

# Introductory Study Guide for Item 100: “Moving Forward – A Vision”

Adopted by the Minnesota Annual Conference on  
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Study guide created by Minnesota Methodists

Item 100 is a vision that was adopted by the 2019 Minnesota Annual Conference. Our individual and collective task now is to begin earnestly living into it. The goals of this introductory study are two-fold:

- 1) Encourage Minnesota United Methodists to read the vision; and
- 2) Encourage Minnesota United Methodists to begin talking about ways to live into it.

## Recommended 90-Minute Study Timeframe

- 5 min. – Welcome
- 20 min. – Lectio Divina Bible Study
- 15 min. – Toolkit for Conversations
- 35 min. – Vision Study (double discussion time for two-hour study)
- 10 min. – Wrap-up
- 5 min. – Closing Prayer

## Lectio Divina Bible Study

1 Corinthians 12:12-25 (One Body with Many Members)

**Process:** Recommend organizing in groups of three. Read scripture aloud; allow one minute of silent reflection; share via mutual invitation. Repeat process, progressing through the three questions below. Mutual invitation is a process where one person at a time shares their reflection without others' input or debate, and then invites another person to share who hasn't shared yet. Participants may always pass.

### Scripture (1 Corinthians 12:12-25)

<sup>12</sup>Christ is just like the human body—a body is a unit and has many parts; and all the parts of the body are one body, even though there are many. <sup>13</sup>We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jew or Greek, or slave or free, and we all were given one Spirit to drink. <sup>14</sup>Certainly the body isn't one part but many. <sup>15</sup>If the foot says, "I'm not part of the body because I'm not a hand," does that mean it's not part of the body? <sup>16</sup>If the ear says, "I'm not part of the body because I'm not an eye," does that mean it's not part of the body? <sup>17</sup>If the whole body were an eye, what would happen to the hearing? And if the whole body were an ear, what would happen to the sense of smell?

<sup>18</sup>But as it is, God has placed each one of the parts in the body just like he wanted. <sup>19</sup>If all were one and the same body part, what would happen to the body? <sup>20</sup>But as it is, there are many parts but one body. <sup>21</sup>So the eye can't say to the hand, "I don't need you," or in turn, the head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you."

<sup>22</sup>Instead, the parts of the body that people think are the weakest are the most necessary. <sup>23</sup>The parts of the body that we think are less honorable are the ones we honor the most. The private parts of our body that aren't presentable are the ones that are given the most dignity. <sup>24</sup>The parts of our body that are presentable don't need this. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the part with less honor <sup>25</sup>so that there won't be division in the body and so the parts might have mutual concern for each other.

**Question for first reading:** What word, phrase, or image stood out for you?

**Question for second reading:** What piece of this passage resonates with you, and what do you wrestle with?

**Question for third reading:** What does God invite you to do, be, or change through this passage?

## Toolkit for Conversations

Communication is one of the most important aspects of building a more inclusive community. Respectful communication guidelines provide a foundation for the well-being of those who participate.

**Positive Ways to Engage** (*adapted from the Kaleidoscope Institute – kscopeinstitute.org*):

- ✓ **R** - Take responsibility for what you say and feel without blaming others. Use “I” statements.
- ✓ **E** - Listen with an empathetic ear; we haven’t all had the same experiences, so offer space and grace to hear the experiences of others.
- ✓ **S** - Be sensitive to differences in communication and cultural styles. We don’t all talk or express ourselves the same way.
- ✓ **P** - Ponder first what you hear and feel, then speak.
- ✓ **E** - Examine your own assumptions and perceptions. Think about how you’ve formed your opinions.
- ✓ **C** - Keep confidentiality. Others’ stories are theirs to tell.
- ✓ **T** - Trust in ambiguity and community; we’re not here to debate right or wrong.

### About Marginalization:

To be **marginalized** means you are on the fringes of society, excluded or isolated. The systems of a society work to further exclude you or silence your voice. You may be spoken about as an issue rather than as a person.

