



**GOD'S RENEWED
CREATION**
call to hope and action

A Guide for Group Study

Based on the Pastoral Letter
from the Council of Bishops of
The United Methodist Church titled
*God's Renewed Creation:
Call to Hope and Action*

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God's Renewed Creation: Call to Hope and Action. A Guide for Group Study.

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Dear Members of The United Methodist Church:

Greetings to you in the name of the Triune God.

The Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church commends to you these resources for studying the Pastoral Letter and Foundation Document for *God's Renewed Creation: Call to Hope and Action*. We believe that these resources will enable you to have thoughtful discussions with one another which, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, may result in changes in your lives, our Church, and the world.

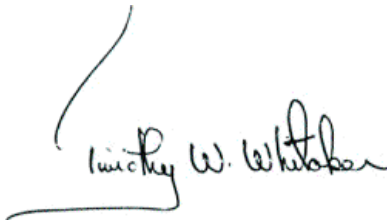
One of our primary responsibilities as bishops is to interpret the apostolic faith as it is expressed in Scripture and tradition both evangelically and prophetically (Book of Discipline, § 414.3). As requested by the General Conference, and on behalf of the whole Church, we have issued our Pastoral Letter and Foundation Document in order to encourage all of us to respond, according to the perspective of our faith in the living God, to the realities threatening our world. We ask that you receive these statements as our service to the Church and use them to explore these issues and shape your practice as disciples of Jesus Christ our Lord.

We are mindful that Christians in other churches around the world are also making statements about our responsibility before our Creator to care for the creation. It is our prayer that our Christian conversation and action will be taken up and used by the Spirit of God as a part of God's plan for the renewal of all creation.

Sincerely,



Bishop Gregory V. Palmer
President, Council of Bishops



Bishop Timothy W. Whitaker
Convener, Task Force on *God's Renewed Creation: Call to Hope and Action*

To the Leader

In the fall of 2009 the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church issued a pastoral letter titled “God’s Renewed Creation: Call to Hope and Action.” The bishops asked for the Letter to be read aloud in worship, meetings, and other events during and following Advent.

In addition to the letter, a number of resources including an expanded Foundation Document and a liturgical version of the Letter have been developed to assist congregations as they seek to respond to the bishops’ challenges in “God’s Renewed Creation.” Many of these resources can be found at the web site www.hopeandaction.org.

The Pastoral Letter and Foundation document are also available in French, German, Korean, Portuguese, and Spanish at the web site listed above.

The Council of Bishops is also encouraging all congregations to study the Letter and supporting documents more extensively. This six-session guide has been prepared to assist leaders of groups of adults in congregational and other educational settings as they study and develop plans of action. It is appropriate for study groups at any time of the year.

This study is designed to facilitate conversation and action related to the issues raised in the Pastoral Letter. It challenges participants to look at their congregations and communities, and to take actions that will contribute to a healthier and more peaceful planet.

Each session is designed to last about 90 minutes, and includes reflection upon scripture and prayer as well as study and discussion about the Letter. The hymn “We Utter Our Cry” is used throughout the study with a new stanza being added each week. The words of the hymn are powerful and speak to the themes of the Letter. If your group is not comfortable singing, consider using the hymn as a responsive reading.

In each session participants are asked to read short segments of the Letter and Foundation Document. This provides a common basis for further discussion. The session guide suggests that participants read segments silently. Depending upon the learning preferences of your group, you may want to read the section aloud, or intersperse discussion questions between reading shorter sections.

Throughout the study you will use a simple diagram of the three interconnected threats (pandemic poverty and disease, environmental degradation, and proliferation of weapons and violence). You will be adding information to the diagram each session, so make sure the three

interconnected circles are large enough to accommodate these additions.

Another feature of each session is reflection upon one or two of the pledges that the bishops have made in the Letter. As they reflect upon these pledges, the group is encouraged to consider what actions God is calling them to take. As leader you will want to take notes on these discussions so that you can help the group formulate action plans as the study proceeds.

Elements from the liturgical version of the Letter are incorporated into the session worship.

Responsible stewardship of time and resources dictate that this study guide be produced and distributed electronically. Each session includes a one-page leader’s guide and a two-page participant piece. We urge you to use the front and back of the paper as you reproduce the participant piece. Some members of your group may wish to skip the paper version completely and read the participant material on laptops or other electronic readers. For those who find it helpful, the guide can be printed out as a booklet on copy machines that have the capacity to print in booklet style.

The Council of Bishops intends for this study to be used not only in local congregations, but also in other settings such as colleges and seminaries. If you are leading the study in a setting beyond the local church, look for ways to help participants make connections to both the context of the group and their local church. For example, in session two you could encourage participants to write letters to the college president as well as to the bishop. In session three you could calculate the carbon footprint of the campus and develop plans to reduce it.

The Council of Bishops and their task force want to know the results of your study of *God’s Renewed Creation: Call to Hope and Action*. Please register your study effort at www.hopeandaction.org (“Contact Us”) and encourage the participants to complete the survey at www.surveymonkey.com/s/hopeandaction when the study is completed.

Session One: Leader's Guide

Preparation

- Collect the following materials: newsprint, markers, copies of "Session One: Participant Material," Bibles, *United Methodist Hymnals*. Create a worship center that includes a globe, a Bible, and a candle.
- Post a sheet of newsprint with three overlapping circles labeled as in the diagram in the participant material.
- Check out the web site www.hopeandaction.org for additional stories and information that you may want to incorporate into the session.

1. Introduce the Study

When everyone has arrived, ask people to introduce themselves to the group by telling their names and describing a place in the natural world where they have experienced God's presence.

Point out the items in the worship center and explain that the Bible symbolizes that we are to orient our lives toward God's holy vision; the globe symbolizes the call to practice social and environmental holiness; and the lighted candle symbolizes that we are to live and act in hope.

Explain that during this six-session study the group will be using "God's Renewed Creation: Call to Hope and Action," the Pastoral Letter issued by the United Methodist Council of Bishops as well as the related Foundation Document to explore how they can respond to the three calls illustrated on the worship center.

Read together Romans 8:22-25. Ask the participants to discuss in pairs: Where do you see creation groaning in travail? What is your hope for God's creation that you do not currently see?

2. Read Segments of the Documents

Distribute copies of "Session One: Participant Material" and invite the group to silently read the sections titled "From the Letter" and "From the Foundation Document." Explain that each week they will be reading a segment from the Pastoral Letter and the Foundation Document.

This week's segment introduces three interrelated threats to God's creation. The group will examine these threats in more detail as the study progresses.

Divide the participants into three groups. Assign each group one of the three threats, and ask them to list the words or phrases that come to mind when they hear the assigned threat. These words may include related examples, emotions, results, concerns, and so forth.

Ask one group to read their list aloud. Record their list on the appropriate circle on the newsprint diagram you prepared before class. As they mention an item, discuss whether it applies to either of the other two groups. If so, record it in an overlapping area. (For example, if the proliferation of weapons group listed landmines, that could also relate to poverty, so you would record it in the area where the circles of violence and poverty overlap.)

Continue the process until all groups have reported and recorded their responses. Invite the group to look at the completed diagram and discuss the following:

- What surprises you?
- What trends do you see?
- What additional words or phrases would you add to the center of the diagram where all the circles overlap?

3. Reflect on the Pledges

Explain that in the Pastoral Letter, the bishops make a series of pledges. In each session the group will reflect on one or more of these pledges and consider what pledges the participants are willing to make.

