

*Becoming One  
in Christ:  
Constructing and  
Applying a  
Christ-centered  
Relational Ethic to  
Human Sexuality*

A Thirteen-Session Curriculum Written for  
Local Church Adult Christian Education Programs  
And Field Tested in Four Congregations

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Edited by Rev. Henrietta Wilkinson

Leader's Workbook

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### About the Curriculum Writer

Kevin E. Frederick grew up as the son of a Presbyterian minister. He received a BA from Warren Wilson College, a Master of Divinity from Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and a Master of Arts from the Presbyterian School of Christian Education. He was ordained in 1985 and served as an Associate Pastor and part time Campus Minister at the University of Mississippi for four years. Since then he served New Providence Presbyterian Church in Maryville, TN for 10 years, during which time he earned a Doctor of Ministry degree specializing in Educational Ministry and Practical Theology from Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in 1999. This curriculum was part of the work for that degree. Since June 2000, Kevin has served as the Associate Pastor for Black Mountain Presbyterian Church in Black Mountain, NC. Kevin and his wife Mary Jane have two children, Eleanor and Sam.

# Introducing the Course

## **Intro . . . . .Background Information . . . . .iii**

The instructional team and pastoral leadership will use this section to prepare for teaching the class.

### Section I

#### Establishing A Relational Ethic in Scripture and in the Life of Christ.

## **Session 1 . . . . .The Society in Which We Live . . . . .1**

We acknowledge the perspectives that people bring to this study, and explore the ways our culture communicates values on matters of sexuality. We seek to acknowledge and understand the factors that create the specific world-views we bring to the debate.

## **Session 2 . . . . .The History Behind the Struggle to Ordain Women. . . . .4**

For the first 1900 years of Christianity a great emphasis was placed on a traditional interpretation of a few passages of Scripture regarding the subordinate role of women in the church. Conflicting biblical witnesses and passages were explored to challenge the traditional role of women in positions of church leadership and eventually resolved the debate in the PCUSA. The authority of Paul is held in contrast with his own writings. With the witness of the four Gospel writers we acknowledge a different set of standards modeled by the ministry of Jesus to women of his day.

## **Session 3 . . . . .God’s Intended Purpose, the Doctrine of Creation. . . . .7**

How do we interpret the gift of sexuality offered in Genesis 2 and 3? There are two functions of human sexuality, procreation and intimacy, both expressed within the context of relationship. What is God’s will for relationships with other human beings and with God? What impact does the cultural context of early settlement Hebrews play in creating a hierarchy between males and females, and is this a misinterpretation of the facts?

## **Session 4 . . . . .Marriage - The Intended and the Broken. . . . .9**

This session will consider the abuse of a woman partner, a violation of covenant with an individual, community, and God (Judges 19, 20, 21). The impact that one’s interpersonal relationships have on society will be considered in I Corinthians 13 as the guideline for life in community.

## **Session 5 . . . . .The Establishment of Covenant. . . . .11**

The biblical witness to a covenantal God is fully developed in Genesis 17:1-22. The concept of ‘seed’ is explored in Genesis 38 as it impacts levirate marriage. Salvation in Hebrew is tied to progeny and the perpetuation of *nephesh* (godly identity) to the next generation. In Jeremiah 34 and Hebrews 8, covenant is removed from sexuality and centered on heart and mind.

**Session 6 . . . . .The Role of Forgiveness in Relationships. . . . .15**  
 An exploration of the Hebrew and Greek words for forgiveness and the specific distinctions they lend to our understanding of God’s will for relationships. What is the role of reconciliation and its impact on forgiveness?

**Session 7 . . . . . Jesus and the Law of Hospitality. . . . .17**  
 A ‘wandering Aramean’ and the role of strangers. What are the deeper issues at work in Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19 that are referred to throughout the Bible, particularly in the ministry of Jesus Christ (i.e. Ezekiel 16:48-59, Matthew 10:5-15, Matthew 11:18-24, Luke 10:10-12.)? What is the unpardonable sin that Jesus elevates by contrasting Sodom and Gomorrah with references to his own day and time?

**Session 8 . . . . . Jesus as the ‘Divine Outsider.’ . . . . .20**  
 Why does Jesus operate from the margins of society while the world/church often gravitates to the center of authority? In Hebrews 13: 7-16, what are the implications at work regarding how we pattern our own lives as followers of Jesus? Understanding the importance of the Good Samaritan Story.

**Session 9 . . . . .The Bible on Human Sexuality and Salvation. . . . .22**  
 Isaiah 56: 3-5 serves as a critique of a much older interpretation of the connection between male sexuality and salvation, as does Acts 8: 27-39. What is the connection between marriage and resurrection in Matthew 19:3-14 and Mark 10: 2-16.? Explore Jesus’ emphasis on the concept of covenant in Matthew 22: 23-40. Construct a definition of Truth (troth) in John 15:1-17 and Philippians 2:5-11. List the essential elements of a Christ-centered Relational Ethic.

**Section II**

**Applying the Relational Ethic of Christian Discipleship to Everyday Life**

**Session 10. . . . .Applying the Relational Ethic to Marriages. . . . .25**  
 Explore three case studies of heterosexual covenantal relationships.

**Session 11. . . .Interpreting Paul and His Writings on Homosexuality. . . . .30**  
 What societal factors shaped Paul’s opinion that can be extracted from his historical setting? Explore conflicting interpretations of two obscure Greek words (*arsenokoites* and *malakoi*). Interpreting Romans 1: 18-32, 1 Corinthians 6:9-20, I Timothy 1:8-11 by applying a Christ-centered relational ethic.

**Session 12. A Challenging Witness, Case Studies of Homosexual Christians. . .35**  
 What application does a Christ-centered relational ethic have when applied to homosexuality?

**Session 13. . .How the Sacraments Witness to Christ’s Relational Ethics. . . .40**  
 The Lord’s Supper and Baptism are the two sacraments of the Presbyterian Church. What does the creedal language found in both of them say about our relationship with Christ and with each other? How does sacramental worship inform our relationships with Christians who are either different from ourselves, or who interpret a part of the truth of Christian living differently from us?

## Background Information:

### Intended Audience:

The primary audience to whom this course is directed is adult laity and ordained leadership within the Reformed Tradition (particularly Presbyterians.) However, it is also adaptable to youth studies, and useful for other Protestant churches who are currently struggling with issues surrounding homosexuality.

### Settings and Schedules:

Because of the complexity of issues surrounding mainline Christianity and homosexuality, it is recommended that this curriculum be taught in a weekly thirteen-session course, with a minimum of 50 minutes of teaching time allotted to each session. An alternative would be a nine-session course, 90 minutes in length, offered as a midweek study. Another alternative could be a six-session series followed by a two-day weekend retreat. The subject matter requires a length of time to absorb the content slowly through study, thought and prayer.

### Planning Process:

It is recommended that a task force be assigned to review the material ahead of time and decide who in the local community is best able to teach this material as objectively as possible. Perhaps the material could be presented to the class by a panel of professionals including a minister, doctors, and educators and/or counselors. It should be moderated or coordinated by someone who would communicate the material clearly and fairly, promote dialogue between class participants, and encourage the sharing of the differing viewpoints represented in the group. In addition to these traits, the teacher(s) should be a person(s) skilled in communicating and leading dialogue related to complex theological issues without attempting to quickly resolve the tensions surrounding the issues for the members of the class. The curriculum provides the leaders and students with readings and devotionals that are recommended for use outside the class setting. These should be referred

to during each class session. Additional resources are referred to in the bibliography and in the appendix of this curriculum.

### Methods:

The curriculum includes a variety of methods of study:

- Reading and exploration of a wide range of scripture passages and various interpretations of them.
- Raising rhetorical and probing questions designed to stimulate classroom discussion and personal thinking.
- Presenting a variety of case studies to be explored and assessed within small and large group discussions.
- Exploration of the meaning of the Sacraments in the Reformed tradition, including sharing together in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.
- Group prayer.

### Essential Resources:

This course is developed around the use of a leader's guide and a student workbook. The leader's guide has the total content of the materials, including questions, background readings and homework assignments to be read in advance of course sessions. It is important for each student to have his or her own workbook and for each leader to have the leader's guide. The student workbook and the leader's guide both make extensive references to the Bible, with numerous passages assigned for many of the course sessions. Each person should have a Bible at home and one available for use each time the study group gathers.

### Use in the Congregation:

For pastors this study may provide resources and situations that can be drawn upon for use in worship and sermons. The curriculum applies to the whole of the congregational life because of its emphasis on understanding and incorporating the elements of a Christ-centered relational ethic within the everyday interpersonal relationships

between church members, between pastors and staff, and between pastors and parishioners. This material provides the potential for a congregation's growth in understanding and expressing itself as the Body of Christ, especially as it addresses matters of conflict resolution and human diversity.

### Advanced Preparation:

It is recommended that the Christian Education Committee of the church governing

body review the curriculum focus ahead of time and provide a synopsis to the Session (governing body) of the church for approval, in advance of it being taught to the church members. Both ordained lay leaders and church professionals are encouraged to be active participants of this course, not only for their own edification but to provide support to a constructive process of learning and a healthy classroom atmosphere.

## *Introducing the Study*

### The Relevance of this Focus of Study:

Within mainline Christianity, a variety of issues regarding homosexuality have been heavily debated over the past twenty-five years. Within numerous denominations, these issues have included questions surrounding church membership, ministry to victims of the disease AIDS, ordination of church leaders, the blessing of committed partnerships, and questions regarding the working definition of the term "family." Since 1978 in the Presbyterian Church, the debate has intensified and become increasingly polarized, leaving many members and church leaders frustrated, confused, saddened and at odds with the direction of the corporate church.

Today the degree of polarization surrounding homosexuality in mainline churches has reached alarming proportions, with both sides nearly equally divided. Some members and leaders of the church have perceived that mainline Christianity has reached a point of an irreconcilable impasse, suggesting the imminence of a schism throughout the moderate and liberal Protestant denominations. Issues surrounding the interpretation of Holy Scripture as it applies to homosexuality have created divisions between groups which apply different interpretive understandings at all level of relationships within the mainline Christian community. The year-after-year battles surrounding homosexuality consume an inordinate amount of energy of the life of Christ's Church. The energy devoted to these issues detracts from, and in some ways limits, a

focus on many other dimensions of ministry throughout the church and the world.

Some have suggested Christians put this issue behind and move on to "the real work of the church." However, repeated attempts to do so have proven the naiveté of this perspective. There is a growing recognition within the Church today of the common faith and belief which unites the vast majority of Christians. Yet many Christians remain confused (and as a result, divided) by the many dimensions, opinions, and sources of authoritative knowledge surrounding this complex dilemma. It is increasingly clear, for the present and future health of mainline Christianity, that the church must undertake a complete and thorough study of the issues surrounding homosexuality and the impact they play on the community of faith.

How the Church goes about this process is every bit as important as the outcome the Church finally decides upon. This course is designed to focus on constructing a Christ-centered relational ethic - not only as it impacts an understanding of homosexuality, but also (and perhaps more importantly) on how it impacts the way individuals and groups within the church debate, disagree, argue with, and remain connected to each other as the corporate body that Christ himself has knit together. The health of our relationship with Christ and our everyday relationships with each other depends to a significant degree (albeit, not an ultimate degree) upon our ability to learn and integrate Christ's relational skills within our identity as Christians. This perhaps remains one of the greatest challenges facing the increasingly

diverse and complex societal context in which the church of the emerging 21st century finds itself.

### Course Objectives:

- To conduct a biblical study of homosexuality within the larger framework of divine/human and interpersonal relationships as addressed throughout the Old and New Testaments.
- To identify the elements of, and to construct, a biblical relational ethic between God and humanity, most clearly illustrated through the many interpersonal relationships of Jesus Christ with people of all walks of life.
- To explore the processes applied to interpreting Scripture passages which address matters relating to homosexuality, including the impact of one's own worldview.
- To identify and explore a variety of voices of authority in our society on the issue of homosexuality and to bring them into dialogue with the Reformed understanding of the authority of Scripture.
- To encourage and develop a constructive dialogue between church members and groups who hold opposing or differing viewpoints on homosexuality.

### What Does the Term "Relational Ethics" Mean?

To be human is to be a social being, interacting with others, with the world, and with one's concept and understanding of the divine. Relational ethics describes how we interact with and respond to individuals, groups and God. An in-depth study of relational ethics seeks to define and articulate a framework of principles or values that govern one's personal interactions with other individuals, groups or communities. For people of faith, relational ethics is centrally impacted by the relationship one has with God and an understanding of what God wills for oneself and one's actions as a disciple. The current level of interest in relational ethics for Christians is illustrated by the popularity of the question, "What Would Jesus Do?" It is easy to wear a wrist bracelet with the initials WWJD, symbolizing one's devotion to follow Christ, but it takes a

lifetime of prayer, study, commitment and practiced selflessness to learn how to integrate the way Jesus Christ related to others. A follower of Christ is called to draw from the relational ethics Christ embodied as a basis for one's own interactions with humans and with God. This way of living in community is rooted in the biblical concepts of creation, covenant, forgiveness, justice, steadfast love, hospitality, compassion, mutuality, and Christ's own identification with the marginalized and the stranger. Even with a lifetime of personal devotion and discipline, one's efforts imperfectly shadow those of Christ. The emphasis of a Christ-centered relational ethic for a Christian is on the life process of integrating Christ's way of relating to others in one's whole life.

Currently there are great disagreements in the Church Universal surrounding God's will for intimate sexual relationships as they impact adults who are heterosexual and others who are homosexual. Differing groups of Christians - devout in their faith in and love for Jesus Christ - have reached a theological impasse over how one goes about interpreting Holy Scripture. Christians on both ends of the theological spectrum make accusations against opponents which seek to dismiss alternative interpretations of Scripture as being either being too soft on sin or too rigid and unbending, too simplistic or too convoluted in its rationale. This impasse results in the judgment and condemnation of groups by those who see themselves as being the 'true' church, who view their opponents as individually being false Christians, or who view them corporately as being an apostate church. The focus of a relational ethic centered on Jesus Christ challenges all of Christ's followers who are left, right, or center on the theological spectrum to apply a Christ-centered relational ethic to the questions and issues surrounding homosexuality. It also provides an ethical framework that governs the process of discernment and debate for all Christians who disagree with each other, by reminding them that as faithful members of the Body of Christ, they are to remain in relationship with each other regardless of interpretive differences.

## Exploring the Concept Behind the Title *Becoming One In Christ.*

The concept behind the title, *Becoming One In Christ* suggests a process of ongoing lifelong spiritual growth for those who believe in Christ as Lord and Savior. It is a process communicating movement from chaos to harmony, from disunity to unity, from brokenness to wholeness, from separation to integration. The title suggests a dynamic relationship with Christ that is always unfolding and changing within the life of a Christian and within the community of believers. Despite the sinfulness and level of imperfection within the lives of every follower of Christ, it is God working through the grace and love of Jesus Christ that alone will ultimately bring about wholeness and oneness between God and all followers, and between all members of the Christian community.

However, we are not to be idle subjects in the process of following Christ. *Becoming One in Christ* necessitates seeking out God's divine will for one's dynamic relationship with God and with other human beings. As people of the Living Word we gain insight into the will of God for human life by studying the relationship between God and God's people throughout the Old and New Testament. One most clearly understands God's will for humanity in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, including Christ's teachings, healings, relationships, journey to the cross, death, resurrection, and ascension. *Becoming One In Christ* has profound implications for the life of the individual Christian as well as between members of the Christian community of faith. This ethical orientation also impacts the ways that Christian individuals and the Christian faith community relate to all others beyond the doors of the church.

The confusion surrounding the role that human sexuality plays in the life of the individual believer has manifested itself for thousands of years in faith communities of Jews and Christians, resulting in a mind/body dualism – a split between sexuality and spirituality, and a division between male and female. The apostle Paul and some of the great early church leaders base this dualism on the creation story of Adam and Eve, and on an

interpretation built on the reasoning that because sin resulted first with the woman Eve who tricked the man Adam into sinning, the fall of humanity from the garden was the fault of the woman. In calling Jesus Christ the second Adam, Paul has been interpreted as implying a connection between Jesus as messiah and male gender. This understanding has been derived from his writings on the gender-based relationships in Ephesians 5:21ff., and in I Timothy 2:8-15. Gender-based dualism, dividing mind and body, the physical and the spiritual, sin and redemption, into male or female lives is most clearly illustrated in the writings of the fourth-century church scholar Augustine of Hippo.

Augustine equated all things spiritual, intellectual, and redemptive with the male gender, and all things earthly, sinful and banal to the female gender. This had the effect of reinforcing the role that dualism plays in society, from the early church down to the present, in forms that perpetuated and reinforced a gender-based hierarchy between males and females as well as within the governing structure of the church.

Only within the last two generations has mainline Christianity begun to address the impact of gender-based dualism upon the life of the church by acknowledging that God calls both males and females to positions of leadership and authority within the church. And yet even today the distortions caused by gender-based dualism plays out in many distortions within our present society, creating a schism of values between the public and private lives of many individuals, from the United States President to pastors of local churches. We see the distortions within a culture bent on viewing women or men as sexual objects for the attainment of personal gratification, rather than by valuing them as unique individuals created in the image of God. We see the effects of gender-based dualism in the complex glass ceilings of limitation that exist in business and society, above which women cannot rise to positions of authority, economic prosperity, and leadership. Gender-based dualism is reflective of the lack of attention to a Christ-centered relational ethic as it impacts all interpersonal human relationships.

Becoming One In Christ is a concept with profound implications for interpersonal relationships in general and intimate adult relationships in particular. By looking first to Christ, to the gospels, and to the broader message of Scripture, with an eye towards identifying God’s will for human relationships, a number of primary principles are identified which constitute righteous relationships. Within our most intimate relationships (between parents and children, spouses with each other, between siblings, and between close friends) we discover that which is uniquely and profoundly our own identity. This includes our strengths and weaknesses, our gifts and our shortcomings, our abilities to be selfless and self-centered, to be compassionate and cruel. The commitment one makes to living as a disciple of Christ is on the surface seemingly the easiest, and yet paradoxically, the most difficult challenge to incorporate into our most meaningful and intimate of relationships.