To be in the **minority** means you are a small fraction of the population. There are times when you might be of a minority viewpoint or opinion within a gathering or group of people. This is not the same as being marginalized, and it is not helpful to compare the feeling of holding a minority viewpoint to being marginalized. Whatever your beliefs, views, or opinions, if you are white, straight, able-bodied, and cis-gender, you are of a dominant identity in the Minnesota Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

A person might hold a minority viewpoint without being marginalized, especially if that person has other forms of power and authority. For example, if someone is at risk of violence or of losing their livelihood, vocation, or status within the community by speaking the truth of their identity, that person is marginalized within the system. If someone is at risk of being disliked or dismissed for expressing an unpopular viewpoint, that person is not necessarily marginalized.

**A Few Definitions to Remember** (*from Our Movement Forward - umcsetfree.com*):

**Grace:** Grace is different than pleasantness. Pleasantness is extending courtesy for the sake of collectively enjoyable experience. Grace, as modeled by Jesus, means offering feedback (i.e. action/responses) that allows individuals and communities to more closely reflect God’s vision for the world. Grace certainly involves forgiveness and patience, though it also involves disruption of harm of marginalized people. Grace overthrows systems of power; it overturns tables. It agitates, transforms, and roots us.

**Harm:** Harm is different from discomfort. Discomfort is the unease that arises from conflict. The response to discomfort is endurance. Harm in this context means repeating the oppression of marginalized people who have historically and culturally been emotionally, physically, and economically brutalized (i.e. assaulted, silenced, dehumanized) by dominant powers in interpersonal and systemic ways. The appropriate response to harm is to stop and repair on the conditions set by marginalized people. This process is not meant to shame people of dominant identities. The focus is on the experience of marginalized people. Harm has been done to people of color, queer, and trans people.

*An editorial word about the study process that follows: It may feel contrived to require others in a small group to sit quietly and listen while one person speaks. This is not usually how we have conversations! Yet it is a way to ensure that all participants have an equal amount of time to share without others taking over with their questions or own opinions. We invite you to enter into the process with a commitment to share your perspective using the guidelines above and also to listen respectfully as others do the same.*

**Process:** Recommend organizing in groups of three. Incorporate a timekeeping process so that each section is read during two minutes of silent reading and then discussed for six minutes (two minutes per person without others' input or debate), with one timekeeper in the room to announce each two-minute interval. Call attention to the small group engagement question for consideration prior to each silent reading interval.

### **Item 100: "Moving Forward – A Vision" adopted by the 2019 Minnesota Annual Conference**

**Section 1:** We envision a Methodism that is rooted in Jesus, grounded in Wesleyan theology, inclusive of all persons, and engaged in the work of justice and reconciliation.

We believe in and are committed to God's Beloved Community; a Community that Christ has told us is close at hand. We are a people, each one created uniquely and beautifully in God's image, who are united by our faith in Jesus.

As a diverse body of Christ, we are called to be faithful to the example of Jesus' ministry to and with all persons. Consequently, we are committed to inclusiveness in all aspects of the life of the Church by embracing the richness of diversity found in sexual orientation, race, physical or mental ability, national origin, marital status, gender identity, ethnicity, economic status and age. We seek to hear, value and amplify voices from the margins by collaborating with and centering marginalized voices in our denominational and local church conversations. We affirm each clergyperson's prayerful discernment in officiating wedding ceremonies for any prepared couple who comes to them. We affirm the prayerful discernment of our Board of Ordained Ministry, who, along with our Conference leadership, have determined nine characteristics for evaluation of clergy. We support the Board of Ordained Ministry's decision to evaluate candidates for ordination, licensing, and candidacy on the basis of these characteristics alone.

**Small group engagement:** *What phrase resonates with you, and in what areas do you see the most room to grow collectively or individually?*

**Section 2:** It is God's truth and central to our Wesleyan tradition that we are loved because it is God's nature to love. We follow the way of Jesus because we are deeply and profoundly loved. While John Wesley shared with many other Christians a belief in grace, justification, assurance, and sanctification, he combined them in a powerful manner to create distinctive emphases for living the full Christian life. Grace pervades our understanding of Christian faith and life. By grace we mean the undeserved, unmerited, and loving action of God in human existence through the ever-present Holy Spirit. While the grace of God is undivided, it precedes salvation as "prevenient grace," continues in "justifying grace," and is brought to fruition in "sanctifying grace." (2016 BOD, pp. 51-53)

God is the "ground of all being," (Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*) ever creating in our midst, while entrusting us as partners and stewards of God's vision for our world. As such, we remain open to God's creating action within us, both individually and collectively. Jesus is our foundation, the One who teaches us to love our neighbor as ourselves, to love our enemies and welcome the stranger. He is our peace, breaking down the dividing walls and ending the hostility. Christ is the very embodiment of Love; Emmanuel – "God with us." It is our love for him that calls us to keep his commandments.