Ask the group to read "Pledges." Discuss the following questions:

- How might we deepen our spiritual consciousness as just stewards of creation?
- What will you do this week to practice hope?

4. Pray Together

Remind the group that in the psalms we find many examples of laments, where people cry out their fears and sorrows to God. Ask the group to read aloud, "We Lament the Wounds on Our Beautiful Planet."

Then invite people to name those wounds on the planet for which they lament. Encourage people to incorporate these laments in their prayer life over the next week.

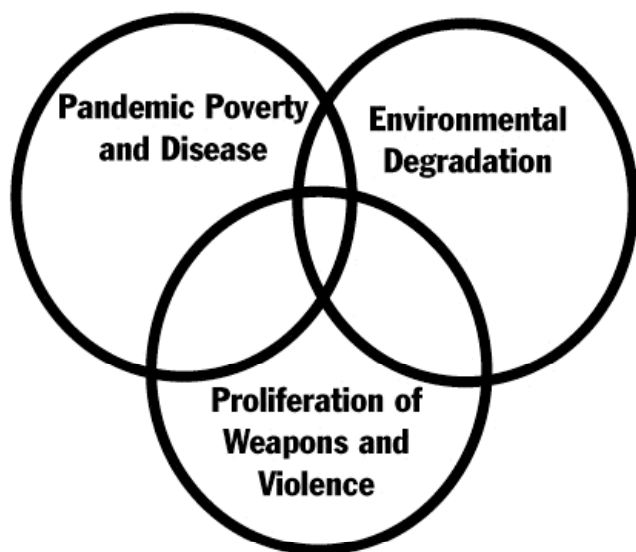
Sing together the first stanza of "We Utter Our Cry," page 439 in *The United Methodist Hymnal*.

Close with this prayer:

May God's grace purify our reason, strengthen our will, and guide our action. May the love of God, the peace of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit be among you, everywhere and always, so that you may be a blessing to all creation and to all the children of God, making peace, nurturing and practicing hope, choosing life and coming to life eternal. Amen.

Encourage the group to explore the items in "Going Further" during the next week.

Session One: Participant Material



From the Pastoral Letter

God's creation is in crisis. We, the Bishops of The United Methodist Church, cannot remain silent while God's people and God's planet suffer. This beautiful natural world is a loving gift from God, the Creator of all things seen and unseen. God has entrusted its care to all of us, but we have turned our backs on God and on our responsibilities. Our neglect, selfishness, and pride have fostered:

- pandemic poverty and disease,
- environmental degradation, and
- the proliferation of weapons and violence.

Despite these interconnected threats to life and hope, God's creative work continues. Despite the ways we all contribute to these problems, God still invites each one of us to participate in the work of renewal. We must begin the work of renewing creation by being renewed in our own hearts and minds. *We cannot help the world until we change our way of being in it.*

From the Foundation Document

We must prepare our hearts and minds by turning to God and placing all anxiety, loss, and grief before the One who is our ever-present help in time of trouble. And, with God's grace, we remember the story that guides and sustains us, holds us accountable, and gives us hope. It is the story that begins with God's loving gift of creation and

culminates in God's promise of renewal for all. It is the story of the Word made flesh, the Incarnation, God's presence with us. It is the story of Jesus' ministry to the most vulnerable; his denunciation of violence, greed, and oppression; and his call to discipleship. It is the story of resurrection, of the triumph of life over death, and of the promise of new life in Christ. And it is the story of transformation, from old to new, from woundedness to wholeness, and from injustice and violence to the embrace of righteousness and peace.

We have a role to play in this story, but we have not faithfully performed it. God entrusted us with the Creation. But, instead of faithfully caring for our peaceful planet and its people, we have neglected the poor, polluted our air and water, and filled our communities with instruments of war. We have turned our backs on God and one another. By obstructing God's will, we have contributed to pandemic poverty and disease, environmental degradation, and the proliferation of weapons and violence. Around the world, we feel the effects of this interconnected trio in different ways and to varying degrees, but there is no doubt that we all are experiencing elements of the same storm.

The storm builds as powerful forces swirl together:

To affect poverty: the **global economic crisis** as systems built upon self-interest and fraud devastate the global economy; the **resource crisis** as food, water, and energy become scarce; the **justice/poverty crisis** as the gap between rich and poor continues to widen; the **global health crisis** as millions die of the preventable diseases of poverty like malaria, HIV/AIDS, and tuberculosis; and the **refugee crisis** as millions of people are displaced by violence, natural disaster, and loss of jobs.

To affect the environment: the **energy crisis** as oil reserves run out within two or three decades; the climate crisis as increasing greenhouse gases threaten to scorch the earth and desertification erodes productive land, polar ice melts, fire seasons lengthen, and coastal floods and severe storms increase in number; the biodiversity crisis as at least one-fifth of all plant and animal species face extinction by 2050.

To affect weapons and violence: The weapons crisis as the threat of nuclear, biological, and chemical attack looms and precious resources are poured into the sinkhole of futile arms races; the **small arms crisis** as roughly 639 million small arms and light weapons circulate the world and the illegal small arms trade is estimated at close to \$1 billion; the **"security" crisis** as global military spending

surpasses 1.2 trillion USD in 2007, with the United States spending 45 percent of this amount.

Because these threats are interconnected, each one compounds the effects of the others. This means that people and the planet experience the cumulative effects of this storm. The interrelated nature of these threats also makes it exceedingly difficult to make any real headway on any individual issue. We find ourselves overwhelmed by *complex webs of brokenness*: injustice against migrants, resource scarcity elevated to warfare, energy crises, environmental racism, economic globalization, and violence against the most vulnerable, especially women and girls.

With Open Eyes, We See Relationships

With open eyes, we see the relationships between poverty and disease, environmental degradation, and the proliferation of weapons and violence. Although this makes the problems seem even more difficult to surmount, treating them separately is less effective. To accurately diagnose our situation and craft a viable plan for health, we must see and respond to the ways in which the particular threats interact with one another. For example, we cannot address global poverty without addressing water shortage made worse every day by global warming. We cannot stem the proliferation of weapons without examining dwindling natural resources or minerals as causes of violent conflict. We cannot talk about the need for health care, schools, roads, and wells without reevaluating the amount of money we spend on weapons.

Although we may prioritize poverty and disease, environmental degradation, and weapons differently in light of our individual experiences, we must not lose sight of the connections among them. And we must reject policies and practices that pit the victims of these problems against one another. We must see these problems as linked, like three connected rings, so that a solution for one improves the situation for the others.

Pledges

1. *We as your bishops pledge to answer God's call to deepen our spiritual consciousness as just stewards of creation. We commit ourselves to faithful and effective leadership on these issues, in our denomination and in our communities and nations.*

8. *We pledge to practice hope as we engage and continue supporting the many transforming ministries of our denomination. Every day we will thank God for fruit produced through the work of The United Methodist Church and through each of you.*

We Lament the Wounds on Our Beautiful Planet

We see waters polluted, species destroyed, forests ablaze, and land abused. We see weapons and waste littering the earth. We see people, created in the very image of God, suffering from famine and disease, burying their children, and living in hatred and fear. We know the farmers who cannot plant their fields because they are infested by land mines. We know the nations that build and make plans to use weapons of mass destruction in the vain pursuit of security.