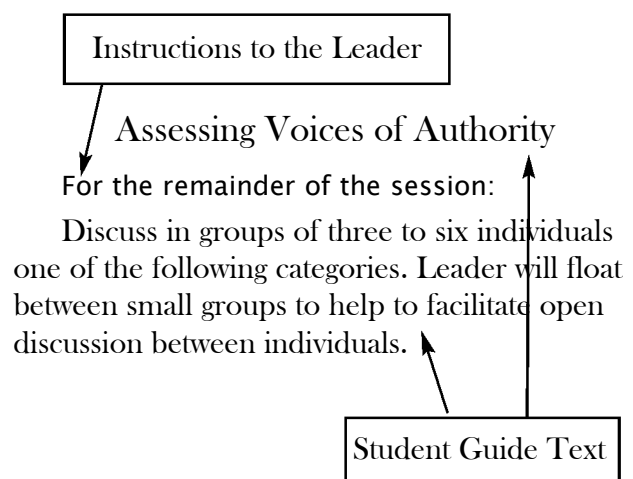
It seems most obvious that one does not experience oneself or one’s relationships apart from one’s own gender, but the impact of human sexuality on relationships is often overlooked and discounted. The full range of human experience in relationship with others always engages various aspects of one’s sexuality. One’s involvement in human relationships can be both consciously and unconsciously manipulative even within the lives of very compassionate and well-meaning followers of Christ. By seeking to articulate and examine the implications of the way Christ relates to others and to God, and by applying the underlying principles found in his relationships with others, Christians can learn to grow and mature in their ability to apply Christ-like behavior to their interpersonal relationships. An underlying premise within this curriculum is that the elements of Christ-like behavior, when faithfully applied, have strong implications for intimate sexual human relationships, whether they are heterosexual in nature or homosexual. This study seeks to examine both types of intimate relationships from the Christ-like principles identified. In so doing it raises a number of new questions for prayerful examination and serious consideration. Some of these include:

- What constitutes sin within intimate sexual relationships?
- Do the same understandings of sin within sexually intimate heterosexual relationships apply to homosexual relationships?
- Conversely, do the standards of fidelity, mutuality, commitment, justice, and compassion that make for a healthy and Christ-centered heterosexual marriage also apply to homosexual partners?

These and many other questions are raised by this study for examination by the whole Body of Christ. A thorough study of the particular principles at work in Christ-like behavior will not only impact how we understand and relate to homosexual persons who believe in Christ as Lord and Savior, but will also impact heterosexual relationships of all types. This clearly includes how individuals and groups within the church today learn to acknowledge the different viewpoints of their fellow Christian brothers and sisters who believe in conflicting biblical interpretations and applications of Christ-like behavior to very specific controversial societal issues.

### Typographical Conventions

The text in the student guide is contained in the Leader’s Guide. Additional text, especially text that is intended to be instructions to the leader are set in a clearly different typeface. For example



# Session 1: *The Society in Which We Live.*

## Session Objectives.

- To identify the different voices of authority and their messages at work in our society.
- To assess how different factors influence one's own world view and that of other participants.
- To begin to explore the dilemma surrounding differing interpretations of scripture and factors which influence each person's understanding of scriptural meaning.

## Opening Prayer

Each Session will open with a class prayer found only in the leader's guide. Whether these exact prayers are used or not, you are strongly encouraged to open each class session with prayer.

God of all people, we gather in your presence to seek an understanding of your will for our lives. We know, Lord, that we each carry with us expectations and preconceived understandings of your truth. We also know that as an infinite God your truth exceeds that which any one individual or group can comprehend. So we come to you out of humility, asking over the course of this study that your Spirit be at work within all of us. Open us all to an understanding of the perspectives of those whom we acknowledge as having faith in you, but with whom we disagree regarding an interpretation of your will for matters of human sexuality. Guide us with the peace that passes all understanding, so that our common faith in Christ will see us through the levels of impasse that affect us all as the Body of Christ. Amen.

## Code of Conduct

Because of the controversial nature of this material and the personal feelings many people bring to the discussion the topic of homosexuality, take several minutes at this point to encourage each person to read and agree to the elements of a class code of conduct. If someone indicates an unwillingness

to agree to this code of conduct, strongly encourage that person to not participate in the class. Ask each person to review the code of conduct and sign their copy of it.

### **Essential Values to Remember in Establishing a Class Code of Conduct:**

- We share a common faith in Jesus Christ.
- We are all of equal value to Christ and to each other as brothers and sisters in the faith.
- Our faith in and understanding of Christ's will for our lives as individuals is ever growing and maturing.
- As individual members of the Body of Christ, no one individual or group possesses all knowledge of Christ's will for human life.
- We will likely gain insights and understandings of Christ's will for human life from those with whom we disagree.
- It is more Christ-like to listen and seek the opinions and positions of others with whom we disagree than to insist on communicating our own.

## Assessing Voices of Authority

For the remainder of the session:

Discuss in groups of three to six individuals one of the following categories of questions raised by these distinct voices of authority within our society.

The Leader will float between small groups to help to facilitate open discussion between individuals.

### **Society**

What various messages does our society communicate about homosexuality ... through the media and entertainment industry, TV, contemporary music, movies, and plays? ... through advertising? ... through an urban culture? ... through a rural culture? ... through the primary and secondary educational system? Try to list a full range of opinions.

## The Church

What are the different messages that the church communicates about its varied opinions and values regarding homosexuality? Around what issues are there conflicting opinions within the church in regard to scriptural interpretation? What are the denominational attitudes toward the gay and lesbian community? Consider the differences of opinions between various regions of the country, and between different generations of Christians within the same congregation?

## Personal Experience

Do you know anyone who is homosexual, or have you listened to the faith stories of homosexual Christians? If so, how has your relationship with that individual influenced your thinking about homosexuality? Have you had an unpleasant encounter with homosexual persons in your life that has influenced your opinion? If so, describe how.

## The Medical/Biological Community

Background material for answering question is in the box in the upper right corner of the page.

Assuming this information to be accurately presented, how do you respond to the findings of medical science? How do the findings of medical science inform a dialogue with the church in a search for truth? What happens when the truth, as interpreted by the authority of Scripture is challenged by the medical/scientific community?

## Small Group Reports.

After small group discussions for 20 minutes, return to a large group to summarize small group findings and to consider the following questions.

- What voices of authority do you think are important for the faith community to be in dialogue with for clarification and definition regarding this issue?
- What voices of authority have no relevance to the dialogue? Why or why not?
- Is it possible to integrate these voices of authority with your faith as a Christian? Why or why not?

The American Psychiatric Association in 1980 declassified homosexuality as a behavioral disorder, determining that many people who are homosexually oriented function normally in society and in the work place and do not, as a group of people, exhibit classic symptoms that categorize maladaptive behavior and illness. Within the last twenty years, increasing numbers of studies have been conducted to assess whether homosexuality is genetically determined. Although inconclusive at present, the evidence is strongly suggestive that for many individuals, homosexuality is a factor of genetic origin; for others, however, homosexual orientation appears to be the result of a conscious decision made during some phase of adulthood. At present there is substantial evidence that the orientation and expressions of homosexuality cannot be easily categorized. In 1999 both the American Psychiatric and the American Psychological Associations definitively stated that sexual orientation is a deeply grounded element of identity in the life of homosexual persons, as it is in heterosexual individuals. Homosexuality is not an illness or condition that can be healed or cured. As a result, efforts to cure an individual of sexual orientation are counterproductive and harmful to the identity and well being of a homosexually oriented individual.

- How should these sources of authority influence the position of the church and the way it interprets Scripture?

## Concluding the Class

We take with us:

- The authority of Holy Scripture is the first and highest authority within the Christian community that Christians are called to consult.
- We recognize a variety of relevant voices of authority that bring important contributions to the study of human sexuality and that should be brought into the dialogue of the Christian community.
- These other voices of authority include the medical/scientific community, the confessions of the church, and the

personal experiences of individual Christians.

- The Authority of Scripture informs and is informed by the interactive dialogue with a variety of voices of authority in our society.

### **Homework in Preparation for Session 2**

Read the four passages of scripture identified for study in Session 2:

Luke 8:40-56,

John 4:1-30,

Luke 7:36-50,

Luke 24:1-12

Familiarize yourself with the piece (Appendix B) written by Gene March outlining six guidelines for use in interpreting Scripture. Be prepared to lead the discussion of any of these passages as they relate to the struggle in our denomination's history during the 20th century to ordain women as church officers and pastors.

## Session 2

# *The History Behind the Struggle to Ordain Women.*

### Session Objectives.

- To consider the primary points which resolved the arguments over scriptural authority for Presbyterians decades ago, regarding the ordination of women as ruling and teaching elders within the church.
- To apply guidelines of interpretation to a contentious biblical and theological debate that has been resolved within the Presbyterian denomination.

### Opening Prayer.

Lead the class in an opening prayer

Holy God, generations of faithful Christians before us have struggled to understand and apply your will to human life and sexuality. You have created us all, male and female, in your image and have granted us many gifts of personality and leadership that collectively convey a greater understanding of the mystery of your wholeness and being. Your spirit of grace and truth has guided generations before us to a deeper understanding of your will for human life as communicated through Holy Scripture. We seek an understanding of the biblical truths that are everlasting and the application of those truths to the changing context of human cultures. Grant us wisdom and faithfulness as we undertake the complex task before us. We pray in the name of the one who challenged some of the prevailing scriptural interpretations of his day, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

### Six Guidelines

Present a summary and discussion of Dr. Gene March's Six Guidelines for Interpreting Scripture (15 minutes)

### Small Group Discussion

This primary question applies to each of the following four groups.

- How did Jesus relate to women who were perceived by the faith community as outsiders, sinners, or as being of less value than men?

Leader: float between groups and facilitate the discussion process where needed. Total time 20 minutes

### Group 1. Read Luke 8:40-56, [characterization of story]

This passage not only values the life of a female child, but of one who had been seen as a societal outcast because of the law regarding menstrual bleeding that categorized her for 12 years as being ritually impure. By daring to touch Jesus she renders him unclean, according to the religious traditions of the day. According to the religious mores surrounding priests and temple leaders, this action of the woman would render Jesus incapable of continuing his ministry, until the rituals of purification were fulfilled, halting all movement towards the household with the deathly ill girl. In so touching his garment, she risks condemnation and great punishment, both religiously and socially.

How does Jesus address her? What term of relationship does he use to address her? How does this contrast with a response of punishment for interfering with his busy and urgent ministry?

### Group 2. Read John 4:1-30, the woman at Jacob's well in Samaria.

This passage describes an encounter between Jesus and a Samaritan woman. Samaritans were perceived by the Jews to be half-breed Hebrews, part of the original twelve tribes who lived in the northern Kingdom which fell in the 8th century B.C. As such they were greatly despised by the Jews, and considered with more contempt than the enemies of the Jews. The Southern tribes had great contempt for the people of Samaria for many reasons, partly because after the fall of the Northern tribes they intermarried with people of other nations and their faith became mixed with Baalism and other regional religions. The Jews had greater contempt for the Samaritans than they did for other foreign peoples, partly because of the close ancestry and faith the two groups shared. The Samaritan woman was a descendant of Jacob

and was connected to the original community of Israel. In addition, this woman was an adulteress and exercised minimal regard for the covenant of marriage. She is an outsider socially, historically, ethically, and religiously.

How does Jesus' interaction with her contrast with the disciples and more so with the religious authorities of his day? What does the woman do on her own after the encounter with Jesus, and what effect might this kind of proclamation have on people who knew her?

**Group 3. Read Luke 7:36-50, the Pharisee's dinner and the uninvited woman.**

This passage holds in sharp contrast the difference between the religious insider, a well respected Pharisee in his own home, and the outsider, the sinful woman who offers real hospitality to Jesus. Jesus sides with the woman, who demonstrates not only hospitality but – more importantly – a love for Jesus, through the use of her extravagant gift of costly ointment and her acts of devotion and appreciation for Jesus. Jesus not only sides with her against the Pharisee, he elevates her as an example of biblical hospitality and a worthy recipient of forgiveness and God's grace. The contrast between the woman and the Pharisee is illustrated in such stark contrast to redefine who God identifies as insiders and those God considers outsiders.

How does this passage challenge the traditional religious thinking of Jesus' day, and what does it communicate about discipleship? What does it say about the value of religious piety within the most devout of religious believers? What challenge does it create to oneself regarding a faith that reflects the relational ethics of Jesus Christ?

**Group 4. Read Luke 24:1-12, the resurrection accounts of Jesus and the first witnesses.**

*(You may want to refer to the parallel passages in the other gospels – Matthew 28:1-10, Mark 16:1-11, and John 20:11-18.)*

In each case female disciples are the first witnesses, and in each case they are instructed (exhorted), either by the angels or the risen Lord, to go and proclaim to the male disciples the good news of the resurrection. The disciples are in hiding for fear of additional retribution by the Roman authorities.

Why were the women at the burial tomb so early in the morning? Why in each case were they instructed to go and tell the male disciples? In a day and time when women had no legal voice in a court of law and were perceived as invalid witnesses, why would they be the first to be told to tell the good news? What is the difference between the actions of the first women disciples, who were told to proclaim the resurrection story to the first male disciples, and what women are currently ordained to do as ministers of Word and Sacrament? In your opinion, why were (in some Christian denominations still are) the few biblical examples used to keep women out of ordained ministry emphasized more than the many references of women serving as faithful witnesses for the majority of church history? What additional factors kept mainline Christianity from affirming this obvious connection for all but the last 75 years?

**Group Reports (Five minutes per group.)**

**Reflecting Back in Recent History:**

If time allows, lead class in discussion of any of these questions. The leader needs to assess the congregation for its own authorities on this issue. (i.e. the first woman elder can reflect on her experience). Invite the reactions of some older members of the class or congregation to the decisions and local congregation struggles to ordain women. Did the congregation ever call a woman pastor? What was the reaction across the church membership to this decision and to

her leadership? Are there retired clergy in the church or in the area who can reflect on the issue for the class?

In regards to the role of women leaders in the Presbyterian Church after 1950:

- What were some of the early concerns and fears expressed regarding the role of women leaders in the church?
- What role did the experiences of women and the church play in informing the resolution?
- What concerns about female clergy exist today in some Christian churches that have no experience with clergywomen?

### Concluding the Session

**We take with us from this class, these insights:**

When conflicts over scriptural interpretation within Christianity regarding the role of women leaders reached a critical impasse, an examination of the following points played key roles in bringing about clarification of scriptural intent.

- The historical-cultural context in which the text was written.
- The way Jesus Christ related to women.
- The role women played in the New Testament - women at the resurrection, the role of women in the early church, including Mary the mother of Jesus, Priscilla, Lydia, and others.

### Homework in preparation for Session 3

Read the first creation story from Genesis 1 focus particularly on verses 26-28; compare with Genesis 2:4b-24.

For the purpose of this study many themes and issues present in the creation stories will go unexamined, while others will be explored for their relevance and meaning regarding both the divine/human relationship and human relationships with creation and within the context of human intimacy. As you read this, jot down the themes that impact intimate human relationships and make your own comments about them. Also write your observations regarding human choice and its impacts on one's relationship with God.

Share a summary of this material and your findings with the class.

**Leader - Read the commentary on the Genesis Text (Appendix C)**

## Session 3 *God's Intended Purpose, The Doctrine of Creation.*

### Session Objectives

- Identification of themes of relationship found within the creation stories of Genesis.
- Assessment of the gifts of intimacy and procreation and their role in the divine/human relationship. (Intimacy is defined here as the interpersonal dynamics found within a deeply personal relationship.) These dynamics involve a variety of factors shared between the two parties, including any or all of the following: spiritual, psychological, intellectual, interpersonal, physical, and/or sexual intimacy.
- Identification of the cultural context of early settlement Israel, the time frame when oral versions of the creation story were beginning to be recorded.
- Assessment of the role of procreation within human intimacy and the interpretation of it as being the sole purpose of sexual intimacy.

### Leader Preparation

The Leader should read the first creation story from Genesis 1 with a particular focus on verses 26–28; compare with Genesis 2:4b–24. and the commentary in Appendix C.

### Opening Prayer

Begin the class with prayer:

God of all creation and all your children, we come anew to difficult passages in your Word, knowing that they are filled with complexity and meaning for those who seek to understand the gift of human sexuality. We acknowledge sexual intimacy as a gift we greatly value, but we know that it is also a gift commonly misused by selfish motives and personal gain. As males and females, we too often engage both consciously and unconsciously in acts which diminish the value of ourselves and others through manipulation, control, coercion, seduction, and countless other intimate ways which reflect the fallen nature of human beings. Help us to reaffirm the value of this sacred gift, and in so doing to value ourselves

and others as being equally loved by you. Help us to treat all neighbors as being worthy of respect and compassion rather than as objects who can serve our selfish agendas or fulfill our fleeting desires. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

### Relationship

The class leader will present a lecture of background materials from the Leader's Guide. After the leader's presentation, focus on "Questions for Discussion" in groups of four.

### Questions for Discussion:

The leader will circulate among the groups as they discuss the following questions

Answer these questions with reference to specific scriptural passages in Genesis where possible.

1. Is procreation the only theologically appropriate reason at work behind the expression of sexual intimacy?
2. If so, then what theological justification do we apply to married couples who seek to enjoy sexual intimacy for its own sake by using birth control, or who simply have no intention of having children?
3. We live in a day and age when we recognize that procreation unchecked is a threat to the well-being of the world and its ability to sustain human life. How does this fact modify our response to God's command in Genesis to "be fruitful and multiply"?
4. What factors comprise the moral standard of faith by which we measure appropriate intimate sexual relationships between two people?

### Healing and Wholeness

Biblical ethicist Max Stackhouse identifies that the Bible communicates a clear standard of the norm of heterosexual marriage throughout history as the basic unit upon which society is built, children are raised, and lifelong partnerships are established. The well-being of our society is based on the health of the family and the birth and

nurture of children. He says that although marriage is a societal norm, it is not a universal paradigm (model) of relationship for everyone.

Discuss the following quote by Dr. Max Stackhouse. Do you agree with his interpretation or not? Construct and support your reaction to this quote.

“A good measure of healing and wholeness can be found elsewhere than in marriage, most notably in communities of faith but also in many close companionships, in various support groups, and in some stable, caring, same-sex relationships. Even if they be assessed as less than complete in one or another way, it would be wrong to prevent anyone by force of law from attempting to live out the most complete healing community possible. Wherever the possibilities of healing occur, fidelity, trust, forgiveness, mutual edification, and acceptance are both necessary ethical principles and means for that healing. Casual promiscuous, exploitative, or commercial sex is a turning away from the healing that the community of faith, and the marriage bond with regard to sexuality, is intended to bring.”<sup>1</sup>

### Concluding the Session

We carry with us from this class:

- A recognition that biblical scholars within the reformed tradition differ with each other on the meaning of God's intentions surrounding the gift of human sexuality as rendered in the Creation stories of Genesis.
- There is consensus between reformed scholars that procreation is at least part of God's intended gift of human sexuality.
- Some biblical scholars believe that sexual intimacy within the context of a loving committed relationship is also an intentional gift to human beings found within the Genesis story.
- Only within the last century has the church officially identified the pleasure of sexual intimacy as one of God's intended gifts for the context of marriage

### Homework in Preparation for Session 4:

Genesis 2:21-24 has been interpreted as communicating the biblical ideal of a monogamous marriage. With the interpretation of companion or helpmate (indicating a mutual and equitable relationship) and applied to the role of the woman in this text, what qualities of a healthy relationship are identifiable in this passage?

The Leader will want to read Appendix D, in preparation for the next class.

## Session 4 *Marriage: The Intended and the Broken.*

### Session Objectives

- To articulate the essential elements that encourage a loving and constructive marital relationship.
- To explore the factors of patriarchy and patrilineage, (the passing on of property through the males in the community) and their impact on marital relationships in Ancient Israel.
- To track a biblical example of a dysfunctional marriage in ancient Israel and to identify the impact it had on the rest of the community of faith.

### Leader Preparation

Genesis 2:21–24 has been interpreted as communicating the biblical ideal of a monogamous marriage. With the interpretation of companion or helpmate (indicating a mutual and equitable relationship) and applied to the role of the woman in this text, what qualities of a healthy relationship are identifiable in this passage? The Leader will want to read Appendix D, in preparation for this class.

