

Discussion Questions

Embracing the Wideness

The Shared Convictions of The United Methodist Church

Kenneth H. Carter Abingdon Press 2018

Chapter One

1. Make a list of five to seven experiences and people who have formed you in faith (pages 1-2)?
2. Look at the three circles: justice, covenant, and unity (page 8). Can you visualize a person in each of those circles in your local church? From your wider Christian experience?
3. What if the center is not a mushy middle but the cross of Jesus that is strong enough to hold the tension of the opposites (page 9)?

Chapter Two

1. How would you paraphrase Ephesians 2:8-9, in your own language (page 14)?
2. If “the fullness of the gospel is confessing and reconciling” (page 17), what is most challenging to you in overcoming divisions among persons?
3. How can personal faith be a resource in breaking down walls of hostility (Ephesians 2:14)?

Chapter Three

1. What is most familiar to you about the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15)? Most comforting? Most disturbing?
2. How are each of the characters in this story of the wayward child present in your family? In your local church? In our denomination?
3. Carter first read Henri Nouwen’s *The Return of the Prodigal Son* when he was in his late twenties, almost thirty years ago, and a minister at Christ UMC in Greensboro, NC. He reread the book in 2016 and identified with Nouwen’s reflection in a very different way (pages 26-27). How has the aging process led you to see new realities and make new discoveries about yourself and others?

Chapter Four

1. Can you recall a significant change that has occurred in your faith, in your family, or in your local church (page 30)?
2. In your own faith, what seems to be core for you, and in what areas are you more flexible? As you read Acts 15, what parallels do you see with our present moment in the denomination (pages 35-36)?
3. What guidance would you give leaders who are navigating change? What guidance would you give to a local church or a denomination that is navigating change (page 40)?

Chapter Five

1. Carter describes “generous orthodoxy” (page 44). In your own language and experience, what does this concept mean to you?
2. How have the “culture wars” affected the church in the United State (pages 45-46)?

3. How can we be more open to the testimonies, courage, and gifts of LGBTQ persons in our families and in our local churches?

Chapter Six

1. How might Jesus' parable of the weeds and the wheat (Matthew 13) be helpful for a local church or a denomination experiencing conflict and division (page 60)?
2. How can we do as little harm to each other as possible, so that we can do the work of God together (page 62)?
3. Right opinions, according to John Wesley, are a "slender part of religion" (page 65). How do we distinguish between core beliefs, on the one hand, and preferences and opinions, on the other?

Chapter Seven

1. Have you ever witnessed the reconciliation of two persons? What spoke to you in that experience?
2. Carter offers a list on pages 76-77 of some ways we divide or categorize ourselves. How would you add to this list? How do these categories help and do harm?
3. Spend a few minutes with the meditation on pages 80-82 (The Anatomy of Reconciliation). Circle or underline a phrase that is particularly relevant to your experience. What would you share from this part of the meditation?

Chapter Eight

1. What is positive about placing our focus on the local church, and what is a potential limitation (pages 84-85)?
2. How can unity include diversity? Or how can the One Body of Christ include different spiritual gifts (pages 87-89)?
3. How does seeing the strengths in those who differ from us require a "conversion of the imagination" (page 90)?

Chapter Nine

1. When we experience conflict, how are we prone to sustain or perpetuate the harm (page 100)?
2. How might the principles of restorative justice be used in a simple way with a conflict of which you are aware (pages 102-103)?
3. Carter offers a list of questions related to the process of restorative justice on pages 104-105. Which question is most significant for you? Which question is most difficult in practice?

Chapter Ten

1. How is the image of a bridge helpful in reflecting on divisions? Can you recall a particularly important bridge in a city or region where you have lived? Why is this bridge significant (page 111)?
2. How are followers of Jesus called to be "bridge" persons (page 113)?
3. On pages 116-117, Carter reflects on stories and the main characters in stories. As you view this list, whose stories are not included? Whose story would you add? In this conversation, how would you begin to tell your own story?

Close by saying together the prayer of Tom Langford, on page 122.