Going Further

- The entire Pastoral Letter and Foundation Document can be found at www.hopeandaction.org. Read both documents, particularly looking at the segments covered in this session.
- Pay attention to the number of times you hear issues of pandemic poverty and disease, environmental degradation, and proliferation of weapons and violence mentioned on your local newscast.
- Commit yourself to finding one new example of hope each day.

Session Two: Leader's Guide

Preparation

- Collect the following materials: newsprint, markers, copies of "Session Two: Participant Material," Bibles, *United Methodist Hymnals*, stationery, stamps, worship center from previous session.
- Post a sheet of newsprint with three overlapping circles labeled as you did in the previous session.
- Check out the website www.hopeandaction.org for additional stories and information that you may want to incorporate into the session. Check your annual conference web site to find the address of your bishop.

1. Introduce the Theme

Begin by inviting people to report examples of pandemic poverty and disease, environmental degradation, and proliferation of weapons and violence that they have heard or read about in the past week. Record the examples in the appropriate circles of the newsprint diagram.

Light the candle as you remind the group of the Pastoral Letter's call: to orient our lives toward God's holy vision, to practice social and environmental holiness, and to live and act in hope. Explain that today's session focuses particularly on practicing social and environmental holiness.

Read aloud Jeremiah 29:4-11. Divide into groups of three and discuss the following questions:

- In thinking about environmental and social holiness, in what ways is your community in "exile"?
- How is your congregation seeking the welfare of the community?
- What images come to your mind when you hear the words, "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope"?

Encourage the smaller groups to share with the larger group their insights. Then sing together the first two stanzas of "We Utter Our Cry," page 439 in *The United Methodist Hymnal*.

2. Read Segments of the Documents

Distribute copies of "Session Two: Participant Material" and ask the group to silently read the sections titled "From the Letter" and "From the Foundation Document."

Invite participants to tell stories from their own experiences that illustrate honesty amidst corruption, generosity amidst greed, creation amidst destruction, or passion amidst apathy.

Point out the eight actions listed in the section "Let Us Practice Social and Environmental Holiness," and ask each person to rank the items in order of his or her perception of how well he or she is practicing it. They are to put a one next to the action they feel they are doing the best at, a two in front of the next best, and so forth.

Divide into groups of three and discuss with one another their first and last items. Ask each group to decide on one action they will take during the next week that responds to one of the actions listed. Briefly let each group tell what they intend to do. Explain that during the next session they will have an opportunity to report on what they have done.

3. Reflect on the Pledge

The bishops have pledged that they will advocate for justice and peace in the halls of power in their respective nations and international organizations.

Discuss the following questions:

- Where are the "halls of power" in our community?
- Who are the ones who need an advocate?
- How could we be better advocates for justice and peace as individuals and as a faith community?

Pass out stationery and encourage participants to write a brief note to their bishop letting him or her know of their prayer support as the bishops live out this pledge and the others they have made in the Pastoral Letter.

4. Pray Together

Pray together the lament "We Grieve for Our World, Filled with Pain," printed in the participant material. Ask participants to think of one person they know who is dealing with the issues named in the lament, and to pray silently for that person. Suggest that this week they offer a word of hope and encouragement to that person through a phone call, e-mail, or other communication.

Close by singing again the first two stanzas of "We Utter Our Cry" and praying this prayer:

May God's grace purify our reason, strengthen our will, and guide our action. May the love of God, the peace of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit be among you, everywhere and always, so that you may be a blessing to all creation and to all the children of God, making peace, nurturing and practicing hope, choosing life, and coming to life eternal. Amen.

Point out the section titled "Preparing for the Next Session" and assign volunteers to collect the data.

Session Two: Participant Material

From the Pastoral Letter

Second, let us practice social and environmental holiness. We believe personal holiness and social holiness should never be separated. John Wesley preached: “The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social. No holiness but social holiness.” Through social holiness we make ourselves a channel of God’s blessing in the world. Because God’s blessing, care, and promise of renewal extend to all of creation, we can speak today of “environmental holiness” as well. We practice social and environmental holiness by caring for God’s people and God’s planet and by challenging those whose policies and practices neglect the poor, exploit the weak, hasten global warming, and produce more weapons.

From the Foundation Document

It is understandable that looking out on this broken and suffering world would cause despair. But the brokenness and suffering are not the complete story. They are part of our experience, but not the sum total of it. Amidst corruption, there is honesty; amidst greed, there is generosity; amidst killing, there is compassion; amidst destruction, there is creation; amidst devastation, there is preservation; amidst apathy, there is righteous indignation, holy dissatisfaction, and a passion for the possible. If we look carefully, we see seeds of hope that can be cultivated by God’s Spirit.

In East Africa, dockworkers refused to off-load a foreign vessel carrying smuggled small arms. Doing what they could to stop the killing in their continent, they also sent word to other dockworkers to refuse the shipment when it arrived farther south.

United Methodists from Lage, Germany forged a partnership with people in Cambine, Mozambique to promote solar energy. They installed solar panels on the local maternity hospital and a theological seminary. The first boy born in the maternity ward after solar light was installed was named “Solarino” to celebrate the renewable energies bringing new life to God’s creation.

In a number of U.S. cities, people of faith are working to end the “straw purchase” of handguns—guns that are purchased legally but then passed into the hands of those who could not legally buy them for themselves. Nonviolent volunteers with “Heeding God’s Call” raise awareness, they approach gun retailers directly and ask

them to accept responsibility for the role they play in violence and to voluntarily end this destructive practice.

Since fourteen people were killed during a workers’ strike in 2004 in the Philippines, members of The United Methodist Church and ecumenical groups of adults and young people have organized weekly to visit workers, hear their stories, witness struggles, visit the Congress, circulate petitions, and renew their resolve to work for justice and peace. These life-changing experiences of sharing strengths, fears, and vulnerability, as well as faith and love, empower young people to choose hope amid discouragement.

Stories about our disregard for destruction of one another and the earth more frequently grab the headlines. But acts of perseverance, compassion, care, and positive innovation take place every day in every corner of our world. Right now, there is someone writing a letter to oppose a discriminatory practice or to advocate on behalf of workers treated unjustly, or to support the ratification of a weapons ban. The United Methodist Committee on Relief is setting up disaster response centers and training to “prevent a bad thing from becoming worse.” Someone is sitting by a bedside to provide comfort. In a community center, a trainer prepares a group to use methods of nonviolent resistance in order to make a change without violence.

Somewhere, a new school is opening and a new well is functioning. People are unpacking boxes of medical supplies and mosquito nets. Children are educating their parents about global warming, and organizations are examining their carbon footprint. New forms of transportation are coming on the market: hybrid cars and plug-in cars and hydrogen cars and cleaner-burning diesels that do not give children respiratory diseases as they roar through neighborhoods. With the tools of ecumenical organizations, congregations are doing energy audits, recycling materials, replacing energy-guzzling appliances, and installing solar panels and wind turbines.

No matter how discouraging things seem, no matter how overwhelmed and anxious we feel, no matter how apathetic or cynical we become, God is already at work in the world. We must only *open our eyes* to see God’s vision, *open our hearts* to receive God’s grace, and *open our hands* to do the work God calls us to do.