### Opening Prayer

Open the class in prayer

God of the covenant, you have created human beings to grow and be in relationship with each other and have given to your people a covenant of love written on the hearts of men, women and children. You have also given us the gift of free will, a gift which is too easily misused for selfish gain, a gift which has caused great heartache and anguish within relationships of intimacy. Open our hearts and minds this day that we may perceive both your vision for our relationships and the full impact of our free will when it is distorted by selfishness and pride. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

### A Healthy Marriage

Lead the class in the following discussion

- List the essential qualities that make for a healthy marriage on a chalk board or flip chart; post so the class can see these.

- Are any of these qualities dependent upon sexual intimacy in order for them to function in marriage?
- Are any of these qualities dependent upon the birth and nurture of children in order to play a positive role in marital relationships?

### Exploring the Scripture

There is nowhere in the entire Bible where the implications of patriarchy are played out more clearly than in the story of the Levite and his wife/concubine found in Judges 19. (She is unnamed as a person and is addressed as concubine in verses 1 and 2, while the Levite is referred to as her husband in verse 3 - NRSV.) The consequences of the violations in this personal relationship have far-ranging implications to the entire nation of Israel and to every tribe in it. (see Chapters 20-21)

Encourage class members to share in the oral reading of Judges 19.

### Small Group Work

Discuss one of the following:

- From Judges 19, list the many violations of a healthy relational focus between a husband and wife - identified elsewhere in Genesis 1:26-31 and 2:18-24 as being mutuality and equity.

The groups may present their conclusions to the whole group as they reconvene.

If time allows the leader may want to summarize from Judges 20–21, the particular details of the “ripple effect” upon the differing segments of the entire nation.

(20 minutes)

### Large Group Reflection on our own experience

- How do distortions in our human relationships on a personal level play out in our relationships with members of larger communities - especially the church?

- Marie Fortune, director of the Center for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, has indicated that from her professional findings, the worst thing churches can do in confronting a spouse abuser or incest offender is to forgive too quickly, because it diminishes the consequences and responsibility of the individual to face the implications of his or her actions. How does holding an offender to accountability change the dynamics between the abuser, the victim and the rest of the family? 2
- A true commitment to mutual and equitable love in marriage will inform how we are called to be in relationship with all human beings, and will likely have a positive effect on our relationships with many others. Conversely, a lack of commitment to mutual and equitable love in marriage will not only impact our relationships with other people, it will demonstrate our lack of depth in regard to our relationship with God.

(20 minutes)

### Concluding the Session

We take with us from this class:

- An understanding of the distortion created within intimate human relationships as a result of the rise of patriarchy.
- The awareness that this distortion is not confined to private relationships but creates far-reaching implications for the larger community as well.
- An understanding of the cultural presence of patriarchy within the Bible. (Knowing its presence enables us to separate the “Good News” of scripture from the cultural biases and distortions imposed upon scripture by the original writers and/or by the interpreting community.)

### Homework in Preparation for Session 5

Background reading: Genesis 15 and 16

Familiarize yourself with these fundamental theological concepts of the Bible (see Appendix E) and present a short lecture on this section at the beginning of lesson 5.

# Session 5 The Establishment of Covenant

## Session Objectives

- To explore the biblical theme of covenant from the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.
- To compare and contrast different symbols of covenantal bonds and their implications for the faith community.
- To apply the implications of the “new covenant” in Jeremiah 34 as it applies to human action and to human sexuality in particular.

## Leader Preparation

Background reading: Genesis 15 and 16

Familiarize yourself with these fundamental theological concepts of the Bible (see Appendix E) and present a short lecture on this section at the beginning of lesson 5.

## Opening Prayer

Lead the class in prayer.

Most Gracious and Loving God, you have blessed us not only with the gift of life but with your constant and abiding love that remains with all of creation and humanity. We acknowledge that we often deceive ourselves into thinking that we have the power and authority to control our lives and their outcomes. Open our hearts and minds to the presence of your Spirit which is constantly at work within the world and within our lives to restore with integrity our relationship with you. Now open us to the truth found in your Holy Word regarding covenant as we seek to apply the concept of covenant to the whole of our lives. For it is in Christ we pray, who revealed the depth of your covenant of eternal love to us. Amen.

## God’s Promises

Present a short summary of the lecture materials. Lead a discussion of the following: Note the student guide does not have all of this material

## God’s Promises

Have the class read the following texts Genesis 17:1-22, Genesis 18:1-15.

Leader summarize:

In these passages the promise of God to provide for Abraham and Sarah and to bless them with numerous offspring is juxtaposed with the reality that Sarah has passed the age at which she is able to conceive. The passing years become a test of faith. Abraham and Sarah try to force the covenantal promise to action through a sexual relationship between Abraham and Hagar, Sarah’s servant girl. But this manipulation of covenant creates a series of relational problems between each of the primary characters and with the conceived child, Ishmael. In chapter 17 and 18 the promise of God seems so much beyond realistic fulfillment that the couple laugh when they again hear it affirmed. Here, procreation is absolutely essential to the survival of the promissory covenant and it serves as the means to the salvation of the community of faith. Yet for Abraham, Sarah and their future offspring, covenantal fulfillment remains beyond the reach of human possibility and is totally dependent upon the will of God. Ultimately, God’s steadfast love (*hesed*) brings about the covenantal promise even when human effort has utterly and completely failed.

The creation of the covenantal community is totally dependent upon the intervening power of a loving and faithful God and its existence is contingent upon procreation. Its fulfillment is based on God’s procreative role at work through a barren woman, rather than upon two human beings’ ability to conceive. The sign of circumcision on the male foreskin was a human response to the faithfulness of God to fulfill the promise of a community of faith. The procreative role of the covenantal promise, along with heredity of land, authority, and power, were all interpreted as a right based on male gender and birth order. This was interpreted as a patrilineal right (passed down in family through the lineage of the males of subsequent generations). However, over many generations its symbolism took on additional meaning, which distorted its original intent. The focus within the covenant

community shifted from a thankful response, to a legalistic earned response defined by a narrow and specific interpretation of correct behavior. As already noted in previous sessions, over time, the society and its interpretation of faith became increasingly patriarchal (emphasizing the power and rights of males and diminishing the rights and importance of the roles of females in the society and religion). (10 minutes)

### The New Covenant

Jeremiah 31:31-34 offers a substantial critique to the legalistic interpretation applied to the Mosaic covenant of Deuteronomy 30:15-20, and the covenantal response of Abraham in Genesis 11:31-12:7, 15:1-21, and 17:1-22.

In small groups divide and discuss the following questions. One person in each group record the elements of covenant identified in these passages. Be prepared to present your summary to the whole class.

*Leader resource the discussion in the small groups. Allow time for groups to present learnings.*

1. What subtle difference to covenant is added in the New Testament in Hebrews 8:8-13? How does this inform the approach we bring to a study of human sexuality?
2. Contrast the sign of the covenant in Genesis 17 with Jeremiah 31. How does Jeremiah serve as a further clarification of the Genesis passage? What are the differences in focus between the two covenants?
3. Does the covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34 undermine or support the concept of covenant established with Israel through Abraham and Sarah? How?
4. If the role of gender is removed from covenantal relationship with God, what characterizes covenantal faithfulness in the way humanity relates to God and other human beings?
5. Jesus defines the focus of faithful covenantal response in Matthew 22:34-40.
  - a. Are these marks of faithfulness in any way connected with human sexuality? If so, how; if not, why not?

- b. What does the central emphasis of covenant in the Jeremiah passage and in Matthew 22 suggest, if anything, about the study of homosexuality? (40 minutes)

### A New Covenant Written on Human Hearts

Leader: Summarize and share with the class.

Levitical (priestly) legalism placed a high degree of emphasis on specific response and the importance of symbolic acts. Circumcision was understood as the only right symbol which exemplified full rights and inclusion in the covenant community. This gender-specific sign perpetuated sexual hierarchy within the community of faith between males and females. This narrow interpretation of the covenantal relationship between God and the people of faith is challenged by Jeremiah. ‘On the hearts of all . . .’ communicates that the male sex organ is not the symbolic focus of covenant.

Here God defines a different sign, what has been often referred to as ‘circumcision of the heart.’ It reflects a covenantal relationship with all the members of the community of faith. “I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God and they will be my people.” (Jeremiah 31:33) Jeremiah indicates that covenant is made with the whole Hebrew people, applying a strong critique to the emphasis placed on gender and sexuality. The heart was interpreted by the Hebrews as the spiritual center of a person, where intelligence and belief inform action (i.e., an expression of self-giving love is an action of a heart’s covenantal response, while an act of greed, callous indifference, or hatred is an act of a ‘hardness of heart’ - Exodus 8:15-17). In essence Jeremiah notes that there is a distinction between the focus of covenant in Jeremiah 31 and a levitical legalistic interpretation applied to covenant with Abraham.

### Concluding the Session

We take with us:

- The biblical witness critiques itself when the people demonstrate a limited

understanding of the will of God for human relationships.

- God is more focused on a change in the heart rather than a physical sign of a covenant.
- God corrects the biblical interpretation of religious leaders when they are missing the point.

## Homework for Session 6

### Biblical Background of Forgiveness

Familiarize yourself with the following

In the Old Testament there are three words which indicate some aspect of forgiveness: *kipper*, to cover, to pardon; *nasa*, to lift up or carry away; *salach*, to let go.

The act of wrongdoing which creates the need for forgiveness is dealt with in all three ways.

1. Forgiveness as *kipper*, covering, leads to the doctrine of atonement or at-one-ment, negating the power of the wrongdoing so that it no longer imposes a negative impact on the relationship between an individual or community with God. *Kipper* is an act of restoration initiated solely by the actions of God.

2. Forgiveness as *nasa*, carries away the obstacle so that it no longer creates a barrier in the relationship between the parties.

3. Forgiveness as *salach*, releases the impact of the violation on the injured parties so that the individuals are able to look forward and get on with their lives.

*Kipper* and *salach* in the Bible are used in reference to God's forgiveness, and *nasa* is used both between God and humanity and between human beings.

Forgiveness restores relationship between the parties involved. However, in order for forgiveness effectively to restore the whole relationship between the perpetrator (the wrongdoer) and the injured/wronged other, forgiveness is largely dependent upon the repentance of the perpetrator. Repentance involves change of mind and intention within the perpetrator and creates a change of behavior that seeks to restore the relationships with those whose lives have been impacted. In regard to relationship

with God, repentance is the human response which seeks to restore a right and open relationship between the individual or community and God. Sacrificial giving to God served as a symbolic reminder of the intention of the wrong doer to change his or her own behavior and intent, with the full intention of living life more in accordance with the will of God as it applies to self and neighbor. Sacrificial giving without an accompanying change of attitude and behavior was identified by the prophets as a shameless derision of one's relationship with God and humanity.

In the New Testament there are two predominant Greek words that illustrate the meaning of forgiveness: *aphiemi*, to send away, used predominately in the Gospels and Acts, and *charizomai*, to be gracious, a term used by Paul to describe the basis of God's forgiveness of humans – the primary focus of Paul's concept of justification by grace alone. Grace and forgiveness cannot be purchased by performing the right actions, but cannot be received by an unaffected and unwilling individual either. Just as forgiveness in the Old Testament is connected with repentance, the Greek New Testament uses the word *metanoia*, which communicates a turning from an action or focus and a turning towards a whole new orientation and set of behaviors. In other words, *metanoia* involved a completely new focus on carrying out the will of God and living in right relationship with others.

The message throughout the Bible consistently points to actions required of both parties involved where a relationship has been broken or violated. The whole process of restoration remains incomplete unless both sides actively pursue it. More importantly, we discover throughout the testimony of scripture that God has always remained an active participant in the full restoration of relationship. Nowhere do we see this more evident than in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is worth noting the condition of forgiveness that Jesus communicates in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:1). It indicates that unless we forgive others we are unable to receive forgiveness from God. One incapable of forgiving others is equally incapable of repenting of one's own wrongdoing. (See Matthew 18:21-35,

the parable of the unforgiving servant, and Mark 11:25-26.)

The health of any relationship, whether between humans, or between a community and God, is always dependent upon the actions and reactions of both parties. However, there are times when one of the parties is unwilling to act out his or her responsible part for a variety of reasons, such as when the impact of the violation was so great that one is unable to forgive, or in the case where the other party is unwilling to work toward restoration of the relationship. In these incomplete and imperfect human relationships, the party seeking wholeness in his or her life must continue seeking personal reconciliation within the personal relationship with God and within the community at large.

Forgiveness that is sought from the offended party or victim without an attempt made by the offender to restore the victim's and the community's life to as whole a state of being as possible, is little more than "cheap grace." Forgiveness cannot be fully realized without both sides realizing the full consequences of the behavior or action and acting in concert to restore at least an approximation of what was lost by the offensive action. Forgiveness without restoration discounts the impact of the action on the lives of the offended parties and minimizes one's relevance as a human being. It also discounts the impact of the ongoing consequences to the offended party's life. When the offending party is unwilling to engage in restoring the loss of the other, the one offended can only offer forgiveness as a story of fully acknowledged loss when shared with the offending party in such a way that the impact of the violation is fully comprehended by the perpetrator. This is the first step towards acknowledging the accountability of the perpetrator. Working to seek the restoration of the one who was offended is part of the duty of the offender. This combination of developing the offender's empathy and accountability reduces the likelihood that the offense will be repeated.

Conversely, in such cases where the offended party refuses to forgive, any genuine efforts of the offending party to seek restoration are negated. The humanity and wholeness of both parties is

diminished by the lack of resolve brought to the issue.

## Reflection

Can you think of an illustration in your life of real pardon and true forgiveness?

Leader: read and prepare a mini lecture on the above material at the beginning of Session 6.

# Session 6

## *The Role of Forgiveness in Relationships*

### Session Objectives

- To articulate the long term consequences of wrongful behavior on individuals.
- To explore and define the connection between reconciliation and forgiveness in human relationships.
- To establish the responsibilities of the offending party to seek restoration and forgiveness.
- To recognize the boundaries and responsibilities of the offended party to be an active participant in the process of forgiveness and reconciliation.

### Leader Preparation

Leader: read and prepare a mini lecture on the material printed at the end of Session 5.

### Opening Prayer

Lead the class in prayer.

God of Grace and Forgiveness, we come before you mindful that your love is never ending and your forgiveness is always available for those who earnestly seek reconciliation with you. We confess that we live in a world that defines justice by acts of retribution and retaliation, and yet we recognize through Christ's life, death and resurrection that you seek a vastly different outcome in response to human evil and wrongdoing. Help us this day as we study the biblical witness to forgiveness and seek to understand the full implications of its meaning to our lives and relationships. Guide us as people of faith in the redemptive love of Christ, that we may learn how to believe in and exercise forgiveness more fully within our own lives and relationships. For we pray in the name of the one who forgives and reconciles, even the Christ our Lord. Amen.

### The Role of Forgiveness

Leader: present a mini lecture on the theme of forgiveness.

Think of the role forgiveness plays in your personal relationships with others. Divide into pairs and discuss the following.

- Identify a time recently that you had to ask forgiveness from another for a mistake or error that you made. What were the circumstances that surrounded the situation? Was the other party able graciously to receive your apology? What issues, if any, remain unresolved even if your apology was accepted? What will it take to resolve these issues?

Or

- Identify a time recently when you had to grant forgiveness to another for a wrong done to you. Was an apology offered? If so, was it difficult to accept the apology? If an apology was not offered by the offending party, was it difficult to offer forgiveness to the person? What was needed to restore the relationship back to wholeness? Is an apology enough, or are there other consequences that impact the relationship?

(20 minutes.)

In your same pairs:

- Identify a time in your life when you were greatly wronged by the willful actions of another (e.g. falsely accused in public, physically or emotionally violated, experienced theft or other property violation, abandonment, etc.) Have you been able completely to reconcile, either with the perpetrator and/or within yourself, the implications and consequences of the wrongdoing? If so, what process allowed you to reconcile? If not, what obstacles stand in the way of your own restoration?

(10 minutes)

### Reflection on Our Church

Individual work, jot down your responses to these questions for later reference.

- What wrongdoings between differing parties are occurring within the debate regarding the ordination of homosexuals that must be addressed as we seek restoration and the will of God for the church of the twenty-first century?

- How do those polarized by belief need to be actively engaged in the forgiveness of their opponents?
- What dimensions of ministry in our denomination are going unmet because of the lack of resolve surrounding the issues of human sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular?
- What roles should forgiveness and *metanoia* play in resolving the apparent impasse in our denomination?

(10 minutes)

**In pairs for the remainder of the session.**

1. Identify within your past a personal action that resulted in a very significant violation of, or wrongdoing against another (perhaps something like a flashback scene, or memory that keeps recurring in your own mind). Did you ask forgiveness of the other party at the time of the violation? Did you receive it? What did you do or not do to work towards the restoration of the relationship? Are you still in need of responding? Have you forgiven yourself? If not, what stands in the way of reconciliation within you or between you and the other party? What consequences since the event has the other person had to live with? What consequences have impacted you?
2. Does an inability to forgive others or oneself impact our relationship with God? How so?
3. How can an individual come to terms with one's own actions or the actions of others if the other party will not or cannot seek reconciliation?

### Concluding the Session

We carry with us from this class:

- The act of forgiveness is not simply based on the perpetrator or wrongdoer making an apology.
- Forgiveness in order to be complete must involve both the perpetrator seeking forgiveness from the person wronged, and the victim granting it.
- Forgiveness is made genuine when repentance involves a change of behavior and a change of attitude that seeks to

correct the wrongdoing assuring that it will not happen again.

- Repentance may involve the perpetrator working for the restoration of the victim, overcoming the brokenness caused by the wrong doing.

### Homework

Leader read and prepare a mini lecture for Session 7 on the material in Appendix F.

# Session 7 Jesus and the Law of Hospitality

## Session Objectives

- To become familiar with the law of hospitality and its role in ancient Israel
- To explore Jesus' transformative application of the law of hospitality to a central role of importance in the life of people of faith.
- To apply this theme to specific scripture passages
- To apply this theme to conflict management within our own lives.

**Key passage:** "But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; and they called to Lot., 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we may know them.'" "

*Genesis 19:4-5*

## Leader Preparation

Prepare for this class by reading Appendix F.

## Opening prayer

*Lead the class in prayer.*

God of Mercy and Grace, throughout the wilderness experience of the Hebrew people, you extended hospitality to them in the forms of food and water. You guided them across an unfamiliar desert and brought them safely to the Promise Land. We give you thanks that Jesus Christ embodied hospitality in its highest form by extending it to strangers and by repeatedly demonstrating that hospitality is a visible sign and expression of your holy will for humanity. As we prepare to study your Word and truth, grant that our learning be filled with insight, and with the power and grace of your hospitable love. Help us to understand its application to our day and time. For, we pray in the name of the one who lived by the authority of this divine law, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Biblical Hospitality

Present the mini lecture on biblical Hospitality based on material in Appendix E

The class leader will will present a lecture of background materials from the Leader's Guide. Class members may read a paragraph each from Genesis 19 until the chapter is read. Then in small groups of three or four discuss the following:

1. Contrast Lot's treatment of the guests with the response of the men of the community.
2. What appear to be the motives of the men of the town?
3. What is the response of the guests?
4. Is there anything mutual or equitable about the encounter between Lot's guests and the men of the town?
5. According to Black's Law Dictionary, the legal definition of sodomy is "oral or anal copulation between persons who are not husband and wife or consenting adult members of the opposite sex, or between a person and an animal, or coitus with an animal."<sup>4</sup> In a court of law, using this definition of sodomy how would the actions of the men of Sodom be characterized?
6. How has our culture changed the interpretation given to this text from its scriptural context to the printed legal definition ascribed to the term sodomy?
7. What definition of sodomy might more accurately reflect the facts within the scriptural context?
8. In Jeremiah 23:14 and in Ezekiel 16: 48-59, what are the sins of Sodom listed as?
9. How are the sins of Sodom contrasted with the sins of the Hebrew people?