Christ brings salvation by restoring broken relationships between humankind and our Creator, and reconciling broken relationships between one another. After giving his whole life, including death on the cross, God raised Him on the third day, showing the power of Love and the hope of resurrection. Christ's promise that an Advocate would be sent was fulfilled through the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit, as Divine Presence, who enlivens us, transforms us, sustains us, and empowers all God's children who would bring peace on earth.

The Holy Spirit calls us into community and sends us forth bringing good news to the oppressed, binding up the broken hearted, proclaiming liberty to the captives, and building a sustainable world for future generations. We envision this to be a world where workers receive a just reward for their labors, and the value of corporate structures is measured by their benefit to the community at large.

**Small group engagement:** *What phrase resonates with you, and in what areas do you see the most room to grow collectively or individually?*

**Section 3:** Our baptism is by water and the Spirit into God's new creation, bringing us together as one in Christ, rejecting that which divides and demeans us. To work toward such a new creation, we take to heart our baptismal covenant to "renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of our sin; to accept the freedom and power God gives us to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves; and to confess Jesus Christ as our Savior, putting our whole trust in his grace, serving him as our Lord, in union with the Church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations and races." (1992 UM BOW, p. 88)

With joy and thanksgiving, we welcome all God's people, celebrating the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion as signs of God's grace, open to all who love Christ, earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another.

We reflect critically on our biblical and theological inheritance, and understand as John Wesley did: that the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason, with Scripture being the primary source through which the other sources are engaged. (2016 BOD, p. 82)

**Small group engagement:** *What phrase resonates with you; and in what areas do you see the most room to grow collectively or individually?*

**Section 4:** We understand that faithful people come to different conclusions on theological and political matters, and resolve to unite in love as John Wesley preached in his sermon on "Catholic Spirit" saying, "Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences. These remaining as they are, they may forward one another in love and in good works."

We value the General Rules as John Wesley established: First, by doing no harm; Secondly, by doing good; and Thirdly, by attending upon all the ordinances of God; while striving to fulfill our baptismal vows by promoting the General Rule of Discipleship: "To witness to Jesus Christ in the world, and to follow his teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit." (2016 BOD, pp. 77-80 and ¶1117.2a)

We celebrate our heritage of ecumenism and commit to continuing intentional interfaith encounters and explorations between Christians and adherents of other living faiths of the world. (2016 BOD, p. 90)

We are a Church created to participate in God's redemptive work in this world. We hold an unwavering commitment to the hard work of advocacy, justice, reconciliation and liberation. We work together in unity to build God's Beloved Community with more creativity than each of us can bring individually. And we encourage each congregation and its leaders to lead boldly within their context to realize our mission "to make disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." (2016 BOD, ¶120)

**Small group engagement:** *What phrase resonates with you; and in what areas do you see the most room to grow collectively or individually?*

### **Wrap-Up**

- Brainstorming in small groups or as a whole: *What next step can the Minnesota Annual Conference take to help you in your congregation? What next step can your congregation take to live into this vision? What next step do you personally commit to doing to live into this vision?*

### **Closing Prayer (Unison)**

Jesus prayed that we would be one as he and the Father are one. Jesus, only by following you will we be able to come together as one people, to serve as your body in the world. You see our unique parts and desire to make us one body. We confess that we often see unique parts and we desire to judge and divide. Forgive us and open us up to see each other as you see us so that we may become whole and holy again. Help us not to see our differences as flaws, but as gifts and expressions of your grace. Give us the desire and power to lift each other up, to encourage one another that we may experience your presence among us. Fill us with love and courage to work together for peace that is rooted in your call for mercy and justice. Amen.