Let Us Practice Social and Environmental Holiness

Practice personal and social holiness by joining us as we:

- Organize within our own particular congregations to study and plan what we can do as individuals and members of our churches (for example, congregational “Green Teams” reclaiming the familiar refrain: Think Globally, Act Locally)
- Learn the positions of The United Methodist Church on these issues, and consider the many options for response and action recommended by our General Conference
- Update our knowledge of nuclear proliferation; pending legislation, conventions, and treaties, and the critical timelines for achieving a truly secure world free of nuclear weapons
- Connect within our own community groups already active in peace, health, and justice ministries including energy, immigration, consumer-ism, discrimination, and population growth

- Call to accountability public officials and decision makers in local and national governments to eliminate barriers to flourishing and sustainable communities

And practice environmental holiness with us as we:

- Conserve natural resources and use only renewable resources in every gathering and every ministry of our congregations and Church
- Become partners with other groups already active in defending God’s creation by teaching others, volunteering in projects, and guiding young people and children in the ways that continue this transformation
- Interact with those in power over community, national, and international policies to change systems and structures that destroy, deplete, or damage the earth

Pledges

5. *We pledge to advocate for justice and peace in the halls of power in our respective nations and international organizations.*

We Grieve for Our World, Filled with Pain

We see people overwhelmed by fear and anxiety; people who find the wounds of the world too deep to address; people who see the challenges to health and well-being for all as too great to overcome. We know the workers who can no longer provide for their families and the activists exhausted by the struggle for justice.

Preparing for the Next Session

Gather the following information about your congregation. Your pastor, trustees, church maintenance staff, and other church leaders may have helpful information.

Average attendance at weekly services: ____

Number of miles church staff traveled on congregational business in a year for each transportation mode listed:

Auto: _____ Bus: _____

Rail and Subway: _____ Air: _____

Amount of energy the congregation consumed in the past twelve months from each energy source listed:

Electricity: _____ (Kilowatt hours)

Natural Gas: _____ (Million BTUs)

Heating Oil: _____ (Gallons)

Coal: _____ (Pounds)

Approximate percent of the congregation’s electricity generated by renewable hydropower, wind, solar, or biomass sources. (Local utility office should be able to provide this information.) _____

Number of garbage bags thrown out weekly: ____

Proportion of following waste that is recycled:

Paper: _____ Aluminum: _____ Glass: _____

Plastic: _____ Electronics: _____

Amount of money spent on the following:

Paper and paper products: _____ Office supplies: _____

Cleaning supplies and services: _____ Furniture: _____

Construction: _____ Food: _____

Apparel and textiles: _____ Printing: _____

Other goods and services: _____

Going Further

- The Web site www.hopeandaction.org has other articles and stories that relate to the Pastoral Letter.
- Learn about the organizations in your community that advocate for justice and peace. Invite someone from one of those organizations to speak at your church.
- Read “The Natural World” from the Social Principles. (¶160 in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*.)

Session Three: Leader's Guide

Preparation

- Collect the following materials: newsprint diagram from previous session, markers, copies of "Session Three: Participant Material," Bibles, *United Methodist Hymnals*, worship center from previous sessions.

- If possible, arrange for a computer with internet access and a projector. If not, follow the directions in "Reflect on the Pledge" to calculate the congregational carbon footprint, and print out the results before the session.

- Check out the web site www.hopeandaction.org for additional stories and information that you may want to incorporate into the session.

1. Introduce the Theme

Remind the participants that during the last session, participants planned to take an action related to practicing social and environmental holiness. Encourage participants to report what they did and learned. Using a different color of marker, note the actions in the appropriate circle on the newsprint diagram from last week. (For example, learning about pending treaties related to nuclear proliferation might be noted in the overlapping of the proliferation of weapons circle and environmental degradation circle.)

Recall the symbolism of the Bible, the globe, and the candle on the worship center: to orient our lives toward God's holy vision, to practice social and environmental holiness, and to live and act in hope.

Ask a volunteer to read Matthew 5:14-16 as you light the candle. In small groups discuss the following:

- In relationship to the three symbols on the worship center, where have you experienced God's light shining through others? God's light shining through you?
- What resources and gifts are we hiding under bushel baskets instead of utilizing them for the glory of God and to the benefit of God's good earth?

Encourage the smaller groups to share their insights with the larger group. Then sing together the first three stanzas of "We Utter Our Cry," page 439 in *The United Methodist Hymnal*.

2. Read Segments of the Documents

Distribute copies of "Session Three: Participant Material" and ask the group to silently read the sections titled "From the Letter" and "From the Foundation Document."

To help the group get a sense of the inequity in the amount of resources consumed and waste produced, count the number of people in the group and ask for volunteers to multiply that number by the following numbers: (a) 11, (b) 20, (c) 25, (d) 27, (e) 44, (f) 100. As the numbers are reported, explain that it represents the number of people in the indicated country that use about the same amount of particular resources as the class.

- a) Paper use in Romania.
- b) Carbon dioxide emissions in the Philippines.
- c) Meat consumption in Malawi.
- d) Total energy consumption in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
- e) Motor vehicle gasoline in Peru.
- f) Electricity use in Nigeria.

Discuss the following questions:

- How do you feel when you hear these numbers?
- What are potentially negative and positive ways of responding to these feelings?

3. Reflect on the Pledge

The bishops have pledged to measure the carbon footprint of our episcopal and denominational offices, determine how to reduce it, and implement those changes. They are challenging congregations to do the same.

Go to www.coolcongregations.com/calculator/ and use the information that people were previously assigned to gather (Session Two: "Preparing for the Next Session") to calculate the congregational carbon footprint.

Discuss the steps needed to develop and implement a plan to reduce the congregational footprint. Make assignments for taking the first step.

4. Pray Together

Pray together the lament, "We Weep for Communities in Crisis," printed in the participant material, followed by a time of silent prayer. Close by singing again the first three stanzas of "We Utter Our Cry" and praying this prayer:

May God's grace purify our reason, strengthen our will, and guide our action. May the love of God, the peace of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit be among you, everywhere and always, so that you may be a blessing to all creation and to all the children of God, making peace, nurturing and practicing hope, choosing life, and coming to life eternal. Amen.

Encourage the group to explore the items in "Going Further" during the next week.

Session Three: Participant Material

From the Pastoral Letter

We all feel saddened by the state of the world, overwhelmed by the scope of these problems, and anxious about the future, but *God calls us and equips us to respond*. No matter how bad things are, God's creative work continues. Christ's resurrection assures us that death and destruction do not have the last word. Paul taught that through Jesus Christ, God offers redemption to all of creation and reconciles all things, "whether on earth or in heaven" (Colossians 1:20). God's Spirit is always and everywhere at work in the world fighting poverty, restoring health, renewing creation, and reconciling peoples.

From the Foundation Document

With Open Hearts, We Acknowledge Our Complicity

In our discussion "The World Community" in the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church, we acknowledge this fact: "Some nations possess more military and economic power than do others" (§165.B). Some nations consume more of the world's resources, generate more of the world's waste, and produce more of the world's weapons. For example:

- Twenty percent of the world's population accounts for 76% of private consumption of things like electricity, paper, meat and fish, and vehicle usage.
- "A mere 12% of the world's population uses 85% of its water, and these 12% do not live in the Third World."
- The United States is the largest supplier of conventional weapons in the world, selling 38% of all weapons purchased between 2000 and 2007—roughly one-half of these weapons were sold or transferred to developing countries.

There are many ways to designate the differences between us: Global North and Global South; first world and third world; first world and two-thirds world; developed world and developing world. We must also acknowledge that there is deep poverty and underdevelopment in the so-called first world, and there are pockets of wealth and opulence in the so-called third world.

