

SESSION 4: HOW WILL OUR CONGREGATION SHAPE ITS MINISTRY?

DEVOTION

Hymn: Lord, Speak to Us, That We May Speak (ELW 676)

Lord, speak to us, that we may speak
in living echoes of your tone;
as you have sought, so let us seek
your straying children, lost and lone.

Oh, lead us, Lord, that we may lead
the wandering and the wavering feet;
oh, feed us, Lord, that we may feed
your hungering ones with manna sweet.

Oh, teach us, Lord, that we may teach
the precious truths which you impart;
and wing our words, that they may reach
the hidden depths of many a heart.

Oh, fill us with your fullness, Lord,
until our very hearts o'erflow
in kindling thought and glowing word,
your love to tell, your praise to show.

Scripture

"Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 2:4-5)

Prayer

Almighty God, give us wisdom to perceive, intellect to understand you, diligence to seek you, patience to wait for you, eyes to behold you, a heart to meditate upon you and life to proclaim you, through the power of the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Benedict, 480-543

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this final session is to arrive at common ground and subsequently lead to doing ministry together that is life-giving for all. In the previous sessions, we acknowledged that the church continues to be "beset by change." We explored what it means to disagree well and practiced an abbreviated deliberation using a case illustration. This session offers the opportunity to choose a specific concern or issue in your own context and provides questions to help prompt the conversation. If feasible for your group, the goal is to come to or be close to actual suggestions that can be shared in the context of your congregation's life.



TAKE TIME TO DISCUSS PURPOSE AND VALUES

While it may already be obvious to many, it is important first to be clear about what specific concern or concerns call for discernment and dialogue. Perhaps a same-gender couple has asked your pastor to conduct a wedding. Perhaps parents have expressed hesitations about a gay person teaching in Christian education class. Perhaps parents of gay children are experiencing subtle discrimination in a youth group. Perhaps people of different sexual orientations wish to talk with one another about the overall direction of the congregation's life and ministry. Different reasons may prompt these discussions and it's important for the group to be clear.

Meaningful dialogue takes place only when people share something of their deeply held values as they talk together about ministry practices. It can be challenging, but in the spirit of non-adversarial dialogue, a critical task is to take the time to listen carefully as others explain their values. This leads to greater understanding even though differences may remain.

It's especially helpful to recognize that most people tend to favor certain clusters of values over others. For example, some lean toward values for openness like change, tolerance and creativity. Others lean toward the values of tradition like continuity, obedience and discipline. All of these, either individually or as clusters, can be found in Scripture and are important in the Christian life. It usually is a matter that values are held with different priorities, and when we each understand that, it is easier to understand each other.

Talking about values can help us establish common ground too. We may discover values we have in common or that fairness is a value most everyone shares and, therefore, can be used to move forward as a community. This is why it is important to listen carefully to what others value and discern what values make for common ground. The challenge is to talk about the issues while letting everyone's values assist the discussion.

DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

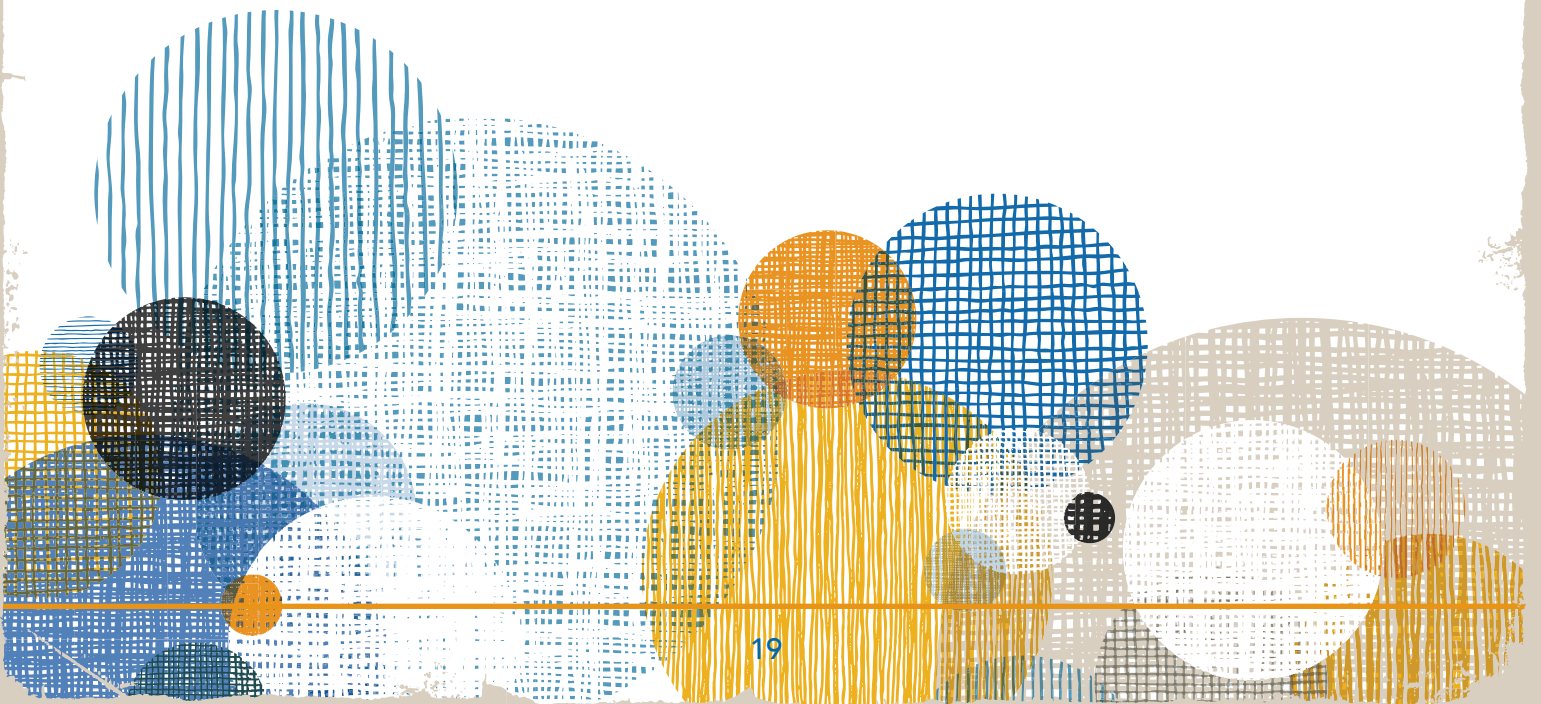
1. What values do each of us lean toward as we come to the dialogue about doing ministry together that is life-giving for all?
2. What are the particular challenges and opportunities our congregation has around the issue of LGBTQ people in our community?
3. How do you think same-gender couples and their families feel about their place in the life and ministry of this congregation?
4. What options are available for establishing more welcoming ministry practices to and with same-sex couples and their families?
5. What are the tensions in our congregation related to establishing some of these?
6. Same-gender marriage is now legal in the United States. How would our congregation handle a same-gender couple's request to be married?

7. What specific recommendations regarding ministry could we agree to as a group that has talked together? How could we refer these to others in our congregation?

CONVERSATION SERIES REFLECTION QUESTIONS

This final section of the conversation series seeks to summarize the dialogue. Now that you have participated in this conversation series:

1. Are you thinking differently about ministry to and with same-gender couples and their families? Please explain.
2. Did you learn anything new from others? Please explain.
3. Are there particular steps you would advise the congregation's leaders to take? What are the potential consequences?
4. What's next? Where do we go from here?



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