## Jesus's Use of Biblical Hospitality

Jesus refers several times in his ministry to the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah.

In Matthew 10:5-15, and Luke 10:8-12, Jesus tells his disciples to rely on the hospitality of the community. The disciples are instructed to

identify the worthiness of those to whom they minister by the level of hospitality they receive.

In Matthew 11:16-24 Jesus is characterized by his critics as being a “glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!” and then says, “Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) and its attending question, “Who is my neighbor?” is a prime example of the law of hospitality at work between those within the story, despite the fact that they relate to each other as cultural adversaries. The internal motivation of compassion is identified by Jesus as driving the actions of the Samaritan. This suggests that we adopt the personal orientation of the Samaritan to all of life, whether in responding to the emergencies of others or simply by entering into dialogue with someone we perceive as a stranger.

In pairs reflect on these questions

1. What is the sin that Jesus identifies as the “the deeds of power” in Luke 10:13-16 within his own generation?
2. Is there a tie between the “deeds of power” that Jesus criticizes, and the law of hospitality that Luke emphasizes (previously identified) in this chapter? Please articulate Luke’s understanding of this law.
3. Reflecting back on this study, what seems to be the primary concern of Jesus regarding the law of hospitality? How does this understanding inform issues of human sexuality?

### Reflecting On Our Own Lives

Consider the following: (present this to the class)

One cannot be hospitable and isolated from the reality of others. Knowing the impact of the truth of Christ, who is the embodiment of the law of hospitality to all types of people, requires us to remain open to the faith stories of those whose world views are different from our own; those who impress us as being strangers and yet whose faith unites us as brothers and sisters in Christ. However, this does not mean making our lives vulnerable to dangerous strangers. Hospitality to strangers allowed the wary host to keep an eye on the person and to listen to their story. If the

actions and the words of the stranger were antagonistic or threatening then the stranger was kept at bay.

Listening for the truth of Christ in others who impress us as being strangers means putting aside our own prejudices and judgments and availing ourselves to the great possibility that God is working in different ways than we are familiar with – working in the hearts and lives of those we have not learned to listen to. This forces us to look for and perceive the common bond of faith at work in lives of people different than the norms we define ourselves by.

In the same two person groups, discuss the following

- As followers of Jesus, how are we as Presbyterians called to embody the law of hospitality in our personal lives, in our church, in our denomination?
- Apply the critique of the law of hospitality to the way you commonly resolve conflict.
- How might the law of hospitality modify the approach of Presbyterians to our differences of opinion on homosexuality?

### Concluding the Session

We carry with us from this class:

- A commitment to apply a basic orientation of hospitality to others, especially those who are of the same faith.
- A sense of the importance of establishing openness in encounters with strangers, a space where dialogue can occur, where differences can be explored and respected. This includes a space where the other is offered the freedom, either to grow in relationship or to leave for another destination.
- Biblical hospitality requires an act of self-emptying and a personal orientation of servant-hood.

### Homework for Session 8

This week practice the law of hospitality in your own personal and professional relationships.

Read Luke 10:29-37, the Good Samaritan: The primary actor in the story, the Samaritan, is an outsider to Judaism, coming from the area of the northern tribes of Israel – an area highly despised by devout Jews for many centuries. The

origins of this hatred were rooted, prior to the downfall of the Northern tribes in 722 B.C.E., in its rival temple to that in Jerusalem. Animosity ran deep and was furtive in the hearts of faithful Jews towards anyone from Samaria. This parable illustrates that Jesus sides with those individuals whom the religious and cultural standards of the day defined as being outsiders. The lead question of the lawyer, “Who is my neighbor?” sets the stage for the application of the law of hospitality to all people in need. It ties the concepts of stranger and neighbor together as being one, a challenge of faith for those insiders who considered themselves adherents to the law of God.

### **Class leader’s Assignment**

Look up and read these additional illustrations of Jesus as an outsider make notes to share with the class.

- Mark 8:31-33 Peter’s call to greatness and Jesus’ response, “Get behind me, Satan.”
- Matthew 9:10-13, Mark 2:15-17 Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners
- Matthew 19:27-30 We have left everything to follow you.
- Mark 6:1-6a Jesus, prophet without honor in one’s hometown
- Mark 6:6b-13 Disciples are called to live as outsiders dependent on others for their well-being.
- Luke 9:57-61 Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head
- Mark 12:41-43 The widow’s contribution.
- John 18:31-40 A redefinition of authority and power.
- Matthew 25:31-46 Defines a clear standard that Christ himself uses to measure effective ministry. At its core is a commitment to side with the outsiders of society. In so doing he redefines the center of power and authority away from the religious insiders towards the margins of society

Read the following in preparation for the next session.

Pastoral Reflection leads to an effort to apply the care of Christ to the cries, concerns and longings of personal and community voices that have gone unheard and that seek restoration to

wholeness with the rest of the dominant community. Listening to those voices with the heart of Christ will bring about an uneasy tension (discomfort) with the existing way that members of the community have responded or failed to respond to the needs of those who are marginalized by the existing practices of the community. Allowing the tension to enter the hearts and minds of those in the mainstream of the community works to bring about a transformation, not only to the life of the individual who reflects as a pastor on the situation of the outsider; it may also impact the response of the collective community.

The church is called to be a servant organization; but when it serves from the center of power and authority as defined by society, it cannot truly serve the underlying needs of the marginalized individual, because it is also serving the needs of the center of authority and perpetuating the structure which labels the outsider. When the church sides with the center of authority, the service is passive and not truly focused on permanent solutions to the structural problems which perpetuate the conditions of the outsiders. However, when the church sides with the outsider, seeking permanent solutions which require change in the whole system of operations, then the church engages in creatively bringing about a transformation that affects the overall structure of the society. Christ equates this creative service with love, which alone brings about a permanent solution to the needs of the outsider.

## Session 8

# Jesus as the “Divine Outsider.”

### Session Objectives

- To establish and examine the role that living on the margins of society played in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.
- To assess the impact that living on the margins of society plays in the lives of homosexuals in our culture and in our churches.
- To articulate the primary elements of, “a ministry of presence.”
- To examine our calling to become followers of Christ, serving those defined as outcasts who live in the margins of our society.

### Leader Preparation

Review the material listed at the end of Session 7.

### Opening Prayer

Lead the class in prayer.

Holy God, you heard the cries of your Hebrew children as they faced the daily oppression of their Egyptian taskmasters. You heard their anguish and provided deliverance and the promise of hope in their flight from Egypt. In Jesus Christ you heard the cries of the lame and the widowed, the child and those afflicted by mental illness, and you restored them to wholeness and to community. In him you sided with tax collectors and sinners who had no hope of redemption, and freed them from the alienation of sin. Many of us find ourselves living in the comforts of the center of society, and fail to take seriously or even understand the anguish and the cries of those who live on the margins of our existence. Grant us open hearts and minds to hear the conviction of Christ, as the Word made flesh confronts us and challenges us to follow his footsteps to the margins of society where suffering can be found, and cries can be heard, both day and night. We ask it in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

### When We Were the Outsider

In pairs for 5 to 7 minutes:

1. Describe a time in your life when you felt like an outsider to a group.
2. What was the context of the situation?
3. Did anyone do anything to make you feel welcome in the group? If so, what action welcomed you; if not, what messages or signals kept you on the margins?
4. What can be done to break down barriers that allow some to be insiders while relegating others to outsider status? Jot down a list of your barrier breaking ideas for use later in this session.

### Jesus as the “Divine Outsider”

As a class read together Hebrews 13:17, one person designated as reader.

Leader share a summary of the following with the class:

Hebrews 13 illustrates the role of Jesus as divine outsider. The writer in Hebrews notes that a service of faithfulness occurs when one is open to the pain and marginality of others.

Hebrews 13:10-14 centers on the “outsider role” of Christ and the response of his followers to willingly leave behind the safe definitions and boundaries of the larger community. In doing so, Jesus takes his center of authority outside the gate where he redefines his authority as being on the margins of society. The transformational role of Christ as outsider refocuses the center of power and authority away from the center of security and toward the vulnerabilities of life that exist outside the gates of safety. In doing so, Christ renders himself vulnerable and avails himself to human suffering and death. This redefines the center of God’s power away from the Jerusalem Temple and provides direct accessibility to God, through Christ’s suffering death and resurrection, to all who believe.

We are called in Hebrews 13 to follow Jesus Christ outside the gate of security to the margins of society – the new center – where we will discover God’s own authority at work, transforming the margins and those located there by God’s centering power. Verse 16 completes the focus on sacrifice in verse 9. “Do not neglect to

do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” The inclusion of verses 10-14 in between these verses about sacrifice actually serves to define for the church where such sacrifices are to be directed – towards those whose lives are outside the walls of security.

Discuss as a whole group

1. What groups are marginalized today, in the church and in our society?
2. Does this include victims of domestic violence, homosexual persons, single parents and children who live in poverty? Give supporting reasons for your answers.
3. Can a person be marginalized socially and spiritually while still being economically prosperous? Support your answer.
4. Can one extend hospitality to homosexual persons, welcoming them as equals in the church, and still adhere to the command to keep the marriage bed undefiled? Why or why not?
5. Regardless of whether heterosexual or homosexual in nature, are there commonly identified sexual sins that violate the meaning of this passage? Are there universal sexual virtues which apply to all individuals regardless of their sexual orientation? Please name them.
6. Can the marriages of heterosexuals be held in honor by a society that affirms committed, monogamous and mutual homosexual relationships between two adults? Why or why not?
7. Heb.13:9 states: “Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings; for it is well for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by regulations about food which have not benefited those who observe them.” Here the grace of God in Christ is the defining factor in making our lives acceptable before God – as opposed to offering the right kind of performance or ritual, defined as sacrificial purity codes and regulations regarding food.

If time permits, the group/leader may choose to discuss the following questions.

1. How do homosexual persons find themselves living today outside the “walls of security”? Is Christ already there ministering to their needs?

2. What unique needs and issues are raised in the homosexual community as a result of being relegated to an existence on the margins of church and society?
3. How is the church called to respond to these particular needs?
4. How does a ministry of compassion to homosexuals put one outside the walls of security?

### Concluding the Session

We carry with us from this class:

- Jesus intentionally chose the role of outsider to minister to those who were marginalized by society.
- The tension between those who are insiders and those who are outsiders within the church not only constricts the ability of the outsider to be an equal in the society; it also inhibits the whole growth and development of the insider from becoming a mature Christian and the community from being whole.
- Christ redefines God’s authority and power as radiating from the center of society by identifying it with the outsiders, at the margins of society where the poor and alienated strangers live.
- The faithful action of embracing those on the margins, as Christ himself did, challenges the church and its members beyond the desire to seek personal security and comfort, “cocooning” itself away from the many needs of alienated peoples in the world.

### Homework for Session 9:

Familiarize yourself with the essay titled, “Qualities of a Christ-centered Relational Ethic” in Appendix G and attach scriptural references to each of the elements that illustrate this relational ethic. Keep in mind that a relational ethic identifies the underlying principles that work to inform the way a person relates to other human beings.

Use this summary of a Christ-like Relational Ethic as a reference for the remaining sessions.

## Session 9 *The Bible on Human Sexuality and Salvation.*

### Session Objectives

- To articulate the individual components of a Christ-centered relational ethic as articulated in previous sessions and to identify other components of relevance.
- To assess the validity of those components based on a biblical definition of Christ-like love found in I Corinthians 13.
- To apply the constructed ethical framework to the setting of intimate human relationships.

### Leader Preparation

Familiarize yourself with the essay titled, "Qualities of a Christ-centered Relational Ethic" in Appendix G and attach scriptural references to each of the elements that illustrate this relational ethic. Keep in mind that a relational ethic identifies the underlying principles that work to inform the way a person relates to other human beings.

Prepare ahead of time a familiarity with Mark 10:2-6; Read Matthew 19:3-14, Mark 10:2-16, John 15:1-17; Philippians 2:5-11.

### Opening prayer:

Lead the class in prayer.

God of Grace and Glory, in Jesus Christ you sent one who demonstrates for all time what it means to live wholly and exclusively by your will. In him we see the marks of love that is both compassionate and strong, forgiving and yet fully acknowledging of the deadly consequences of human sin. In him we see accountability to life that is truly self-giving but not selfless. Grant that we who have been called to a ministry of discipleship may grow in our ability to acknowledge the fullness of faithful service to you

and to your people; that we may more effectively serve as your own covenant people. For, we pray in the name of Christ, who alone is the living Lord. Amen.

### Love and Intimacy

Read I Corinthians 13:1-13

Have class members articulate the different qualities of love in this passage. List all of them on newsprint. Center the class discussion on the following exercises:

1. Using the many expressions of *agape* (love) that Paul defines in I Corinthians 13, measure the presence or absence in this text of each of the elements of the Christ-centered relational ethic outlined in the homework for session 9.
2. Do each of these components fit or support Paul's definition of love?
3. Are any of the elements of Paul's definition of love not included in a Christ-centered relational ethic?
4. Do they contradict Paul's definition of love? If so, how might we modify the Christ-centered relational ethic to include them?

### Sexuality and Salvation

Read Isaiah 56:3-5 and Acts 8:27-39. Discuss as a group:

1. How is a Christ-centered relational ethic at work in the following texts: Isaiah 56:3-5 and Acts 8:27-39?
2. Does this ethic center in any way on one's sexuality as a basis for a right relationship with God?
3. If not, what does this suggest about the emphasis we often seem to place on human sexuality and relationship with God?

### Small Group Discussion

Leader, prepare ahead of time your familiarity with each of these biblical passages. Float between groups to facilitate discussion.

### Group 1:

Refer back to the elements of a Christ-centered relational ethic at the end of session 8.

1. Read Matthew 19:3-14. How does Jesus' referral to the different types of individuals in this text (sexually mature adults, children and eunuchs) as a grouping tend to critique the ethical orientation to divorce that the Pharisees convey to Jesus?
2. Read Mark 10:2-16. Do the Matthew and Mark texts reveal a specific orientation of how Jesus measures the quality of the relationships between God and human beings? In your own words articulate this orientation.
3. What relational ethic of Jesus can be extracted from the clustering of these groups as he teaches on the theme of salvation?
4. Does this orientation of Jesus inform us in any way about his relationships with homosexually oriented Christians who seek to live in right relation with God and the rest of the community of faith?

### Group 2:

Read together John 15:1-17.

This passage serves as an interesting illustration of the application of two different interpretive approaches. Discuss the following.

1. Assume for a moment that this passage addresses, at least in part, the context of sexual intimacy. If this were the case, how would you interpret this text?
2. How does this orientation inform the concept of bearing fruit?
3. Apply the Christ-centered relational ethic to John 15:1-17 without the assumption that sexual intimacy is being addressed. What differences are communicated when these two different assumptions are applied?
4. Is either of them more accurate or do both apply? Support your answers.
5. What is the measurement of faithfulness implied in this text, which indicates a productive life of faith?
6. If Jesus' nature as 'the true human' is not measured by his expression of sexuality, but is more accurately assessed as being his willingness to "abide in God," then is that same standard the basis by which we

measure our whole lives - including our sexuality?

7. If self-giving love (vs. 13) and its willingness to be wholly given for others is the ultimate measurement of faithfulness to God, then is Jesus communicating a different measurement for faithful Christian leadership than the one that Christian churches today apply to ordination?

### Group 3

Read together Philippians 2:5-11.

This passage is identified as a confessional hymn of the early church. It communicates the essence of faithful response to Christ.

1. Looking at the context of Christ's relational ethics, how does one measure the faithfulness of a Christian to this hymn?
2. Is this confessional hymn dependent upon any specific expression of sexuality?
3. How does this passage inform the way we integrate our sexuality with the whole of our lives?

For the last fifteen minutes of discussion return to the large group setting and discuss the findings of your group.

(5 minutes per group)

### Concluding the Session

We take with us:

- Our relationship with God is not measured with a particular emphasis on human sexuality. The emphasis we place on sexuality and relationship with God seems to be a reaction to the sexual immorality of the society in which we live, rather than through the identification of a well-articulated sexual ethic as defined by Christ.
- In contrast we discover, upon closer examination of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, an overarching Christ-centered relational ethic that applies to all human relationships, including sexual intimacy.
- Our understanding of the role that sexual intimacy plays in measuring the faithfulness of the life of a disciple must be

framed within the larger context of the Christ-centered relational ethic. To do other than this seems to elevate sexuality to a level removed from Christ's own demonstration of relational ethics.

### Homework for Session 10

This week consider the following questions:

- Do we as a church apply the full impact of a Christ-centered relational ethic to heterosexually intimate relationships when considering the worthiness of church officers to positions of ordained leadership? Why is this difficult to do, and how might the church utilize these standards with candidates for ordained leadership?

- Is it possible for God to be at work in the life of a homosexual Christian who is deeply committed to a personal, mutual, and equitable relationship with one other, calling them to ordained leadership in the church? Why or why not?

## *Session 10* *Applying the Relational Ethic to Marriages.*

### Session Objectives

- To practice applying the full scope of a Christ-centered relational ethic to complex issues that arise within marital relationships.
- Learn to identify specific problems arising within heterosexual marriages through the application of a Christ-centered relational ethic.
- Draw from the Christ-centered relational ethic, suggesting practical alternatives to be used between the case study subjects other than the negative approaches identified in each case.

### Opening Prayer

Lead the class in prayer.

God of all covenantal relationships, with Abraham and Sarah you established a covenant of hope and fulfilled that hope with the child Isaac. You grant the gift of love between a man and a woman and bless the gift of love within the covenant of marriage. And yet, Lord, we know that often we misuse the gift by failing to live up to Christ's model of self-giving love. Instead we measure love by emotions, enjoyment, and self-gain, and lose sight of the gift when the cost demands more from us. Help us today to measure our lives by the self-giving love of Christ, and our devotion by our compassion to each other. Renew in us a right and holy spirit as we seek to understand and apply a Christ-like love to those at the center of our lives; for we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

### Case Studies (divide into three groups).

In each group identify a scribe who will take notes and then serve as a reporter to the larger class at the conclusion of the discussion time. Plan to discuss together as a whole class the summary statements of each of the small groups.

Access the primary components of the Christ-centered relational ethic from the homework in Session 9. (Appendix G)

Listed for quick reference, they are: Compassion, fidelity, equity and mutuality, respect, justice, empathy, emotional availability, listening, self giving, sharing, openness, trustworthiness, steadfast love, forgiveness, and intimacy.