Our social and economic situations are much more complex than any labels or statistics can capture. And yet, some generalizations are also true and important. Those of us in the Global North consume more, waste more, and

militarize more than those of us in the second category. We in the North must take responsibility for the environmental damage we have caused, what many now call our "environmental or ecological debt." We must reckon with our vain pursuit of security through weapons and violence. We must also confess the greed and selfishness that motivate us to pursue our own comfort while ignoring those in need.

We also recognize that "no nation or culture is absolutely just and right in its treatment of its own people." We in the Global South must acknowledge corruption that threatens our societies. Like our brothers and sisters in the north, we too must challenge our nations' quest for security through weaponry. When we spend precious resources on weapons, we are stealing from the poor of our country. We confess selfishness and greed, made worse in contexts of scarcity.

We join together in acknowledging that we have resources and gifts that we hide under bushel baskets (Matthew 5:15) instead of utilizing them for the glory of God and to the benefit of God's good earth. We have opportunities for charity and justice making that we do not exercise. We have also failed to encourage the gifts and energies of our young people by not involving them in community building, leadership, and development. And we have not done enough to stop violence against women and children. At times we all fall prey to despair, losing sight of God's presence with us and failing to hear God's call to us. We ask for God's help and grace as we turn away from harmful practices and commit ourselves to God's purpose of renewal for all.

Pledge

6. *We pledge to measure the "carbon footprint" of our episcopal and denominational offices, determine how to reduce it, and implement those changes. We will urge our congregations, schools, and ministries to do the same.*

We Weep for Communities in Crisis

We see communities without basic health care and clean water; communities stripped of natural resources and denied access to land; communities torn apart by intolerance, religious extremism, and ethnic hatred. We know the refugee who risks death and capture searching for a safe place to live.

Going Further

- The Web site www.hopeandaction.org has other articles and stories that relate to the Pastoral Letter.
- Read “The World Community” from the Social Principles (§165 in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*).
- To learn more about how your resource usage compares to those in other areas of the world, go to www.earthtrends.wri.org
- Go to <http://coolclimate.berkeley.edu> and use the carbon footprint calculator to calculate your household’s carbon footprint. Note how your footprint compares to the world average. Develop a plan to reduce your footprint by four metric tons. The following suggestions will help you get started:
- Use energy-saving compact fluorescent light-bulbs instead of incandescent lightbulbs.
- Stop using plastic grocery bags. Take reusable canvas bags with you to the grocery store. Your congregation may even want to consider providing reusable bags with the church name as a welcome for newcomers.
- Don’t wash partial loads of dishes or clothes; wait until you have a full load.
- Incorporate a few meatless days into your regular meal planning.
- Turn the temperature of your house down one degree when the furnace is running and up one degree when the air conditioner is running.
- Only plug in your phone charger and other charging units when you are actually charging.
- Eat local produce.
- Plant a church garden.

Session Four: Leader's Guide

Preparation

- Collect the following materials: newsprint diagram from previous sessions, markers, copies of "Session Four: Participant Material," Bibles, *United Methodist Hymnals*, worship center from previous sessions.
- Check out the web site www.hopeandaction.org for additional stories and information that you may want to incorporate into the session.

1. Introduce the Theme

Review the steps you developed in the previous session to reduce the congregational carbon footprint. Report any progress that has been made, and continue with any planning that needs to occur.

Light the candle as you recall the symbolism of the Bible, the globe, and the candle on the worship center: to orient our lives toward God's holy vision, to practice social and environmental holiness, and to live and act in hope.

Divide into three groups and assign each group one of the three interrelated threats. Ask participants to focus on the assigned threat as they listen to Matthew 19:23-26.

Then break into groups of three, so that each group has one person who was focusing on each threat. Ask them to discuss the following questions:

- How do you think this scripture relates to the threat you focused on?
- What word of hope do you find in the scripture?

Encourage participants to record their words of hope in the appropriate circles on the newsprint diagram.

Then sing together the first four stanzas of "We Utter Our Cry," page 439 in *The United Methodist Hymnal*.

2. Read Segments of the Documents

Distribute copies of "Session Four: Participant Material" and ask the group to silently read the sections titled "From the Letter." and "From the Foundation Document."

Use the following questions as a springboard for further discussion:

- Where do these segments of the Letter and Foundation Document intersect with your passions?
- What do you want to learn more about?

Dividing back into the three previous groups, ask each to identify existing organizations (local, national, world) that are working to develop solutions to the assigned threat. As each group reports back, write the

names of the organizations in the appropriate circle of the newsprint diagram. Ask who from the congregation is involved with any of the organizations listed. Place a star next to those.

Consider asking those named to write an article for the church newsletter, create a bulletin board, speak to a church gathering, or develop some other way to inform the congregation about the work of the organization.

3. Reflect on the Pledges

Ask participants to read "Pledges" in the participant material. Ask them to recall their earliest memory of being in conversation with someone whose life experience was dramatically different from their own. Encourage participants to tell these memories, reflecting on the following questions:

- What did I learn from the experience?
- In what ways was my life enriched?
- Were there any long-term results of the conversation?

Then ask them to recall their most recent memory of being in conversation with someone whose life experience was dramatically different. Encourage participants to tell their stories, reflecting on the previous questions.

Brainstorm a list of opportunities for participants to engage in dialogue with people who have different life experience. These could be as simple as visiting a restaurant frequented by immigrants and engaging in conversation with the workers, to more formal things such as enrolling in an interfaith dialogue experience. Encourage each person to select one thing that they will do in the next week.

4. Pray Together

Pray together the lament, "We Mourn a World of Inequality and Injustice," printed in the participant material followed by a time of silent prayer. Close by singing again the first four stanzas of "We Utter Our Cry" and praying this prayer:

May God's grace purify our reason, strengthen our will, and guide our action. May the love of God, the peace of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit be among you, everywhere and always, so that you may be a blessing to all creation and to all the children of God, making peace, nurturing and practicing hope, choosing life, and coming to life eternal. Amen.

Encourage the group to explore the items in "Going Further" during the next week.

Session Four: Participant Material

From the Pastoral Letter

God is already visibly at work in people and groups around the world. We rededicate ourselves to join these movements, the movements of the Spirit. Young people are passionately raising funds to provide mosquito nets for their “siblings” thousands of miles away. Dockworkers are refusing to off-load small weapons being smuggled to armed combatants in civil wars in their continent. People of faith are demanding land reform on behalf of landless farm workers. Children and young people have formed church-wide “green teams” to transform our buildings and ministries into testimonies of stewardship and sustainability. Ecumenical and interreligious partners persist in demanding the major nuclear powers to reduce their arsenals, step by verifiable step, making a way to a more secure world totally disarmed of nuclear weapons. God is already doing a new thing. With this Letter and the accompanying Foundation Document, we rededicate ourselves to participate in God’s work, and we urge you all to rededicate yourselves as well.

From the Foundation Document

Call to Hope and Action

John Wesley insisted, “The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social. No holiness but social holiness. Faith working by love is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection.” (*Preface to Hymns and Sacred Poems*, 1739, ¶ 5) Ours is not solely a private faith, but one that also orients us toward God and the needs of our neighbor and world. At a time when people are cynical about religion, United Methodists must continue our rich heritage of “faith working by love” as an example of the church’s ability to make a positive difference in the world.

The leaders and members of our denomination have a long tradition of speaking truth to power, naming injustice and advocating for right relationships and equitable sharing among all God’s peoples. Today, United Methodists protest racism and abuse directed toward illegal immigrants and challenge local and federal authorities to maintain a democracy open to all people. In Arizona, Bishop Minerva Carcaño joins thousands in protest, and in Texas, United Methodist Women and the Board of Church and Society organize interreligious

prayer vigils that include people from ten different countries.

We feel the energy in thousands of ministries every day in our United Methodist connection. We are strengthened and inspired by the Toberman Neighborhood House in San Pedro, California, which provides services for gang prevention and gang intervention, family counseling and mental health, child care, and community organizing. The Toberman House is one of 100 national mission institutions, founded by the women of the Methodist tradition in 1903 and still supported by UMW Mission Giving.

Today, we are increasingly aware of the powerful role that young adults are playing to transform our societies and to challenge our church to live out its commitments to social justice, creation care, and peace. For example, every year, young adult interns with the Micah Corps in the Nebraska Annual Conference immerse themselves in social justice education, training, and advocacy on behalf of the poor and marginalized in their state.

During the many listening and learning events that informed the Pastoral Letter and Foundation Document, participants did much more than articulate their concern about poverty and disease, environmental degradation, and weapons and violence. From ages ten to one hundred, they expressed their deep desire to do something about these problems and their great hope that change is possible. These conversations raised awareness about several things:

1. We must study, observe, learn from, and listen to one another, especially to victims of these threats. Some of us are indeed aware of these problems, but less aware of the interconnections, and even less aware of our personal connections and complicity or the dramatic urgency in what is already happening in our communities. We must listen with particular care to our young people, whose knowledge, consciousness, and impatience for action can be energizing and inspiring for us all.
2. We can be re-energized and spiritually renewed by the examples from our own Wesleyan and United Methodist heritage and experience. We belong to an amazing denomination with transforming potential already active and agile in thousands of ministry settings including legislatures, parliaments, and congresses.

3. We need an ongoing word of hope as we follow Wesley out into the streets and communities to face uncomfortable and difficult things and connect with others working for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.
4. "With God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). We have immense hope, and it will grow as we study, act, and connect.

Pledges

3. *We pledge to practice dialogue with those whose life experience differs dramatically from our own, and we pledge to practice prayerful self-examination.* For example, in the Council of Bishops, the fifty active bishops in the United States are committed to listening and learning with the nineteen active bishops in Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Philippines. And the bishops representing the conferences in the United States will prayerfully examine the fact that their nation consumes more than its fair share of the world's resources, generates the most waste, and produces the most weapons.

4. *We pledge ourselves to make common cause with religious leaders and people of goodwill worldwide who share these concerns.* We will connect and collaborate with ecumenical and interreligious partners and with community and faith organizations so that we may strengthen our common efforts.

We Mourn a World of Inequality and Injustice

We see a world where some live opulently while others barely survive; a world where the innocent suffer and the corrupt profit; a world where too many still find their opportunities and freedom limited by skin color, gender, or birthplace. We know the boy who is caught in the snare of drugs and violence and the girl who is raped or forced into prostitution.

Going Further

- The Web site www.hopeandaction.org has other articles and stories that relate to the Pastoral Letter.
- Read more about the Toberman Neighborhood Center at www.toberman.org
- Read about the experiences of the Micah Corps at <http://micah-corps.blogspot.com>
- Read John Wesley's sermon, "The Character of a Methodist." It can be found at <http://new.gbgmumc.org/umhistory/wesley>

Session Five: Leader's Guide

Preparation

- Collect the following materials: newsprint diagram from previous sessions, pencils, copies of "Session Five: Participant Material," Bibles, *United Methodist Hymnals*, and worship center from previous sessions.

- Check out the web site www.hopeandaction.org for additional stories and information that you may want to incorporate into the session.

1. Introduce the Theme

Encourage people to report any experiences they have had since the previous session of engaging in dialogue with those whose life experience is dramatically different from their own.

Light the candle as you recall the symbolism of the Bible, the globe, and the candle on the worship center: to orient our lives toward God's holy vision, to practice social and environmental holiness, and to live and act in hope.

Explain that this session particularly emphasizes living and acting in hope. Ask the participants to focus on the lighted candle as they listen to you read Isaiah 43:18-21 twice, pausing between readings for silent reflection.

Then in small groups ask them to discuss the following questions:

- What images emerged as you listened to the scripture?
- Where have you experienced God doing a "new thing" in your own life?
- What "new thing" do you think God is about to do in your congregation?
- What word of hope did you hear?

Then sing together the first five stanzas of "We Utter Our Cry," page 439 in *The United Methodist Hymnal*.

2. Read Segments of the Documents

Distribute copies of "Session Five: Participant Material" and ask the group to silently read the sections titled "From the Letter" and "From the Foundation Document." As they read, ask them to underline what they believe are the five most important words or phrases. Then have them report what they have underlined, recording the words or phrases on newsprint. When all the responses have been recorded,

look for common themes that have emerged. Encourage honest discussion about why people selected what they did.

Divide into small groups and challenge each group to select one sentence either from the Pastoral Letter or the Foundation Document that speaks most forcefully of hope in relationship to the three interrelated threats, or to write a sentence of their own.

As the groups report, record the sentences around the edges of the newsprint diagram you have used in previous sessions, so that the three interrelated threat circles are surrounded by the statements of hope.

3. Reflect on the Pledges

Ask participants to read "Pledges" in the participant material. Discuss the following questions:

- What would make our community a "greener" place?
- What resources (people, facilities, money, information, and so forth) could our congregation contribute to the effort?
- Where do we need assistance? From whom?
- How can we share what we have learned with our congregation and our community?

4. Pray Together

Lead the group in the confession in the participant material. After the unison part of the confession, encourage the participants to name aloud or silently personal confessions related to being the stewards and caretakers that God created us to be. Sing together stanza five of "We Utter Our Cry" as a response to the confession. Close with the following prayer:

May God's grace purify our reason, strengthen our will, and guide our action. May the love of God, the peace of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit be among you, everywhere and always, so that you may be a blessing to all creation and to all the children of God, making peace, nurturing and practicing hope, choosing life, and coming to life eternal. Amen.

Encourage the group to explore the items in "Going Further" during the next week, particularly rereading the entire Pastoral Letter and Foundation Document.

Session Five: Participant Material

From the Pastoral Letter

Third, let us live and act in hope. As people in the tradition of John Wesley, we understand reconciliation and renewal to be part of the process of salvation that is already underway. We are not hemmed into a fallen world. Rather we are part of a divine unfolding process to which we must contribute. As we faithfully respond to God's grace and call to action, the Holy Spirit guides us in this renewal. With a resurrection spirit, we look forward to the renewal of the whole creation and commit ourselves to that vision. We pray that God will accept and use our lives and resources that we rededicate to a ministry of peace, justice, and hope to overcome poverty and disease, environmental degradation, and the proliferation of weapons and violence.

From the Foundation Document

For many hundreds of years "The People of the Book"—Jews, Christians, and Muslims—have lived through hard times of drought, fire, floods, raging waters, and tempestuous winds, sustained by the ancient wisdom of the psalmists, who over and over again sang of "the steadfast love of the Lord."

Today, the human family is awakening to alarming news: after several thousand years of a stable climate that enabled us to thrive, the earth is heating up at an accelerating rate. Climate change poses a particular threat to the world's poor because it increases the spread of diseases like malaria and causes conflicts over dwindling natural resources. Easy access to small arms ensures that such conflicts turn deadly, and the specter of a nuclear war that would destroy the earth continues to loom over us.