### Case 1

Hector and Sarah have been married for 17 years. They met in college where they were both training to be engineers. Early on in school they realized that they were taking several of the same classes together. They started studying together, and their romance grew out of a mutual admiration for each other. Both were near the top of their class, and when it came time during their senior year to interview for jobs they both had several offers. They had been considering marriage, and when they realized that they had job offers from the same plastics manufacturer, they not only decided to take the job offers, they decided to get married. It seemed the right thing to do. Five years into the marriage Sarah became pregnant, and when her baby was born she decided to stay at home to raise her daughter. Hector was experiencing changes of his own professionally; a year after his daughter's birth he was offered a managerial position, which meant more responsibility and a greater salary. Four years later another advancement opportunity occurred. He knew that it meant longer hours and an even greater focus on his work, but he felt he was willing to make the sacrifice. Meanwhile, during the subsequent years, Sarah gave birth to a second daughter and a son. Her life revolved around infant care and children's issues and she gradually grew despondent that she would never be able to pursue her own professional goals again. This issue created a constant tension between Hector and Sarah. He felt it was his duty to provide and her duty to nurture the children at home. This issue remained unresolved and was

only magnified by his absence from home, which began involving weekends for business trips each month.

Sarah felt increasingly alienated from her husband and her own professional self. Resentment and estrangement grew between them and they did very little as a couple together. When her youngest child started elementary school Sarah decided to enter a real estate training program and get a license to sell as a realtor. Hector was angry that she wanted to work outside the home and refused to offer his emotional support to her plans. Sarah continued anyway. During the realtor's course she made friends with another student named Jim. He was a good listener and they studied together and helped each other prepare for the licensing examination. When she received her realtor's license she asked Hector to celebrate her achievement with her, but he became distant and refused to acknowledge her accomplishment. Hurt and angry, Sarah called Jim. A sexual relationship soon developed that has continued for the past ten months. She is now considering filing for divorce over irreconcilable differences.

### **Processing the Case Study:**

Discuss the following questions for 30 minutes. Assign a scribe to record the basic outline of your discussion and make a five minute report to the larger group near the conclusion of the session.

1. Using the principles behind a Christ-centered relational ethic, what are the issues here?
2. What factors have contributed to the slow demise of Hector and Sarah's relationship?
3. What roles have Hector and Sarah played in contributing to the downfall of their marriage?
4. Is their relationship salvageable? What will it take to restore the relationship?
5. What roles do three young children play in their decision-making process?
6. What Christian principles might a pastoral counselor need to emphasize if this couple came for counseling?

Construct a summary of the guiding principles needed to strengthen the relationship between

Hector and Sarah, citing scripture passages that reflect a Christ-centered relational ethic.

Record these elements and then share them at the conclusion of this session with the larger class discussion of your case study.

### **Case 2**

Bill and Tina met each other at a church social gathering when she was in her mid-twenties and he was in his early thirties. They were very attracted to each other and started dating within a week of their introductions. Bill appeared to be a very confident and light-hearted man and Tina was pleased to find a man who was intelligent, had a number of interests, and was a good conversationalist. Bill never finished college but Tina had, and she had a better job than Bill. Tina was confident, poised, and self-assured. She was also vibrantly outgoing and a good mixer in groups. Bill found those qualities very attractive, knowing deep inside that he wasn't so confident of himself in group settings. After three months of dating, Bill proposed to Tina and she said yes without hesitation.

After meeting each other's parents they both recognized that their families held different values. Bill's father was an "Archie Bunker type" who set the agenda around the home. His mother was very subservient. The gruffness of Bill's father was offensive to Tina and she was grateful that she hadn't seen those qualities in Bill. She felt sorry for his mother, who seemed trapped in her role. She couldn't relate to his family well.

Tina's father and mother generally had an amicable and mutually supportive relationship. Her father shared in the duties around the house as she grew up and she never questioned the respectful love her parents had for each other. Tina didn't see that with Bill's parents, but she did with Bill throughout the dating and engagement. However, within a few months of being married she began to sense an uncomfortable pattern emerging. By the time they had been married a year she was clearly identifying many of the same qualities in Bill as she saw in his father. It horrified her, and she tried to confront Bill with her concerns, but he rebuffed her repeatedly. Trying to protect her parents from being too

concerned, she didn't ask their advice; but Tina talked to her pastor who encouraged her to pick a time when her husband would have to focus on the issues. When she did so he became very angry and depressed. Over the next several months, Bill began to be verbally abusive and the severity of his verbal attacks intensified. It hurt Tina deeply. She had not known this type of experience growing up and felt too embarrassed now to go to her parents (they once expressed reservations over her choice of Bill shortly after they were engaged).

She returned to the pastor, who read with her Ephesians 5:22-24 and counseled her to endure with patience, working through love to slowly change Bill. She agreed to try this but after a few more months felt trapped. She was angry with herself for being so hasty to marry Bill. She wept bitterly over the prospect of a lifelong marital relationship similar to that of Bill's parents. She wanted what she had seen between her parents. She decided one last time to intensely confront Bill with his treatment of her. Bill flew into a rage, throwing objects and smashing her vanity mirror and destroying her make-up supplies. He threatened her physical security and then stormed out of the house and drove away like a maniac in a rage. Something snapped in Tina. She knew full well that her emotional and physical security was now greatly threatened and that she did not feel safe with the thought of living with her husband. She packed up all her personal belongings and moved to her parents'. The next day she filed a restraining order at the police station and filed for divorce with a lawyer. She was angry at "the shallow advice" she received from her pastor. A part of her felt guilty, but she knew that divorce was better than a life of battered treatment.

### **Processing the case study:**

In your group discuss the following questions. Assign a scribe to record the basic outline of your discussion and make a five minute report to the larger group near the conclusion of the session.

1. Using the principles of a Christ-centered relational ethic identified in your homework for session 9, what are the primary issues between the couple in this case?

2. What Christian principles might a pastoral counselor need to emphasize if Tina came for counseling?
3. What might be an alternative interpretation of Ephesians 5 than the one she was given by her pastor?
4. What would be the issues that Bill would need to address in himself?
5. How do you reconcile Jesus' statement in Mark 10:2-12 when abuse has been strongly threatened, or when it actually occurs?
6. What role should forgiveness play in Bill and Tina's relationship?
7. What role do consequences play in a fully integrated response of forgiveness? (Is it possible for Tina to fully forgive Bill but not be able to return to the marriage?)

Construct an outline of guiding principles needed in the relationship between Bill and Tina, citing scripture passages that reflect a Christ-centered relational ethic.

Record these elements and then share them at the conclusion of this session with the larger class discussion of your case study.

### **Case 3**

John and Laurie have been married for 26 years. They elected before they married not to have children. In fact, sexual expression of intimacy has played a very limited role in their marriage. Neither of them feel they are very passionate people. They have supported each other and encouraged each other to pursue their own careers in banking and law. Early on in their relationship, this meant devoting a tremendous amount of time to their vocations. As a result they spent very little time with each other for the first ten years of their marriage except for 2 weeks of synchronized vacation time. That was their time to build their relationships. Vacation time has remained a part of their lives together and has meant a great deal to both of them.

After fifteen years with the law firm, Laurie was offered a full partnership with the firm and has gone on for further education and training to become the firm's leading expert in tax law. She is widely recognized in the local community as "the" lawyer to go to when one needs legal assistance

with tax codes. Professionally she is very thorough and assertive in court and is very articulate in presenting her cases.

John has risen in the world of banking. Twenty years ago he earned his MBA in Marketing and has applied his skills and expertise to his bank to help make it one of the most healthy and competitive small banks in the state. Five years ago his bank merged with another larger regional bank and he received a promotion to Vice-President of Marketing. The merger meant more work for John and only in the last year has the pace slowed down for him. He now feels that the bank has emerged as a dominant financial institution in the region and future mergers are planned over the next five years. Professionally, though, John's work has reached a plateau and he no longer feels challenged.

John and Laurie bought the home of their dreams after they had been married for 5 years and had it paid for after twenty years of marriage. They have their home finely furnished and have incorporated the latest in entertainment and labor saving technology devices into it. Once it was paid off they purchased a vacation home on the beach. They now devote three weeks a year to traveling, and have enough retirement investments made to live comfortably for the rest of their lives. They are not yet 50 years of age and both of them have begun in the last few years to question life's meaning. They have slowly become aware of an interior emptiness in their lives and they realize that there is much about who they are becoming, that they have not explored with each other. Laurie no longer finds the platitudes of an upwardly mobile consumer-oriented society to offer any meaning in her life. John spends a lot of time pursuing expensive hobbies but finds they don't hold his interest. They have recently dabbled in New Age spirituality but find its focus on interior growth only to mirror the rest of their personal and professional lives. They want something more. In talking to their closest friends and family, one or two suggest that they should have had children years ago, some suggest adoption, other friends suggest a career change, or early retirement. For the first time they are second guessing their decision not to have children.

### Processing the case study:

Discuss the following questions for 30 minutes. Assign a scribe to record the basic outline of your discussion and make a five minute report to the larger group near the conclusion of the session.

Using the components of a Christ-centered relational ethic, construct a useful critique of their lives that would allow them some direction and deeper sense of meaning for the remainder of their professional and personal lives.

1. What do John and Laurie need in their relationship with each other?
2. Read Hebrews 13:7-16. What are the implications for this couple?
3. What might the Presbyterian Church have to offer this couple spiritually that they have not found in their lives?
4. How do the teachings on resurrection life and the two great commandments found in Matthew 22: 23-40 apply to John and Laurie's lives?
5. Based on your experience with the church and its worship, fellowship, education, and outreach programs, what might you suggest to them that would help them meet their needs?

Construct an outline of guiding principles needed in the relationship between John and Laurie, citing scripture passages that reflect a Christ-centered relational ethic.

Prepare to share with the larger group.

**Class leader** facilitate the following and a discussion when each group has presented.

Each small group will present their case overview with the whole class.

### Concluding the Session

We take with us from this session

- An understanding of how the relational ethic applies to real life situations.
- Insights into destructive or counter-productive patterns that impact marital relationships.
- Experience in applying the principles of a Christ-centered relational ethic to everyday life.

## Homework for Session 11

Consider the following; trying to write a short answer for each question:

1. Assuming that a Christ-centered relational ethic is essential in growing in discipleship to Christ, has the church done an adequate job interpreting how these elements impact the whole of one's life, including our most personal of relationships?
2. Do these principles of relationship apply to all people who are involved in intimate relationships?
3. What cutting edge issues does this session raise for you as you reflect on your own life?

4. How do these principles of relationship apply to individuals who are homosexually oriented?

## Session 11 *Interpreting Paul and His Writings on Homosexuality.*

### Session Objectives

- To identify and articulate primary differences that exist between Biblical scholars in our denomination regarding the interpretation of scriptural passages that speak to the issue of homosexuality.
- To acknowledge the impasse this has created not only in our denomination but in mainline Christianity.
- To apply Dr. Gene March's essential elements of a Reformed biblical interpretation (introduced in session 2) to passages addressing homosexuality.

### Leader Preparation

Carefully prepare an overview and lecture of this material.

### Opening Prayer:

Lead the class in prayer.

Great and Holy God, your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our salvation. We come this day acknowledging the supreme authority of your holy word in our lives as Christians; and yet, Lord, we acknowledge that each and every one of us brings our experience and bias to the interpretation of your word and the role it plays in our lives both individually and corporately. Great controversy surrounds the interpretation of Paul's writings on homosexuality, and we admit that the whole of the church is sharply divided over those differences. Devoted Christians on both side of this debate who center their lives on you view each other with suspicion and doubt the veracity of each other's faith and discipleship. We confess that our actions surrounding this controversy often damage our relationships with Christ and each other. Fill us with a spirit of wisdom and compassion so that we may not only hear the perspective of our neighbors in faith, but may discern the movement of the spirit of

reconciliation in our midst. Grant us patience and perseverance in our commitment to each other; for it is through Christ that we remain the church, and through him that we pray. Amen.

### Presbyterian Teaching on Scripture

"The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears unique and authoritative witness through the Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed as the word of God written. The Scriptures are not a witness among others, but the witness without parallel. The church has received the books of the Old and New Testaments as prophetic and apostolic testimony in which it hears the word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated."

*Confession of 1967-UPCUSA (paragraph 9.27)*

### Romans 1:26-28.

"For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, *giving up natural intercourse with women* were consumed with passion for one another. *Men committed shameless acts with men* and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done."

The two highlighted phrases in this passage reflect the points of controversy between biblical scholars.

Leader, carefully prepare an overview and lecture of this material. Summarize and present both sides listed in below as objectively as possible.

### A Traditional Interpretation of Romans 1: 26-28

Many traditional scholars communicate the perception that sexual intimacy is only "natural" between male and female individuals who are married to each other. These scholars believe this

Romans text addresses clearly and unambiguously any act of homosexual intimacy irregardless of the fidelity, commitment, and mutuality found within the partnership. Implicit behind this argument is the belief that procreation between a man and a woman in marriage is the singular, universal, and definitive purpose for the expression of sexual intimacy. The term “natural” in Romans suggests that God created sexuality purely for the purposes of bearing and raising children and for creating intimacy between men and women who are united in marriage. Conversely, any sexual expression that does not honor this intent clearly violates God’s will for human intimacy.

Sexual behavior and the Hebrew Bible (extrapolated from *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*.) Procreation was perceived to be an unqualified good in Israel. Historically speaking, Israel was a small nation struggling for its survival against much larger and more populated peoples like the Canaanites, the Philistines, and the Egyptians. Israel was largely an agrarian society. Within its culture a larger family meant a greater labor force to produce and harvest crops (it also meant more mouths to feed). A primary focus on the importance of procreation served to ensure the survival of the struggling society. “All sexual behavior that did not produce legitimate Israelite offspring to the holy commonwealth was, in varying degrees, censured or controlled. . .” Philo of Alexandria - ca. 15 B.C.E.-50 CE (a contemporary of Jesus Christ), the most important representative of Greek-speaking Judaism and a source of authority of the early Christian community - interpreted the re-ordering by the Septuagint (the Hebrew Bible translated into Greek) of the Ten Commandments to place adultery at the top of the list of sins against one’s neighbors, before murder and theft, to indicate that adultery was the most serious of all sins. Philo also condemned any expression of sexuality, even within marriage, that was not for the purpose of procreation. The implications of these factors demonstrate the sharply defined focus of authority attributed to procreation, and the lumping together of all other forms of sexual expression as being contrary to both the will of God and the best interest of the community of faith.

The Hebrew understanding of the role of sex was widely accepted by Jewish converts to early Christianity. This understanding reflects the Apostle Paul’s interpretation of the role sexual intimacy played in human life. Indeed with his interpretation of the immanence of the second coming of Christ, Paul “unambiguously counseled the Corinthian Christians that marriage represented a compromise of the spiritual life, the highest degree of which was attainable only by celibates like Paul (I Cor. 7:1, 7-9; cf. Matt. 19:10-12; Rev. 14:4).”

### **An Alternative Interpretation of Romans 1: 26-28**

For a number of reasons it is difficult to assess with total accuracy the precise application of Paul’s teachings on homosexuality in the Romans and Corinthian passages in regard to how they apply to our cultural context today. We are not a society dependent upon procreation to assure our survival; in fact, procreation unchecked threatens the sustenance of human life in the twenty-first century as it has never done before. Attitudes of acceptance towards sexual intimacy within marriage, contraception, and even, to a large degree, masturbation, have changed considerably within Christianity during the last century. Social, professional, and interpersonal norms and mores of male-female roles and behavior have been radically redefined within the last fifty years. From this perspective it is logical, although unsettling to Christianity, that contemporary culture would be re-examining other definitions of morality ascribed to human sexual behavior.

Scholars who counter this perception interpret the same phrases with very different findings. In discerning the meaning of the phrase “giving up natural intercourse,” they have consulted the life experiences of many homosexuals and the findings of medical science. Both have indicated that the majority of individuals who identify themselves as homosexual have always been aware of that sexual orientation from the onset of puberty. Indeed they have never been sexually attracted to members of the opposite sex, only to members of their own sex. In 1972 the American Psychiatric Association removed the diagnosis of

“illness” from the definition of homosexuality. The majority of physicians today do not see homosexuality as a medical condition in need of a cure.

Reportedly for many who are homosexually oriented, what has been “natural” for many homosexual persons is the awareness that their sexual preference has never changed. They argue that they have not exchanged anything in their lives that has been untrue to whom they were created to be. From this perspective some scholars believe the argument that Paul raises in this text does not apply universally to all homosexual persons, but specifically to those engaged in manipulative, uncommitted, and distorted relationships between people who are not equals. (This interpretation has been used to support the full acceptance of adult homosexual persons involved in monogamous and equitable relationships, who are committed to the well-being of their partner.)

### Other key passages

“Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolater, adulterers, *male prostitutes, sodomites*, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers - none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the spirit of our God. *1 Corinthians 6:9-11 NRSV*

“This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers, fornicators, *sodomites*, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.” *I Timothy 1:9-11 NRSV*

Leader summarize for the class.

Regarding the interpretation of these passages, there are essentially two primary distinctions that biblical scholars have made within mainline Christianity today. Groups representing both distinctions are found within mainline

Presbyterianism. Both groups apply the forms of historical and literary criticism to the text. Within both groups many were educated by the same seminaries and professors. The vast majority of these biblical scholars possess a deep and abiding relationship with the church and a strong belief in the redemptive nature of God and Jesus Christ at work in their own lives and in the world. As Presbyterian biblical scholars, most of them believe the scriptures to be the unique and authoritative witness without parallel to the work of God and the Lordship of Christ in the world. Considering these facts, one is left pondering the question, how is it possible that these biblical scholars have developed very contradictory conclusions regarding the meaning of these specific passages?

By examining the interpretive differences of two groups and the factors which led to their findings we may gain a deeper understanding as to the nature and complexity behind this debate. Both groups of scholars agree that Paul is defining types of behaviors that are contrary to the will of God and the health of the community of faith and the life of the individual Christian. However, the contradiction occurs, in the NRSV passages printed above, over the words in bold type. In Greek they are *malakoi* and *arsenokoites*.

### A Traditional Interpretation of *Malakoi* and *Arsenokoites*

One group of scholars, relying on the tradition of the church and its interpretive witness from the days of the early church to the present, indicates that Paul’s inclusion of these terms refers to anyone who practices homosexuality. They agree with Paul that the creation stories in Genesis offer proof that procreation within the context of marriage is a defining purpose, and the only appropriate context, for human sexual intimacy. The Jews before and at the time of Jesus Christ applied a similar interpretation to the gift of human sexuality. The tradition of this interpretation extends back approximately 1000 years before Paul, making this the predominant interpretation of human sexuality communicated throughout the Jewish and the Christian traditions.<sup>7</sup>

## An Alternative Interpretation of *Malakoi* and *Arsenokoites*

A second group of scholars perceive that the words *arsenokoites* and *malakoi* are very difficult words to interpret. “*Arsenokoitai* . . . is a word that appears to have no prior history in the Greek language and, as is generally believed to have been coined by the apostle Paul himself by combining *arsen-* (male) and *koitos-* (bed), two words that are contiguous in Leviticus 18:22 and especially in 20:13.”<sup>8</sup> *Malakoi* is an adjective that literally means ‘soft ones’ or ‘unmanly ones’ and most likely refers to the young boys ages 11 to 17 who were going through puberty and were ‘femininely’ attractive to older men. This group suggests that the focus of this text is on an aberrant sexual behavior different from that of a mutual and monogamous homosexual relationship. Within both texts, (Corinthians and Timothy) the list of behaviors that Paul includes are all manipulative, abusive, or selfishly destructive behaviors within intimate relationships.

According to this perspective the Roman cultural context that Paul addressed must be first understood if these ambiguous Greek words are to make sense.

### The Culture that the Apostle Paul Lived In.

The Apostle Paul’s ministry began sometime within the first 20 years after the death of Christ, (exact beginning date unknown). He grew up influenced by a strong Jewish heritage, and his education in Hebrew Scripture was extensive. Prior to his own conversion to Christianity, he displayed a zeal for Judaism that resulted in the active persecution of early Christian converts. Paul’s city of origin was the Hellenistic city, Tarsus, which was heavily steeped in Greco-Roman culture and exhibited a tolerance for many religious traditions. Roman mythology, however, played a predominant role in Roman spirituality throughout the empire. With its hierarchy of gods and goddesses, Roman mythology reflected a variety of human attributes and qualities highly regarded in the society. In this religion the human body was an object of great admiration. The

image of the virile and muscular male body was worshiped as being god-like.

The Romans are regarded as among the greatest builders in history. Their construction included great highways and aqueducts. Their public buildings included everything from government offices and religious temples, to sports stadiums and bath houses separated by gender. These bath houses were frequented by the citizens and served as gathering places of social and sexual interaction. The value the Romans placed on the mature and educated male mind combined with the value on the virile male body led to the common practice of sexual/educational mentoring where older males would mentor pubescent boys into adulthood.

Although these men were often married, it was common for sex to play an active role in the mentoring relationship with young males. In addition, within the cosmopolitan atmosphere of many Roman cities there were other sexual practices introduced by various cultures including cultic prostitution and pederasty. Pederasty is the development of a purely sexual relationship initiated by an adult male with a boy. (It should be noted that the Greeks distinguished between different kinds of homosexual relationships and condemned pederasty while affirming mentoring relationships between an adult professional and an understudy teenager that included sex.) These scholars argue that this background information is necessary in understanding the specific behaviors that Paul condemns.

### Discuss the following questions

1. As a class, discuss the primary points that the different interpretations are based upon.
2. Which interpretation do you personally agree with or disagree with? Why?
3. What common agreements regarding the types of behavior condemned by Paul exist between the two primary groups of biblical scholars? Is this basis of agreement strong enough to preserve the trust and further the dialogue between these two groups? Why or why not?

4. To what authority can the church turn when such difficult differences of scriptural interpretation occur?

From this session we take with us

- The knowledge that accurate scriptural interpretation of controversial and difficult passages requires an intense amount of study and openness to the opinions from contrasting views.
- The recognition that sometimes a faithful response to scripture is to delay an attachment of a specific interpretation to the text until further perspectives can be brought to bear.
- The recognition that an accurate and full understanding of the present day contextual setting, including the personal faith stories of people from both sides of the debate, must be brought into dialogue with the text.

### Homework for Session 12

Think about your response to the following questions

1. Have you known a homosexual person? Was he or she active in a church?
2. How was this person accepted by family, school, or church?
3. How did this person feel about the way he or she was treated?

Try to write about this person as you answer the above questions.

# Session 12

## *A Challenging Witness – Case Studies of Homosexual Christians*

### Session Objectives

- To familiarize oneself with the stories of Christian faith within the lives of specific individuals who are homosexually oriented.
- To explore the ethical issues within these specific stories, utilizing a Christ-centered relational ethic.
- To further develop proficiency in the application of a Christ-centered relational ethic.

### Opening Prayer

Lead the class in prayer.

Most gracious and loving God, through the mystery of infinite life you created us; through the vision and authority of infinite love, you redeem human life; and through the power of your directing and comforting presence you sustain us through times of confusion and uncertainty. We give you thanks this day for the witness of faith that has preceded us, and has brought clarity of focus and an understanding of your holy will to generations of believers who struggled blindly in their own day and time with faith issues. We are grateful for the clarity of interpretation that we live by today because other generations sought to interpret God's will and apply God's justice for children and impoverished families, for slaves and women, for physically handicapped persons and those who are mentally ill.

We come before you facing a new and difficult dilemma in our society as we struggle to faithfully interpret your will for people regarding homosexuality and faith. Help us to learn to listen carefully and faithfully to each other – especially to the faith stories of Christians whose sexual orientation is different from our own. Grant us patience and wisdom as we reach out to you and to each other, recognizing that our relationships in Christ call us to act with both caution and compassion in regard to individual human life. Pour out your spirit anew upon us, that Christ's clarity and grace shall emerge in a way clearly understood by your church as it has with so many tough issues in generations past. We pray this

prayer in confidence, even in the midst of the chaos which surrounds human life; through Christ, in Christ, and with Christ. Amen

### Speaking in the First Person

The class leader will briefly lead the whole group in the discussion questions assigned as homework in Session 11.

1. Have you known a homosexual person? Was he or she active in a church?
2. How was this person accepted by family, school, or church?
3. How did this person feel about the way he or she was treated?

### The Lordship of Jesus Christ

(The leader will cite and read this statement from the Book of Order.)

“All power in heaven and earth is given to Jesus Christ by Almighty God, who raised Christ from the dead and set him above all rule and authority, all power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but in that which is to come. God has put all things under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and made Christ Head of the Church, which is his body. . . Insofar as Christ's will for the Church is set forth in Scripture it is to be obeyed. In the worship and service of God and the government of the church, matters are to be ordered according to the Word by reason and sound judgment, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. . . In affirming with the earliest Christians that Jesus is Lord, the church confesses that he is its hope and that the Church, as Christ's body, is bound to his authority and thus free to live in the lively, joyous reality of the grace of God.” (G-1.0100a, c, d)

### Case Studies

Divide the class into two groups. Recommend that each group refer back to the elements of a Christ-centered relational ethic found in Session 9 as they consider their assigned study.

## **Small Group 1 - A Gay Christian.**

Read this story aloud in your small group:

I grew up in a family of faithful and devout Christians. You might say we were there every time the doors of the church were open for some group gathering; my father is a Presbyterian minister. In fact several members of my family on both sides have served the church in leadership roles for four generations. I grew up knowing and believing that God and Jesus Christ love me. I was active in church activities through high school and some in college. From the time I was in the sixth grade, I have been aware that I have been attracted to males and females differently than most other people. I kept this information to myself and struggled with it privately through my teenage years, but by the time I was in my mid-twenties I needed to be honest with myself and my family. I told them that I was a homosexual and they were all stunned. They each went through various stages of denial, guilt, and blame. My mother thought it was something I would be healed from and my sister mentioned something about a stage I was going through, but those approaches discounted my experience and I kept pushing them to hear me and my story on its own terms. My father reserved his comments and seemed to be processing this information in his own way. He encouraged the rest of my family to listen to my story. Slowly over a period of many years they completely worked through their feelings and realized that my sexual orientation is no more of a choice than their own attractions and feelings are. They now understand that I would never have chosen to put myself or them through the pain and difficulties surrounding homosexuality if it was strictly a matter of personal choice.

As a young man seeking to center my life in the Christian faith, I returned to church after several years. Professionally I am a design artist, and I was invited to serve a term on the worship and music committee of the church I joined. It struck me that the church needed more rich visual symbols to enhance worship. When I suggested this to the committee they agreed. One spring, I volunteered to create a banner for the congregation for the season of Pentecost. I

extensively researched the Pentecost event and created a twenty-foot tall banner specifically for that sanctuary. On Pentecost Sunday I was invited by the pastor to present the banner during the worship service and I spoke for five minutes about the meaning of the design. Afterwards some people told me that the banner and my presentation made Pentecost come alive for them in a new and dynamic way. I felt fully connected in the life of the church, but ironically became aware of a growing dissonance in my life. The people of my church did not know my full identity, and as time passed it became more important for me to be accepted authentically for who I am as a Christian who is also homosexual. I decided to share this information with the pastor of the church. The pastor seemed a bit disconcerted by the news and seemed to have difficulty relating to me afterwards. I shared my story with two others whom I thought I could trust, and soon realized that my relationship with one of them had grown very distant and cold. I noticed repercussions with other acquaintances in the church who no longer acknowledged my presence.

I felt increasingly isolated and it greatly affected my ability to worship there. Within six months after making and presenting the banner my relationship with the church withered and I was left to look in alternative locations for a community of faith. A friend at work was involved in a 12 Step Program and I went with her to it and found there more a community of acceptance and support than I found in the church. At this point in my life the 12 Step group serves as my congregation. They know and accept me for who I am. I find the relationship with the Presbyterian Church to be a painful reminder of what the church can't be for me and for its other gay and lesbian sons and daughters who were baptized into it and grew up loved and nurtured by it.

### **Assess this case study**

1. If the sexual expression of a gay or lesbian Christian is universally identified as sinful action, then how is it possible that God works (as implied in this case study) to empower the spiritual faith of a

homosexual to serve as an effective witness to other people who have no knowledge of his or her sexual orientation? Is the witness diminished by learning of his or her sexual orientation?

2. If God's spirit is illuminated in Christian worship through the lives of homosexuals, then what is the theological basis for excluding gay and lesbian Christians who possess a deep faith in Christ from serving in positions of ordained leadership in the church?
3. Do we limit the power of God to work through human life by defining the norm of heterosexuality as a universal standard from which acceptable Christian leadership is called?
4. In this case study, have members of the congregation practiced sins of exclusion?
5. Are there biblical passages where Jesus accepts the faith of individuals shunned by the faith community for not conforming to the norms of the society? List the passages and describe the circumstances surrounding the situation.
6. Why might it take ten years for this family fully to work through the issues surrounding the sexual orientation of this man; and what insights derived from the way this family addressed the sexuality of their son and brother can be applied to the church today?

### **Small Group 2 - Illness Brings a Family Together**

Read the following article, "Love Story: How A Father and Son Discovered Each Other in the Shadow Of AIDS," from The Wall Street Journal. March 16, 1992, p.1, A6.

There was a man who had a son, and he and his wife loved their son very much. He was their only son. His delivery had been difficult, and because they were fearful of future pregnancies, they agreed to have no more children. They had grown up in the Depression, and as the boy's father had said, "We'd rather have one child and have him want for nothing than have six children we maybe couldn't afford to send to college."

There was a man who had a son. The man was a Presbyterian elder. He took his son fishing and together they got involved in Cub Scouts and later, Boy Scouts. And there was his wife, a woman who had a son, and she sang in the Presbyterian Church choir and her son sang in the children's choir and later in the youth choir.

There was a man and woman who had a son, and it came time for the boy to go to college. They sent their son to a fine Presbyterian men's college. While the boy was away at school, the father completed his own unfinished college education and they graduated the same year. The father graduated after ten years of night school, his son graduated with honors in psychology and French. The boy taught French in a prep school, was drafted into the army and served in Korea during the Vietnam years, and came back to teach French in a large city.

There was a man who had a son, and on a warm spring night about nineteen years ago the boy said to his father, "I haven't really been honest with you. I'm gay."

The father, who didn't think he had ever met a gay person had been taught that homosexuality was a sin, didn't know what to say. He didn't know what to say. What he finally did say was, "You're our son and we love you," and the father wrapped his arms around his boy. "You're our son and we love you."

There was a man who had a son, and the boy, because of what he learned in the Presbyterian Church, and because of what he learned at a Presbyterian college, decided to go to Seminary to study. He graduated with two degrees, a Master of Divinity and a Master of Social Work, but his church would not validate his call to the ministry because he did not want to lie about his homosexuality. His father was disappointed and he was angry. "We'd always gone to church," the boy's father said, "he'd always been generous... in school, never went out boozing... They wouldn't have anything to do with him... The fact that he's gay is just the way things turned out." The father felt bitter and helpless, but decided that "leaving the church... wasn't the answer." He read books and articles trying to understand homosexuality. There was a man and a woman who had a son;

and one night about three years ago they received a phone call from their son. They knew from the tone of his voice something was wrong. “Mom, Dad, I got some test results back today. I have AIDS,” he said.

There was a man and a woman who had a son, and they sold their home to move in with their son in a faraway city, so they could care for him while he continued his work. His father squeezed into a cot in the boy’s bedroom and set an alarm for every two hours so he could give him his medicine. Eventually the boy had to be moved to a hospice where he could receive medicine for pain but would no longer be treated for the illnesses allowed by AIDS. In the hospice most of the AIDS patients had few, if any, visitors, but the boy’s parents were always there, and friends came frequently. When the end finally came, the man held his son’s hand for five and a half hours as the boy gasped for air.

There was a man who had a son, and after his son’s death, he said, “We became closer than we had ever been. I was never interested in music or theatre like his mother was. So I couldn’t help him with that. But when he became sick, if he needed turning or needed to be helped to the bathroom, those were things I could do. This was one time I was able to help... Sure, I would give anything for grandchildren to spoil. But I have many things to be thankful for.”

“There was a man who had two sons,” Jesus said, and when he saw his younger son coming home on the road, he hitched up his robes and ran down the road to embrace the boy, and no sooner was he in his arms than he was shouting to the servants to prepare a party. There was a man who had two sons, Jesus said, and when he saw his elder son wouldn’t come to the party, he went out to him. The party was fashioned out of the father’s love. The cost therefore, is excessive and extravagant. This is the way the Kingdom of God makes entrance into the world, as a great feast to which everyone – everyone – is invited. Come to the feast of the father’s love. [End of article]

## Assess this Case Study

This story about a Presbyterian family could be about a family in almost any congregation in our denomination. Assume for a minute that this family is from your congregation.

1. Do you know of families in your congregation who have gay or lesbian children or siblings?
2. If this family were from your congregation, what kind of support could this young man and his parents count on from your pastor?
3. Would any family in your congregation be able to approach the leadership of your church for spiritual support while facing the crisis of AIDS, and would it be available to them as if Christ were offering it?
4. If your session learned that this Presbyterian family had moved to your town to be with their gay son during his battle with AIDS, would they reach out to the family and offer support? If not, what would it take for the congregation to do so?
5. What changes need to occur in your congregation and/or in the Presbyterian Church (USA) in the messages communicated and in the way many members relate to the Presbyterians who are homosexual persons and their family members?
6. How does the reference to the biblical story of, “The Prodigal Son” fit this story? How does it vary from the life conditions of the son in the “Love Story”?
7. Homophobia is defined as the irrational fear or hatred of homosexual people.<sup>9</sup> The father in this story overcame his own fear and confusion through learning and listening, but primarily through loving his son. In the vast majority of cases the people seeking ordination in our churches are themselves children of the church. Many of them are the sons and daughters of ordained Presbyterian leaders. What responsibilities does the church have to these individuals, considering the promises we make to them at their baptisms?

8. This story points to the silencing that churches frequently engage in to further marginalize and distance the voices of its' own homosexual members from being heard. Does this imply that the majority of Christian churches are homophobic? Why or why not?

### Concluding the Session

We carry with us from this class:

- A recognition that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has alienated some of its own children baptized into the church because of its inability to accept their sexuality.
- The Holy Spirit can and does choose to work through the lives of homosexually oriented Christians.
- The intolerance of the Church toward homosexual persons has caused great pain not only for homosexuals but for members of their own families as well.

For further study on this issue, please see the 2004 resource prepared by the Covenant Network of Presbyterians entitled, *Far From Home: Tales of Presbyterian Exiles*, available at [www.covenantnetwork.org](http://www.covenantnetwork.org)

### Homework for Session 13:

Review the flow of the materials covered in this course.

1. What are the primary insights you have gained from this study?
2. How has this study challenged your thinking or changed your perspective?
3. In your opinion, does this approach help to further dialogue in your church and the denomination? Explain the basis of your answer to this question.

Complete the post-course Assessment Tool and bring it with you to the class

Take time to do two things for your class. Lead the class through the directions at the beginning of the survey. WHEN THE SURVEYS ARE RETURNED TO YOU. Compare the differences between the pre and post class survey noting the difference of answers between each individual. Has the course helped to clarify the class members' feelings on this issue or has it further confused them. Note particularly the

number of questions answered with a # 4, which means 'not sure'. Compare on both an individual level and as a whole class using only the survey findings of those who completed the course. Does the level of ambiguity of class members rise or fall after the course has been taken? What general movement on the scale, if any, occurs from having participated in this study? Share your findings with the class and discuss if there is time. If appropriate share the overall general results of this survey with members of the church who have not taken the course and encourage class participants to share how the course helped (if any) their understanding of these issues. You may need to do this at a time after the course has concluded.

# Session 13

## *How the Sacraments Witness to a Christ-centered Relational Ethic.*

### Session Objectives

- To identify the relational ethic of Christ present within the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.
- To consider the relational dimension of the vows each Christian makes during the sacrament of Baptism.
- To assess the role worship plays in the educational process of the community of faith.
- To acknowledge the patterns of mutual self-destruction that the community of faith engages in.

### Opening Prayer

Lead the class in prayer.

God of all that is sacred, you have been at work in our lives guiding us into a greater understanding of your love and its application to your people. In Jesus Christ we come to know truth personally. In the commonness of bread, wine and water we come to an ever deeper understanding of your surrounding grace. We pray for the clarity of your light as we reflect on these our Holy Sacraments, that we may be empowered by the Holy Spirit which unites us as brothers and sisters in Christ. May we come to see the disagreements surrounding human sexuality within the larger scope of your abiding love – a love that welcomes all of us who call upon Christ as Lord and Savior, to his table of fellowship and mercy. Open us to the indwelling of your Holy Spirit, which rests upon all who share in Christ's baptism. We ask this in the name of Christ our living Lord. Amen.

### Leader Preparation

Drawing from liturgical resources in the Presbyterian Book of Common Worship. Identify the relational themes present in the liturgy of Baptism or the Lord's Supper. For the Lord's Supper, see pages 125–129 and 157–159. For the Sacrament of Baptism see pages 403–415 and 431–445. On a flip chart, list for the class the themes of relational ethics found in the

liturgical language for each of the two sacraments.

### Group Discussion

**Leader: Facilitate discussion in each group.**

#### **Group 1: Baptism**

**Read this material aloud, stopping to include reading of the identified scripture passages.**

In the opening presentation of the liturgy of Baptism, [Matthew 28:18-20] God's total authority is given to Christ and claimed by Christ, communicating the fullness of the relationship between God and Christ. This is followed by a command to the church to go and make disciples of all nations, connecting the community of faith not just with Christ, but with God as Spirit and Creator of the world (the Holy Trinity). Obedience to this relationship is measured in the response of those who have been baptized into the commandments of God. God promises infinite presence to God's people. Ephesians 4: 4-6 emphasizes the relational focus of the believing community to God and each other. We are united by our common faith in one Lord, the same God in three persons who transcends and infuses all of life. The obedience and confidence of the faith community focuses on the promises of the Triune God which are bestowed on each believer in Baptism. "Baptism sets the tone for the whole pilgrimage of a Christian by signifying at the beginning, our dependency upon the community for our faith and nurture. The burden of baptismal work is upon the church, the baptizers; not on the one being baptized. It is the church to whom the command to 'make disciples' has been given."<sup>10</sup>

The principle focus in the baptismal act is on the church; more accurately stated, it is on God's presence at work through the church to bring about salvation, conversion, and spiritual growth within the community and those baptized into it. The intentions of the individual, or if an infant,

the intentions of his or her own parents, are articulated publicly regarding one's own baptism into Christ. Immediately following, the congregation is once again asked to profess its willingness to lead the candidate on the faith journey in and with the community of believers.