Clearly we have arrived at "a hinge of history," a revolutionary time of great challenge. We turn again to the ancient wisdom and remember the ringing challenge of God: "Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (Isaiah 43:19). Do we not see signs that God is at work in this crisis?

As the earth is being transformed, God has blessed human beings with the capacity to read the signs of the times and to respond with intelligence and faith.

Learned scientists and experts monitor the changes that have an impact our very survival. They are clarifying the measures we must take immediately to save our forests, oceans, air, and human and animal ecosystems.

More than that, God has inspired human beings to envision new futures and to invent the tools necessary to make them a reality: technologies to replace fossil fuels with energy from the wind and sun; new forms of transportation, "green jobs," and guides for reducing "carbon footprints." Thousands and thousands of persons in faith-based and community-based coalitions, congregations, businesses, and farms are already acting for change in quiet, persistent, and profound ways.

Even further, God is bringing people together to plan and to act upon emerging realities. Villages, towns, and local governments urge and guide neighbors to share common cause; cities, states, and nations identify the special needs of their citizens and implement solutions; the United Nations and international agencies research global problems, identify solutions, and shape the organizations to address them. Public leaders are working at a feverish pace to reshape the rules of engagement between humans and the earth. Empowering all these efforts is an amazing network of globe-circling monetary, industrial, transportation, and communications systems such as the human family has never before known.

Finally, Christian and interreligious communities are speaking out boldly on the interrelated nature of the present crisis. For example, the "Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace" currently being drafted by the World Council of Churches names justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

Why is all of this activity happening? Because the peoples of the world are reading the signs carefully—we see clearly that God is doing a new thing, and that God is inviting the human family to participate in transformation. . . .

We open our hearts to confess our sin, to receive God's grace, to discern God's call, and to feel strengthened by God's sustaining Spirit. We are not initiating these actions; rather we are responding to God's gracious invitation to join God's renewal of creation. God invites us, with all of our imperfections, to participate in this work. We open our hearts so that we can change. We open our hearts to feel God's presence with us as we labor. We open our hearts "that we may anchor our souls in the One who is just, who renews our strength for the work to be done."

We open our hearts to embody the "moral image of God," to use Wesley's words (*Works* 2:188). This moral

image is not something we possess but is ours only insofar as we continually receive it from the Source. We embody the moral image of God as we receive God's grace and then reflect that grace out into the world. To describe this process of receiving and reflecting God's grace Wesley used the image of breath, calling it "spiritual respiration": "God's breathing into the soul, and the soul's breathing back what it first receives from God; a continual action of God upon the soul, the re-action of the soul upon God" (*Works* 1:442).

We open our hands to respond to the Spirit and do the work God calls us to do in the world. As human beings created in God's image, we have a special responsibility to care for the gift of creation. Wesley calls this "the political image of God" (*Works* 2:188). We often live as though "being created in God's image" gives us special privilege, but living with that assumption is a grave mistake. Our status as human beings increases our *responsibility*, not our *privilege*. Being created in God's image means that we are charged with caring for this world, not invited to abuse it. Doing justice, building peace, and mending the planet are ways that we take care of what we have been given. However, we are not caretakers for an absentee landlord; rather God's renewing Spirit works through us and courses around us breathing new life into the planet and its people. . . .

Renewing creation is an act of discipleship for us. It is the work we are called to do, and the One who calls us accompanies us as well, so that we experience a synergy of grace and human responsibility. God is even now "doing a new thing," and we are invited to serve the divine purpose of renewing creation. Despite the threats posed by these interrelated forces, we refuse to be governed by fear. On the stormy waters with his disciples, Jesus admonished them (and admonishes us) to live in faith rather than fear (Mark 4:35-41). His ministry in the world provides a pattern for us to resist the forces that terrify us without succumbing to them or employing terror. And his resurrection assures us of the new life to come, new life for every element of creation no matter how wounded. The God who raised Jesus from the dead is the God who breathes new life into every aspect of our broken world.

Facing these complex and difficult problems will press us to practice a "responsible hope," one that remains open to promise and peril. "And, given the often overwhelming experiences of life, we must frequently practice hope in pieces, sometimes grieving and shouting, sometimes celebrating. The cumulative effect . . . is a

disposition that generates and sustains moral action because it attends to possibilities and limitations. It buoys the spirit and steels the spine."

Pledges

7. *We pledge to provide, to the best of our ability, the resources needed by our conferences to dramatically reduce our collective exploitation of the planet, peoples, and communities, including technical assistance with buildings and programs, education and training, and young people's and online networking resources.*

9. *We pledge more effective use of the church and community Web pages to inspire and to share what we learn. We celebrate the communications efforts that tell the stories of struggle and transformation within our denomination.*

Confession

Leader: God sees the creation's wounds. God hears our lament. And God calls us to accountability. We cannot be instruments of God's renewal if we deny our complicity in pandemic poverty and disease, environmental degradation, and proliferation of weapons and violence.

All: As United Methodists, we confess our failure to embody the image of God. We rationalize our sin; satisfy our own desires; and exercise our freedom at the expense of the common good. We know that we should live within sustainable boundaries but we struggle to summon the moral will to change. As individuals and communities of faith, we have not been the stewards and caretakers that God created us to be.

Going Further

- The Web site www.hopeandaction.org has other articles and stories that relate to the Pastoral Letter.
- Reread the entire Pastoral Letter and Foundation Document found at www.hopeandaction.org. Reflect on what you have learned in the study of the documents.

Session Six: Leader's Guide

Preparation

- Collect the following materials: newsprint diagram from previous sessions, pencils, copies of "Session Six: Participant Material," Bibles, *United Methodist Hymnals*, worship center from previous sessions.
- Check out the web site www.hopeandaction.org for additional stories and information that you may want to incorporate into the session.

1. Introduce the Theme

Light the candle as you recall the symbolism of the Bible, the globe, and the candle on the worship center: to orient our lives toward God's holy vision, to practice social and environmental holiness, and to live and act in hope.

Explain that this session particularly focuses on orienting our lives towards God's holy vision.

Divide the participants into three groups. As they listen to you read Luke 10:25-28, ask one group to imagine they are the lawyer, another group to imagine they are Jesus, and the third group to imagine they are a bystander watching the exchange.

After you have read the scripture, ask them to divide into groups of three, so that each triad has a member from each of the original three groups.

In the triads have them discuss the following:

- What did you see, smell, hear, and feel?
- What do you think the lawyer probably did afterward?
- What does this scripture say to us today related to orienting our lives to God's holy vision?

Then sing together all six stanzas of "We Utter Our Cry," page 439 in *The United Methodist Hymnal*.

2. Read Segments of the Documents

Distribute copies of "Session Six: Participant Material" and ask the group to silently read the sections titled "From the Letter" and "From the Foundation Document." Discuss the following questions:

- Looking at the world through eyes of faith, where do you see love at work? Where is transformation happening in your community?
- The Foundation Document names several ways in which we love God and neighbors; are some more important than others? If so, which ones?

Brainstorm ways the congregation can live out the items listed in the section "Let Us Order Our Lives Toward God's Holy Vision."

3. Reflect on the Pledge

Ask participants to read "Pledge" in the participant material. Together make a list of decisions that have been made by groups in the church recently. This could include the Church Council, church committees, United Methodist Women and Men, the youth group, trustees, and so forth. Review each decision and discuss what decision might have been made if each group had asked: Does this contribute to God's renewal of creation? Or if the question was asked, how did it affect the decision? Consider ways the question could become a regular part of the church planning process.