The second primary requirement in the sacrament of Baptism is for the individual, or the parents of the infant, to profess before the whole community faith in Jesus Christ and a series of renunciations. Evil, its powers, and personal sin are publicly renounced. Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior is embraced by the candidate, followed by a communal confession of faith by the whole congregation reciting the Apostle's Creed. A prayer of thanksgiving over the water is offered by the pastor, reminding the community of faith of the life-giving power that water has played throughout the history of God's covenant people. Water symbolizes the cleansing and restorative presence of God in the life of the community and its individual members.

**Read aloud and discuss the following excerpts from the PCUSA Book of Order, The Directory of Worship:**

"The body of Christ is one, and Baptism is the bond of unity in Christ. As they are united with Christ through faith, Baptism unites the people of God with each other and with the church of every time and place. Barriers of race, gender, status and age are to be transcended. Barriers of nationality, history, and practice are to be overcome." W-2.3005

"Baptism enacts and seals what the Word proclaims: God's redeeming grace offered to all people. Baptism is God's gift of grace and also God's summons to respond to that grace. Baptism calls to repentance, to faithfulness, and to discipleship. Baptism gives the church its identity and commissions the church for ministry in the world." W-2.3006

The individual is then received into the full life of the community of faith after the sacrament of Baptism by participating in the sacrament of Communion. Baptism and Communion are often linked as a unifying connector between the new member of the faith community and the rest of the community with Christ.

**Discuss these questions**

1. Baptism stresses the unity of the Body of Christ, a unity which transcends differences of many kinds. Does the difference over how to interpret the scripture passages relating in this case to homosexuality, ever take priority over the unity that we share in our Baptism?
2. What are the essential elements of shared Christian faith identified in the sacrament of Baptism? How does one's personal expression of sexuality fit into this construct of relationship?
3. The rite of the sacrament of Baptism calls each individual to renounce sin and evil. In baptisms where the respondent interprets 'sin and evil' in the relational terms identified in this study, rather than the specific expression of one's sexual orientation, is it possible that the meaning of the sacrament transcends all differences of interpretation that have been applied? Support your answer.
4. Does the sacrament of Baptism and the unity it points to call both sides of this debate to a common confession of Ephesians 4, which reads, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of us all, who is above all, and in all, and through all"? How does this text inform the differences of interpretation offered to this debate?

**Group 2: The Lord's Supper**

**Read these paragraphs aloud.**

Through the scriptures Christ invites all who recognize their need for his love at work in their lives to come to the table. This invitation is extended to all baptized members, reminding us of our relationship of dependency on a loving God and thanking God for all the gifts of life which come from God. After thanking, we remember the acts of Christ in his ministry, death, and resurrection. We remember his promise to return and are sustained by his pledge of undying love and presence for all of God's people. After thanking God the Father/Creator and remembering Jesus the Son/Redeemer, we call upon the Holy Spirit to lift the community into the presence of Christ and ask for God's

acceptance of our gifts of bread and wine as symbolic of our full participation in the Body of Christ. We ask the Spirit to unite us with Christ and with the rest of the community of faith, to nourish us and keep us faithful as Christ's body at work in the world.

There is no act of worship which more fully exemplifies the relational nature of the individual and the church with the world than the sacrament of Holy Communion.

“Around the Table of the Lord, God's people are in communion with Christ and with all who belong to Christ. Reconciliation with Christ compels reconciliation with one another. All the baptized faithful are to be welcomed to the Table, and none shall be excluded because of race, sex, age, economic status, social class, handicapping condition, difference of culture or language, or any barrier created by human injustice. Coming to the Lord's Table the faithful are actively to seek reconciliation in every instance of conflict or division between them and their neighbors. Each time they gather at the Table, the believing community are united with the Church in every place, and the whole Church is present; join with all the faithful in heaven and on earth in offering thanksgiving to the triune God; renew the vows taken at Baptism; and they commit themselves afresh to love and serve God, one another, and their neighbors in the world.

The Presbyterian Book of Order, The Directory for Worship: W- 2.4006: “In the fourfold table action in which bread was taken, blessed, broken, and given, the early church actualized the mystery of Christ's presence in its life. In Christ's obedient life, death, and resurrection, communion with God had been restored and communion with one's brothers and sisters had been accomplished. This was more than mere historical memory – it was a present experience which, in the meal, became available for Christ's followers in the present and in the future.”<sup>11</sup>

Within the liturgy of the sacrament of Holy Communion, after communion has been offered to all those present, a prayer reminding us of our relationship of dependency on God's grace and mercy concludes the sacrament of Communion,

asking God once again for the strength of body and spirit to go into the world blessed and empowered as God's servant people.

“The Eucharist (Communion) embraces all aspects of life. It is a representative act of Thanksgiving and offering on behalf of the whole world. The Eucharistic celebration demands reconciliation and sharing among all those regarded as brothers and sisters in the one family of God and is a constant challenge in the search for appropriate relationships in social, economic, and political life. All kinds of injustice, racism, separation and lack of freedom are radically challenged when we share in the body and blood of Christ.<sup>12</sup> (World Council of Churches)

### Questions to address

1. When we come to the Lord's Table we are invited as equals with all who seek the restorative power of God's eternal love at work in their lives. Is that equality at the table strong enough to break down differences of opinion regarding how scripture is to be interpreted? Support your answer.
2. Discuss: If the distinctions over interpretation of passages relating to homosexuality are not more authoritative than the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, how can Presbyterians justify any approach which further divides the church or promotes distortions of the opponent's positions?
3. How can the sacrament serve as a point of common understanding of opposing viewpoints?
4. Many Presbyterians would interpret the above statement on the Lord's Supper, made by the World Council of Churches, as applicable to the type of injustice and exclusion that homosexuals experience in our culture and in the church. From their perspective, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper stands as a witness against the status quo and illuminates a deeper understanding of the true unity of the church. Others would argue that the sacrament stands as a witness to Christ's complete obedience to the will of God, and against all expressions of social

immorality. Is there common ground between these two positions? Describe.

### The Sacraments

Reconvene as a class and discuss together the findings of each group:

1. What promises and hopes do the sacraments and their meanings offer to Presbyterians today as we wrestle with the debate over homosexuality, ordained church leadership and the blessing of same sex partnerships?
2. Is a self-giving orientation of service to other human beings in the name of Christ, (the commissioning charges in either Baptism or Communion) in any way dependent upon a specific sexual ethic? If so, how: if not, what necessary distinctions or boundaries exist regarding self-giving love and sexual intimacy?

### Concluding the Session

Conclude this class with a prayer of your own and suggest a time to reconvene for sharing the results of the pre and post course surveys. Ask the Session for an opportunity to share the Sacrament of Holy Communion led by the pastor. Share the results of the course and the class reaction to this material with the pastor.

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1. Choon-Leong Seow ed. *Homosexuality and Christian Community*. Max Stackhouse. "The Heterosexual Norm." Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996. p.142
2. Marie Fortune, Director of the Center For Prevention of Domestic Violence. The 1997 Caldwell Lectures at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Notes taken from lectures. March 1997.
3. Paul Achtemeier ed., *The Harper Bible Dictionary*, Bruce J. Melina." Hospitality" Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1986. pp. 408-409.
4. Black's Law Dictionary, 5th edition. 1979. p.1247.
5. Paulo Frieze, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Continuum Publishing, 1992. p.77.
6. Groome, *Christian Religious Education*. pp. 91-92
7. James Mays, ed., *Interpretation Series: Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching*. Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997. p.97.
8. Robert Brawley, ed. *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality*. Herman C. Waetjen, "Same Sex Relations in Antiquity and Sexual Identity in Contemporary American Society." Louisville: Westminster /John Knox Press, 1996. p.109.
9. Bruce Hilton, *Can Homophobia Be Cured? Wrestling with Questions that Challenge the Church*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992. p.17.
10. John H. Westerhoff III and William H. Willimon, *Liturgy and Learning Through the Life Cycle*. Minneapolis: Seabury Press, 1980. p.13.
11. Ibid. p.32.
12. *Faith and Order Paper No. 111* "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry." Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982. p.14.

## Endnotes

*The New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes. Volume 1.* Terrence Fretheim, “The Book of Genesis: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections.” Nashville; Abingdon Press, 1994. p. 345.

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Jack Seymour and Donald Miller, eds. *Theological Approaches to Christian Education.* Susanne Johnson “Education in the Image of God.” Nashville, Abingdon Press. 1990. p.130.

(For more detailed information on the cultural and anthropological factors behind the development of this system see Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve.* New York; Oxford University Press. 1988. Chapters 2 and 3.)

Marie Fortune, Director of the Center For Prevention of Domestic Violence. The 1997 Caldwell Lectures at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Notes taken from lectures March 1997.

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Black’s Law Dictionary 5<sup>th</sup> edition. 1979. p.1247.

Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out.* New York, Doubleday and Co. 1975. pp.46-51.

Parker Palmer, *To Know as We are Known: A Spirituality of Education.* San Francisco; Harper and Row. 1983. p.49.

James Poling, *The Abuse of Power.* Nashville; Abingdon Press, 1991. p.187.

James Whitehead and Evelyn Whitehead, *Method In Ministry; Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry.* Kansas City; Sheed and Ward. 1995. p.50.

Jung Young Lee, *Marginality, The Key to Multicultural Theology.* Minneapolis, Augsburg-Fortress Press. 1995 .p.97.

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Ibid. Romney Moseley, “Education and Human Development in the Likeness of Christ.” p.146.

Paulo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* Translated by Zmyra Bergman Ramos. New York; Continuum Publishing. 1992. p.77.

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# Assessment Tool Measuring Personal Perspectives Regarding Homosexuality

I.D. Code \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

Date surveyed \_\_\_\_\_

For personal identification write down the first three letters of your mother's maiden name followed by the last three digits of your phone number. You will be the only person who will be able to identify your own survey.

## Directions:

Assess the following questions using a scale of one to seven. Circle the number that you think correctly reflects your opinion in response to the statement. One is equated with the area of least comfort, or that registers complete disagreement with the statement, while seven in each case indicates complete agreement, or a high level of comfort with the statement. If you are not sure of your answer circle four, the choice identified as NS. When you complete your survey turn it into the course leader, who will keep the surveys until the completion of the course.

The 190th General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church USA in 1978 established a position document which has served as a tool of "definitive guidance," first for the UPCUSA and then later for the PCUS and continuing for the reunited PCUSA since 1983. In it there is a clear distinction made between non-practicing sexual orientation and 'practicing' or sexually active homosexual persons. For purposes of this survey, consider the terms 'homosexuality' or 'homosexual persons' as indicating sexually active homosexual persons.

### 1. I believe homosexuality is a sin.

Strongly disagree		Not sure			Strongly agree	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Comments:

### 2. A predisposition towards homosexuality is genetically determined in many individuals and should be understood as the biological equivalent to individual differences in human beings such as left- or right-handedness.

Strongly disagree		Not sure			Strongly agree	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Comments:

3. Homosexuality is more a matter of choice, and the individual can control the type of sexual urges operative in his or her life.

Strongly disagree		Not sure			Strongly agree	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Comments:

4. Homosexuals, like heterosexuals, must not be judged as a group but must be assessed by the individual merits of their own situations.

Strongly disagree		Not sure			Strongly agree	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Comments:

5. Societal restrictions which specifically regulate the sexual behavior of homosexuals are morally wrong.

Strongly disagree		Not sure			Strongly agree	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Comments:

6. I would feel uncomfortable in a worship service if I knew the person sitting next to me were a homosexual.

Strongly disagree		Not sure			Strongly agree	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Comments:

7. It is wrong for corporations to create employee policies which specifically support the rights of homosexuals (i.e. naming their partner as their beneficiary).

Strongly disagree      Not sure      Strongly agree  
1    2    3    4    5    6    7

Comments:

8. The cultural acceptance of homosexuality does not present a threat to the stability of the society I live in.

Strongly disagree      Not sure      Strongly agree  
1    2    3    4    5    6    7

Comments:

9. The denomination's acceptance of ordained homosexuals would represent a theological position directly opposite to what the church should stand for.

Strongly disagree      Not sure      Strongly agree  
1    2    3    4    5    6    7

Comments:

10. A denominational position in favor of ordination of homosexuals would alienate Presbyterians from the majority of other Christian denominations.

Strongly disagree      Not sure      Strongly agree  
1    2    3    4    5    6    7

Comment

11. The Bible is clear in its condemnation of all homosexual acts.

Strongly disagree      Not sure      Strongly agree  
1    2    3    4    5    6    7

Comments:

12. Even if it did not impact my local congregation in any way, a denominational policy allowing for the ordination of homosexuals would result in my leaving the PCUSA and this congregation.

Strongly disagree		Not sure			Strongly agree	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Comments:

13. If a person who is a homosexual is a Christian, his or her faith in Christ should impact how we relate to and communicate with him or her.

Strongly disagree		Not sure			Strongly agree	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Comments:

Do you have any family members who have self-identified as homosexual?

(Circle one)

Yes No

Do you have any close friends or acquaintances who are homosexual?

(Circle one)

Yes No

What concerns do you have for our denomination regarding the outcome of this issue?

After completing this survey give it to the course instructor. It will be returned after the conclusion of the course when each person's pre and post course surveys have been tabulated. Because the materials are coded for anonymity the instructor can compare pre and post surveys for each person without knowing the identity of each pair of surveys.

## Appendix B

# How Presbyterians Interpret Scripture

Consider these excerpts from an article written by W. Eugene March entitled, “*Risky but Critical Work: Sexuality, The Bible and Policy Making.*” in *The Presbyterian Outlook*. (Richmond: 18-25 December 1995.) 6, 8. Dr. March, recently retired professor of the AB Rhodes Chair of Old Testament Bible, at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary.

By creed and tradition Presbyterians consider the Bible central to any determination of practice or policy. What the Bible says is not simply a matter of curiosity. It is foundation for the church and for individual Christians. Presbyterians take seriously the biblical witness....We want to hear God’s word through Scripture and conform our lives to it.

1. For a starter, each text must be read with a regard for both the literary and historical context from which it comes. Exodus 21: 20-21, for instance, gives instruction intended to moderate ill treatment of slaves. To argue from this passage that slavery is a legitimate institution (as some Presbyterians of another era did) is to misuse the passage by disregarding its context. Its literary context directs attention to violence between people and how such violence is to be regarded. This is the subject of the text in its context. The historical context is one in which the existence of slavery is treated straightforwardly and not questioned, however in no way validates the legitimacy of such an institution...

2. Remember that the Bible was written in other languages than English....Some Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic words simply do not have direct equivalents in English....The Hebrew term *shalom* is popularly translated as ‘peace’. The English term ‘peace’, however, is not sufficiently broad to carry all the nuance of the Hebrew term *shalom*. With that one word, Hebrew could designate health, well being, success, victory, cessation of hostility and wholeness. Further, the term was used as a simple greeting, more or less equivalent to our ‘hello’ or ‘goodbye’. The English word ‘peace’ can only carry a portion of the meaning or the Hebrew. To be sure the term

‘peace’ has been broadened in usage among Presbyterians, but it is because we have expanded our English term ‘peace’ in light of the broader meaning of the term in Hebrew. Translation is not always directly equivalent or unambiguous.

3. Respect the fact that a biblical text cannot always (or even most of the time) supply a simple, direct recipe for contemporary ethics. Our present situation is vastly different from that of the people addressed originally by the Bible...when the Bible addresses the world of commerce, as we know it, it does so only obliquely. There are tendencies and guiding principles but few points of direct application. This is likewise true in the area of sexuality, where our language and concepts are rooted in contemporary psychological theory of human development unknown in the time the Bible was originally constructed. To use the language of ‘superego’ or ‘dysfunction’ or ‘heterosexual’ to explain what the Bible may mean in a certain passage is to assume intellectual concepts that were totally unknown when the Bible was originally written. The concept of and the language describing homosexuality did not come into existence until about 100 years ago. We must be careful when using these when translating ancient texts.

4. Less clear passages in the Bible should be read in light of the whole of Scripture. Sometimes terminology may be unclear because the particular word or phrase occurs quite rarely. If the word is paralleled by other language that is better understood or if there are other passages that seem to be treating the same topic, light may be shone on the problematic term. Of if a subject is addressed sparsely or not at all in the Bible, then texts that deal with related concerns may be a source of insight. In dealing with the issue of homosexuality in the Bible, for instance, there are actually very few passages that directly deal with this topic. Indeed, it can be argued that there are no passages that deal explicitly with homosexuality as defined and understood in contemporary psychological theory. Thus it is necessary to look for guidance from texts, which indirectly offer

assistance. In my opinion, passages dealing with acceptance or compassion or the goodness of God's creation or vocation or discipleship or forgiveness may offer the help we need to move forward in our discussion.

5. We are guided not only by what particular passages say but also by broader interpretive guidelines. Not only was Jesus of Nazareth remembered as having summarized the commandments by stressing the priority of love for God and neighbor, but we also remember that Jesus went about healing the blind and lame, feeding the hungry and extending love to numerous people who were considered outcasts in his society. Thus, many explicit teachings (such as the exclusion from worship assembly of any child be born of an 'illicit union,' as Deut. 23:2, or the execution of children because they are stubborn and do not heed the discipline of their parents, as in Deut. 21:18-21) have been rightly rejected because these are not in keeping with our understanding of the life and message of Jesus, and his love.

6. Finally there is always a risk in using the Bible to address contemporary issues. The risk is that the Holy Spirit may in fact seize the church and lead it in a totally unexpected direction. We Presbyterians rightly have insisted upon the priority of Scripture in the formation of our theology and in the guidance of our lives. Nonetheless, the Holy Spirit is the life of Scripture and brings the risen Lord into our midst. We are bold to proclaim that God has done 'new things' and can do them again.

The church should listen to Scripture as it debates the critical issues of sexuality at the General Assembly and across the church in the years ahead. But when it does, it should take care to read the Bible in context, respect the problems of translation, resist the temptation to search the Bible for rules rather than to read it for guidance, read Scripture with Scripture, keep an eye ever fixed upon Jesus and his teaching of love and compassion and finally, wait for and be responsive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The church can be deeply enriched when it so 'uses' Scripture. But let no one misunderstand; to seek to follow guidance of God's Spirit and Word is a risky

business and may lead us into places we never expected to go.

## Appendix C

### Commentary on Genesis 1:1-28

In the first creation story the voice of God in verse 26 is in the plural, suggesting a corporate action. “The creation of humankind results from a dialogical act – an inner-divine communication rather than a monological one.” Many Reformed scholars suggest this is the presence of the Holy Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, also known as Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer – at the creation event. “God is not in heaven alone but engages in a relationship of mutuality within the divine realm.”

For humanity, the true understanding of God cannot be fully realized if we focus on a privatized individual relationship with God. Although the individualized relationship with God (‘I-Thou’) is a part of the larger context, it does not express the larger dialogical relationship of what it means for a Christian to be in community with the Holy Trinity (a divine ‘corporate’ entity) and with the whole community of faith. ‘I-Thou’ speaks nothing of the infinite nature of God at work through community and through relationships with others in and beyond the community of faith. Thomas Groome writes, “Our way of knowing is through an active/reflective relationship with our created world, but also through a lived relationship with God as this is encountered and reflected upon in a Christian community and in the whole community of humankind.”

Although mutuality exists between the ‘persons’ of the divine, there is no equality between humanity and the corporate entity of God. God as creator possesses a role different from that of all of creation. Through the act of creation, the creator maintains responsibility for the well-being and upkeep of that which has been created as a reflection of the very image of God. This implies a relationship that exists within the trinity of the divine ‘community,’ but which also exists between God and creation itself. For God to abandon humankind, created in God’s image, would be to reject a portion of God’s own identity. As humans, then, we reflect the image of God on several levels. Through the act of

creation, God provides Adam (the human one) with relationship (2:18).

The need for relationship is a visceral need within humanity, existing prior to the completion of the act of creation itself. Relationship is offered by God in response to the isolation of the first human – which God acknowledges as not being good for humanity. God gives human beings the gift of relationship, which serves as an avenue towards human fulfillment in life.

#### **Themes of Relationship at work in the Genesis accounts of Creation.**

- A’dam was made from adamah (Hebrew) – the earth human was made from dust, and by nature was created to be dependent upon a relationship with the creator-God to exist.
- Human beings are not created to be fulfilled in isolation from each other or from God. Relationship provides the context in which fulfillment occurs between human beings and God, between humans and each other, and specifically within intimate human relationships between male and female.
- Male and female relationship reflects, on one level, the image of God as community, the Holy Trinity.) Mutual interdependence and connectedness form the context of that relationship.
- Procreation is a gift given within the context of an intimate male and female relationship that ensures the continuation of humanity and provides the potential of greater fulfillment and joy within the male/female relationship.
- Human beings are charged by God to fulfill several roles and functions – to be overseers and laborers of the land, to have dominion over the land and animals, to populate the earth through procreation, to utilize and care for the earth’s resources, and to be in an ongoing relationship with God. With these functions identified, they are accompanied with the responsibility for the careful use of the land and animals, and the freedom of choice to affect all

relationships. Humanity is given a freedom of choice and a freedom of decision allowing them to serve as independent and autonomous agents.

- Accompanying one's freedom of choice and decision-making is responsibility for the impact of the positive and negative consequences of one's choices on God's creation. With freedom comes responsibility for the impact of one's decisions and actions on one's relationships with creation, with others, and with God. (Responsibility to God - Genesis 2:16-17, 3:8-13; the presence of sin which breaks harmony in human relationships and relationships with the rest of creation, blame and guilt - 3:9-13) "In God's garden as God wills it, there is mutuality and equity. In God's garden now, permeated by (human) distrust, there is control and distortion."
- Freedom to act creates consequences, both positive and negative. When relationships have been broken by selfishness for reasons of personal gain, the actions cause consequences that must be lived with and incorporated within one's life. (Consequences are communicated here as a form of divine punishment - Genesis 3:14-19 - and have far-reaching impact.)

## Appendix D

### Preparation for Session 4 - Marriage

Read and prepare a brief introductory lecture on the following materials:

Genesis 2:21-24 has been interpreted as communicating the biblical ideal of a monogamous marriage. With the interpretation of companion or helpmate (indicating a mutual and equitable relationship) and applied to the role of the woman in this text, what qualities of a healthy relationship are identifiable in this passage?

Distortion of human relationships was introduced into the Hebrew community as a result of a misinterpretation of Genesis 2:18-24 - that Adam was made in the image of God and that woman was made from the image of man. Countering this interpretation is the biblical witness of Genesis 1:26-31, where man and women are made in “our likeness” the plurality of God. (Note the reference to God in the plural.) Some Reformed Biblical scholars conclude the presence of the Trinity, the corporate nature of God in this text, indicates the relational quality of God. However, the Trinity was not a theological concept at work in ancient Israel. Its suggestion reflects a Christian trinitarian interpretation of Elohim. One such theologian is Susanne Johnson. She writes:

“We exist in relation to all that God creates and loves because we are created in the image of a triune God. From the outset, the church has used the symbol of the Trinity to show us how God’s own self - three persons in one - is expressed in terms of community and relatedness. The Trinity can be seen as a connective inclusive relational metaphor.”

Having made this distinction, there are a number of Old Testament textual references to God as plural. Today many Reformed Scholars interpret this scripture with the recognition that mutuality and equity are the intended norms defining relationships between men and women. This was often not the situation in ancient Israel. In a culture where agriculture in a harsh and arid land was the sole means of economic livelihood and the living conditions often required that the

inhabitants operate at a survival level of subsistence, a patrilineal system of land management was chosen (land, authority, and responsibility were passed from one generation of men to the next, most often through the oldest males of each subsequent generation). This system was perceived as the most effective means of insuring cultural stability in early settlement Israel because of the longer life-span of males (40 years) as opposed to females (29.9 years), who often died in childbirth.

When the patrilineal system, which played a neutral and even beneficial role in early settlement Israel, was paired up with the distorted theological interpretation that God created only the male from the full image of God, then the patrilineal system (the passing of property from one generation of males to a subsequent generation) became patriarchal (including authority and power) and introduced inequality and a male-focused concentration of power into the relationships between men and women. Several distortions of human relationships can be scripturally traced to this theological justification of patriarchy. Note also the examples of polygamy (marriage to more than one wife) in Genesis 29:15-30 and Levirate marriage (the moral responsibility of a male relative to impregnate a deceased brother’s wife to insure perpetuation of the dead man’s name) found in Genesis 38. [Note also the distortion of relationships occurring through acts of deception and manipulation, as a result of the particular interpretation imposed on the relationships by the underlying value of patriarchy.]

Another distortion of patriarchy is the biological assumption of the male as “bearing the seed of life” (Genesis 38:9, Ezra 9:2, Jeremiah 31:27) - the perpetuation of the essence of God through the male line of humanity. In regard to procreation the role of the woman was seen as the agricultural equivalent to fertile ground. The essence of humanity, the egg or seed, was exclusively a product of the male. As a result, the male held unequal power and authority in the

whole relational structure between men and women. In the case of a wife who could not conceive, there was a provision allowing for a concubine to be taken for the sole purpose of producing an offspring. Genesis 16:1-15 not only demonstrates this cultural practice, it reveals the relational implications of such a practice and the fall-out affecting each of the individuals involved.

## Appendix E

### Session 5 - Establishment of Covenant

Familiarize yourself with these fundamental theological concepts of the Bible and present a short lecture on this section at the beginning of lesson 5.

The Hebrew word for covenant (*berit*) has a root meaning “to bond,” emphasizing relational bonds.

Two Greek words: *Syntheke* suggests the same theme. Another term used in the New Testament, *diatheke*, implies more of an obligatory bond, emphasizing the legal aspect of covenant.

Covenant signifies relationship based on commitment, including both promises and obligations. Covenant conveys a high standard of reliability and durability in a relationship sealed by a rite: either an oath, sacred meal, sacrifice, or an invocation of blessings and curses. In the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, the primary emphasis of covenant is on God’s covenant with people. The people are bound to God as the created beings in relationship with God the creator. Yahweh (God) makes an exclusive claim on the lives of God’s people. Genesis 9:1-17 expresses the universal covenant of God’s faithful pledge (promise), not only to humanity but to all of creation itself. The primary covenant between God and God’s people is expressed in the covenant God made with the nomadic migrating Habiru’, the Hebrew covenant people – identified as Abraham and Sarah – and the special relationship between God and their descendants. Genesis 17:1-22.

The full implications of God’s covenantal promise, and the proper human response is understood in the Exodus event. The Mosaic covenantal response of the people is established on Sinai, centered on the human response of gratitude and reverence towards the saving acts of a loving God. Exodus 20:1-17 (the Ten Commandments) establishes the covenantal human response to God, the covenantal protector. All covenants with God and the community of faith are based on God’s *hesed*, steadfast love, essentially understood as grace combined with judgment – a redemptive presence which works

despite the human violations of covenant enacted on each other in the community and with God. This steadfastness of God in covenant communicates the trustworthiness of God to remain in partnership with the community of faith, regardless of the actions of the people. In fact, God works through the context of the human experience of failure to restore the relationship to wholeness: redemption offered to the wondering people by reaching the Promise Land, restoration of the community after the Babylonian exile, and for Christians redemption illustrated most completely in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The power of God’s resolve in *hesed* demonstrates that not even the murderous death of the “anointed one,” which was demanded by the religious and political authorities of his day, could break covenantal relationship between God and God’s people.

All covenantal relationships between God and the faith community point to the loyalty, constancy, and durability of God while at the same time revealing human inconsistencies as weakness and sinfulness. Covenant is ultimately dependent upon God’s *hesed* (steadfast love) and not on human ability to achieve a higher level of consciousness or behavioral perfection. And yet this does not discount the role of the human attempt to reflect commitment in our relationship with God and neighbor. The Psalmist repeatedly defines a covenantal human response of love and gratitude for God’s gift of grace (e.g. Psalms 1, 8, 100, 146-150), and the prophet Micah calls for a covenantal response to the question, “what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8) God’s covenantal relationship with Israel centers on divine promises and the elements of a faithful human response based on obedience to God and compassion to one’s neighbor.

**Background reading: Genesis 15 and 16**

## Appendix F

### Preparation for Session 7 - Jesus and Hospitality

The law of hospitality was a highly valued ancient virtue practiced by many cultures in the Middle East. Those who adhered to it offered fellowship and succor in the form of food and lodging to wayfaring strangers. In ancient Israel, the law of hospitality played a major role in creating the identity of the people of God. For the Hebrew people, one ran the risk of losing relationship with the faith community and with God if the law of hospitality was ignored. Abraham himself demonstrated the law of hospitality in Genesis 18:1-8, and on this basis proved himself and his family worthy of the blessings of God. In Genesis 19, Lot's hospitable treatment of his guests stood in sharp contrast to the total absence of hospitality in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot's offer of his own daughters to the men of Sodom is unsettling to us, but it must be understood as an indicator of the extremely high value the Hebrew people placed on hospitality. However, this demonstrates both the high regard for hospitality in ancient Israel, but also the underlying value of patriarchy and its accompanying disregard for females. We do an injustice to the importance of the law of hospitality as a response to God and its role in shaping their identity, if we reject hospitality outright because of its presentation in Scripture passages as being juxtaposed with a low value placed on women. In Isaiah 58:7, hospitality is more highly regarded as a spiritual virtue than fasting.

The law of hospitality was important to the Hebrews after the Exodus event (about the time when the story in Genesis, chapters 18 and 19, was first recorded) because the Hebrew people had been sojourners in their flight from Egypt. It was God who offered hospitality to them, protecting and guiding them throughout their forty years in the wilderness. The Hebrew people believed that, in response, they must recognize God at work acting through them to protect strangers. This called forth from the covenant community, empathy for the unique perils of people on journeys, including the absence of security on the highways, and the availability of the resources of food, water and lodging for travelers.

The full emphasis of the law of hospitality involved three stages.

1. Testing the stranger - inviting the stranger to speak, to determine the lineage and purpose of the stranger.
2. Treating the stranger as guest by extending servant actions of foot washing, offering one's best in the comfort of food, drink, and/or lodging.
3. The creation of a solid friendship that would foster community between the two parties.<sup>3</sup>

By the time of the Greeks and Romans, hospitality played a key role in the culture and was required of all people within the Greco-Roman domain. This included the people of Jerusalem in Jesus' day.

## Appendix G

### A Christ-centered Relational Ethic

The qualities of a Christ-centered Relational Ethic include

- **Covenant** – the sacred binding together of two or more parties towards a specific vision or goal, with specific promises and obligations made by each party. Covenant is both promissory in nature and obligatory – stating what each party will do for the covenant partner and for the maintenance of the covenant itself, and also stating clearly the obligations of both parties and outlining consequences if those obligations are not fulfilled. The driving principle behind covenant with God is *hesed*, steadfast love. Covenant establishes the framework out of which each of the following elements is included.

- **Commitment** – the responsibility of all parties involved in the relationship to build up the relationship and fulfill responsibilities of interdependency to the other party involved. Included in this is a sustaining presence of support when chaos impacts one or both of the covenant partners. The ideal of *hesed*, steadfast love, is not bound by human life. It transcends generations and binds the commitment of God and the covenant community at large to God's unbroken commitment to the covenant. Paulo Freire writes, "Love is commitment to other human beings. . . As an act of bravery, love is not sentimental; as an act of freedom, love cannot serve as a pretext to manipulation. It must generate other acts of freedom."<sup>5</sup>
- **Freedom** – within relationships, while respecting the individuality of the other individual, freedom is the acknowledgment of the right of the other to make choices for him or her self. Freedom of choice includes the choices which will strengthen the relationship and/or the partners' well-being. It also includes the right to make choices that are self-serving and/or destructive to the bonds of the relationship and to the covenant partner. With the establishment of boundaries in the Garden of Eden, God

gave human beings the freedom to choose their own actions, resulting in the exercise of free will for each participant in a covenantal relationship. Mutual relationships are dependent upon freedom of choice for the relationship to grow into a maturity of equity and self-giving love. Thomas Groome writes, "If Christians understand salvation only as an otherworldly reality and God as a 'big daddy' residing in that other world, then such a view is likely to prevent us from facing historical reality as it is, and from taking initiative to transform it towards the kingdom of God.

The not-yet-ness of human freedom poses a huge historical task for all people, and for Christians precisely because of their faith in Jesus Christ."<sup>6</sup>

- **Hospitality** – the act of serving the needs of strangers and sojourners. Jesus elevated the importance of this custom by applying hospitality to people who were outside the realm of societal power and authority; to those who were marginalized by society. The law of hospitality is central to Hebrew and Christian relationships. Converting strangers into friends involved four steps:
  - a) siding with the outsiders, the marginalized, the outcast, the estranged from society
  - b) listening to their stories and discerning the commonality of faith between oneself and the stranger
  - c) Once identified as an ally or person of like faith, responding with greater hospitality by
  - d) serving their basic needs (an act of Christian *agape*).

People who engaged in these four steps served as faithful witnesses to Christ and God, who extended hospitality to strangers.

- **Forgiveness** – ideally based on the willingness of both the injured and offending parties to overcome the barriers erected physically, psychologically, and

spiritually, as a result of the wrongdoing having occurred between the parties. This happens when the one wronged no longer sees him or herself as a victim, but as a person reclaiming the whole of one's life – including the resources for healing and the boundaries necessary to live a constructive and hopeful life. Complete forgiveness includes a willingness of the perpetrator to restore the injured party, as much as possible, to an approximate level of wholeness that existed before the violation occurred. Then, and only then, can both parties begin to rebuild the relationship on common ground. Essentially true forgiveness is not a tacit dismissal of the consequences of the violation by the one who was wronged. Rather, it is an acknowledgment, by all parties involved, of the consequences of the act(s) of wrongdoing which not only violated the injured party, but also the integrity of the relationship, and the level of trust between the parties. Negative consequences of wrongdoing impact all parties involved, and ideally all parties must be willing to work beyond them towards a mutual wholeness. Many times, however, the perpetrator is unwilling to reconcile with the wronged party. Then forgiveness becomes the primary responsibility of the ones wronged, to work at overcoming in their own mind and spirit the internal feeling of victimization. This may take longer to complete, but does offer freedom to the wronged party to move on with his or her life.

- **Justice** - the reconciliation and salvation of individuals and all groups of people reflecting the scriptural vision of equity and mutuality within human society. Old and New Testament writers strongly affirm that God sides with those who are oppressed or marginalized in society. The sovereignty of God calls to question conditions in society which oppress others. The will of God desires to move the oppressed and the oppressors to a new societal order based on equity and mutuality. The role of the community of faith in these circumstances includes bearing the cries of the oppressed, siding

with them, empowering them, and serving as their advocates before the oppressive principalities and powers.

- **Intimacy** - a deep personal sense of knowing between individuals in a relationship, where their strengths and weaknesses are acknowledged and included in the equation of acceptance, trust, and commitment. The integrity of the relationship is rooted in the reality of the dynamics that exist between the parties. Intimacy directly relates to the level of interdependence that exists within the relationship. As intimacy relates to the divine/human relationship, it is not by chance that the Hebrew word for sexual intimacy is also used to describe one's intimate relationship with God. The Hebrew word 'yada' implies a complete knowing of the heart, soul, and mind (see Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Jeremiah 31:31-34, and Hebrews 8:8-12). Knowing God in the Hebrew sense rises from personal experience, requiring that the person is devoted to following God as sovereign, and seeking to apply God's will to one's daily living. Biblically speaking, knowing God arises from an ongoing daily relationship of obedient Christ-like servanthood which is informed by the Word of God and communicated through the life of Christ.
- **Boundaries** - establishing clear limits of behavior which articulate the distinctions between a loving and healthy relationship and one that is manipulative, self centered, or abusive. Physical and emotional abuse, infidelity, adultery, dominance and control, are all examples of self-centeredness and exceed the boundaries of a healthy relationship. These actions violate the boundaries of the other individual and one's relationship with God, by overemphasizing the values, needs, desires, and worth of one individual while subjugating those of the other individual and God. Behavioral qualities of life-giving relationships include fidelity, self-giving love, mutuality, and equity. (These qualities are defined below.)
- **Fidelity** -the lasting devotion of one party to another. Devotion recognizes that

once choices of commitment are made, no competing or parallel commitments are entered into. Regarding sexual intimacy, fidelity implies a uniquely focused relationship of sexual and emotional intimacy in which the concept of steadfast love (*hesed*) becomes the standard of loyalty and sharing with one's covenantal partner.

- **Love** (*hesed*, Hebrew) –steadfast love, fully revealed as, the everlasting nature of God's commitment to human beings despite repeated human violations of the relationship. (*agape*, Greek) self-giving love, willfully seeks to serve the needs of the other in harmony with the will of God. *Agape* involves a willingness to act for the other even when doing so may require personal sacrifice and loss. Christ's expression of *agape* culminated in a self-giving sacrifice of his life for all of humanity. It is important to note the distinction between victimization in relationships involving physical, emotional, or psychological abuse, when sacrifice is externally imposed on another, as opposed to the empowered position of willingly offering one's well-being as an act of loving sacrifice in service to the well-being or wholeness of another. The latter is the only legitimate understanding of Christ-like love.
- **Mutuality and Equity** - essential qualities in creating a loving and intimate sexual relationship. Mutuality seeks the well-being and fulfillment of one's partner as well as oneself. Equity establishes a standard of mature adulthood, equality for both parties. It is characterized by actions of respect and honor for the needs and integrity of the well-being of the other, where the hallmarks of the relationship are understood as a compassionate interaction of give and take.

Each of these qualities of relationship impacts not only the intimate relationship between two parties, but informs and impacts the Christian basis of relating to the rest of the world. They make up the components of a Christ-like relational ethic which illustrates in tangible terms the concept of the body of Christ.