Then ask participants to think about personal decisions they are facing and how asking the question might influence those decisions.

4. Evaluate the Study

Give each person a sheet of paper and ask them to finish the following sentences.

- One thing I have learned during this study is . . .
- I have changed my thinking about . . .
- I have started . . .
- I have stopped . . .
- In six months I hope our church . . .
- In ten years I hope our world . . .

Allow those who wish to share their answers.

Encourage people when they go home to respond to the survey listed in "Going Further."

- As a group discuss the following questions:
- What have we learned?
- What actions have we taken?
- What actions do we plan to take?
- What will we be praying about?

5. Pray Together

Lead "Rededication" from the Participant Material. Sing "We Utter Our Cry" as a response. Close with the following prayer:

May God's grace purify our reason, strengthen our will, and guide our action. May the love of God, the peace of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit be among you, everywhere and always, so that you may be a blessing to all creation and to all the children of God, making peace, nurturing and practicing hope, choosing life, and coming to life eternal. Amen.

Session Six: Participant Material

From the Pastoral Letter

Aware of God's vision for creation, we no longer see a list of isolated problems affecting disconnected people, plants, and animals. Rather, we see one interconnected system that is "groaning in labor pains" (Romans 8:22). The threats to peace, people, and planet earth are related to one another, and God's vision encompasses complete well-being. We, your bishops, join with many global religious leaders to call for a comprehensive response to these interrelated issues. We urge all United Methodists and people of goodwill to offer themselves as instruments of God's renewing Spirit in the world.

First, let us orient our lives toward God's holy vision. This vision of the future calls us to hope and to action. "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope" (Jeremiah 29:11). Christ's resurrection assures us that this vision is indeed a promise of renewal and reconciliation. As disciples of Christ, we take God's promise as the purpose for our lives. Let us, then, rededicate ourselves to God's holy vision, living each day with awareness of the future God extends to us and of the Spirit that leads us onward.

From the Foundation Document

When we open our eyes to God's vision of renewal, we also clearly see the ways in which we obstruct God's process. When we open our eyes to the presence of God's renewing Spirit in the world, we celebrate every charitable act, every just practice, every courageous stand for peace, every moment of reconciliation, every cessation of violence, and every restored habitat as a glimpse of the Kingdom of God, as a "seed-like presence of that which is hoped for."

We might think of opening our eyes as a spiritual discipline rooted in John Wesley's understanding of the "natural image of God" (*Works* 2:188). Three gifts are included in the basic equipment our Creator has given us as spiritual beings to be both independent and at the same time to relate to God and our neighbor. The first of these gifts is *reason*—the human ability to discern order and relationships, to grasp how things work, and to make judgments. The second gift is our *will*—the ability to commit ourselves to God, to persons, and to goals, and to carry through. The third gift is our freedom. God does not want automatons. "A mere machine" is not morally

answerable, says Wesley. Human responsibility requires freedom (*Works* [Jackson] 10:234).

Therefore, we reflect the natural image of God when we exercise our reason for accurate understanding and good judgment, and when we respond to God's grace by freely exercising our will to choose good and resist evil. We open our eyes in order to perceive the world accurately, understand our roles and responsibilities, and exercise good judgment. . . .

In order to live fully in God's image, we must make God's promise our purpose. We respond to the groaning of creation and to this vision of renewal by making ourselves a channel of God's blessing. We open our hearts to receive God's grace, and we open our hands in response, to do the work God calls us to do. What does it really mean to fashion ourselves as instruments of God's renewing Spirit? This is not a new question. It is, in fact, a variation of the question posed to Jesus many times. "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25). Jesus answers with the dual love commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39). Participating in God's work of renewal looks like love shining forth in action.

We love God by paying attention to God's creation. We pay attention to poverty, environmental degradation, and weapons and violence. Neglecting these ills and those who suffer their effects is contrary to love. We respond to Jesus' commandment by paying attention to our world. And we begin to fashion ourselves as instruments of God's renewal by deepening our spiritual consciousness as faithful stewards and directing our attention to the world God loves.

We love God and neighbor by practicing compassionate respect. We extend our care and concern, and provide assistance and comfort as needed. But we also respect the ones cared for as subjects in their own right. We respect the earth, knowing that it is not ours to plunder. We respect those suffering poverty and disease, granting them full autonomy to determine their own needs and path to well-being. We respect victims of violence by supporting their pursuit of a just peace. In sum, we "work toward societies in which each person's value is recognized, maintained, and strengthened."

We love God and neighbor by changing our behavior. We cannot be instruments of love if we hold on to selfishness and greed. Jesus calls us to love, but he also calls us to conversion, to a radical change in our lifestyle and attitude. His message is clear: We cannot help the world until we change our own way of being in it.

We love God and neighbor by challenging those who do harm. We must not only respond to the suffering already created, but also challenge people, companies, and governments that continue to exploit the weak, destroy the earth, perpetuate violence, and generate more weapons. We follow Jesus' example of confronting authorities non-violently, using the force of love. And we adhere to our Social Principles, which affirm the "right of individuals to dissent when acting under the constraint of conscience."

Anyone who has experienced genuine love knows its power. Looking at the world through the eyes of faith, we can see love at work, transforming an abandoned lot into a community garden, transforming a neglected child into a healthy and happy toddler, and transforming people at war into communities committed to reconciliation. We witness God's work of renewal in these pockets of transformation. And we participate in that work of renewal by living fully as Christ's disciples, people whose love of God and neighbor shines forth in action.

Let Us Order Our Lives Toward God's Holy Vision

- Renew our understandings of God's holy vision for peace, peoples, and planet Earth.
- Start with personal spiritual transformation reclaiming the "commission" as a faithful, hopeful caretaker with renewed power and energy;
- Establish small groups to sustain practices of prayer, study, empathy, and action;
- Collect, celebrate and share stories of progress, improvement, hope and struggle; share them within communities, congregations, conferences, and regions;
- Strengthen spiritual disciplines privately and within small groups, and attend to the guiding of the Holy Spirit;
- Prayerfully identify the specific responsibilities for action and transformation urgently needed in your region or context (Global South or Global North, urban or rural, powerful or vulnerable, host or sojourner).

Pledge

2. *We pledge to make God's vision of renewal our goal.* With every evaluation and decision, we will ask: Does this contribute to God's renewal of creation? Ever aware of the difference between what is and what must be, we pledge to practice Wesleyan "holy dissatisfaction."

Rededication

Leader: Find solace and strength in the knowledge that God's creative work continues. This gracious and loving God still calls us forth and prepares us to care for one another and the planet. With John Wesley, let us all affirm the "unceasing presence of God, the loving, pardoning God, manifested to the heart, and perceived by faith," and turn to God offering "up all the thoughts of our hearts, all the words of our tongues, and all the works of our hands, all our body, soul, and spirit, to be an holy sacrifice, acceptable unto God in Christ Jesus."

All: We pray for the wisdom and courage to change the ways we live and work, relate to one another and the earth, and allow our nations to be governed. Through God's grace, we renew our minds, reorient our wills, and recommit ourselves to faithful discipleship as instruments of God's renewing Spirit. We rededicate ourselves faithfully to follow the One who came into the world to reconcile us to God and to one another.

Going Further

- The Web site www.hopeandaction.org has other articles and stories that relate to the Pastoral Letter.
- Go to www.surveymonkey.com/s/hopeandaction and complete the survey. This survey will help the Council of Bishops to understand how the Pastoral Letter has been received and what actions individuals and congregations are taking.