

Women Called to Ministry

A Six-Session Study for The United Methodist Church

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Leader's Guide

All Scripture readings are from the New Revised Standard Version
unless otherwise indicated.

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*General Commission on the Status and Role of Women
in The United Methodist Church*



(Please note the introduction page at the beginning of the Student's Guide which gives the table of contents, the material in the Addendums, and information on the authors.)

HOW TO USE THIS MATERIAL

This Leader's Guide has suggestions for activities that will enhance the study and for leading a short worship. It includes activities, questions and other options for the leader and students. Choose those appropriate to your students and according to the time available in the session. The Leader's Guide is written with the assumption that the students have read the Student's Guide before coming to class. However, you may want to review portions of it during the session and allow the students to field any of their own questions for discussion.

If your session time is longer than an hour, you are invited to spend more time reflecting on the "Further Biblical Study" section.

Be sure that you begin preparing to lead the session early in the week prior to the lesson so that your mind and heart will be prepared for leading. Enter each planning session with prayer for God's guidance as you plan and lead.

KNOW YOUR STUDENTS

We often think that learning for adults can happen in any circumstance. However, adults learn in various ways, just like children. Few of us learn best by simply listening. Some of us learn best by reading, and some by doing some sort of physical activity during learning. This is evident when people doodle or tap their feet during learning.

Most of us learn by thinking through a situation and making some sort of comment on the subject. This is why discussion is effective with adults. However, we do need to realize that some people think before they talk, and some think *while* they talk. Therefore, a discussion can easily be dominated by those who think while they talk. In order to give everyone opportunity to express their opinions, break the class up into small groups or ask them to each turn to one or two other people and discuss the question.

SET THE CLIMATE

Consider creating a focal point for each lesson. You may include something that reflects the theme, or simply a table with a lighted candle. The candle represents Christ among us. Suggest that if at some time during the session anyone should realize that the class is speaking or acting in a manner it would not act or speak if Christ was there, she or he should come forward and blow out the candle and re-light it to remind the class of Christ's presence.

Check the room for tidiness. An untidy room indicates a lack of interest. Placing the chairs in a circle or semi-circle creates an informal, friendly atmosphere that is conducive to better participation.

Gather any materials suggested for use. If there is a gathering activity that begins the session, directions for this should be printed on a board or paper posted on the wall.

SessionOne

Outsider-Insider

THEME

Who are we as people of God in religion and in Christianity? The Canaanite woman's story (Matthew) breaks the societal boundaries of "outsider-insider," and recognizes God's welcome of all.

INVITATION

Have you ever felt like an outsider? Are others on the inside? Jesus' ministry was challenged by a Canaanite woman, an outsider, and the story breaks open new understandings of who is on the outside and who is on the inside.

SCRIPTURE READING

Matthew 15:21-28

YOU MAY NEED...

Paper, crayons, pencils/pens, basket of small bells, ribbon streamers, hymnals, pins (or something to connect ribbons to bells), Bible

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- As the participants enter, give each a piece of paper and crayons and ask them to draw a picture or write a statement about a time when they felt like an outsider.
- Allow time for participants to share their drawings/statements. If you have a large number, ask them to turn to a "nudging neighbor" and share.
- Briefly review the context of the biblical story.
- Review the information on page 7 of the Student's Guide about the Jewish traditions that Jesus broke when he talked with the Canaanite woman.
- Ask the participants to close their eyes and reflect on what you say:

Imagine that you are the Canaanite woman. What might you feel as you see the crowd and someone tells you that the crowd is gathered around a man who is called the Son of David? (Pause) How do you feel when Jesus ignores you? (Pause) Think about your daughter who seems to be filled with demons. She can't seem to control her actions! She is not only hard to live with, but because of her actions she causes

shame to you and your family. You often hear whispers behind your back when people wonder what sin you committed to cause your daughter to be possessed by demons. Sometimes you wonder too, since you can't remember any such sin. (Pause) What emotions do you feel inside yourself? (Pause)

When the man's disciples try to send you away and you hear Jesus say that he was sent only for the people of Israel you almost give up hope, but then you have a new wave of courage. Can you convince him to help? (Pause) How are your emotions different now? (Pause)

Now, leave the land of your imagination and think about your life. When have you had a similar experience where you were an outsider? (Pause) Did you feel that God didn't even have time for you? How did you overcome that feeling? (Pause)

- Ask the participants to open their eyes and invite any who wish to share the feelings they had during the meditation.
- Say: *The Canaanite woman did not miss this opportunity. Have you ever missed an opportunity to constructively challenge the "insider-outsider" paradigm? The woman's persistence had constructive results. Sometimes we need an opener that enables us to see and name elements that are destructive such as an exclusively sexist, colonial and racist interpretation of mission. The woman got her heart's desire by pushing the edge. How has that happened in your life?*

Ask the participants to write a conversation that takes place between themselves and Jesus. Suggest that they take this home and put it in their Bibles at the Matthew 15:21-28.

- Review the two messages taught by these two teachers, the Canaanite woman and Jesus. Reflect on the story in Matthew 15:21-28 when the Canaanite woman proclaims that God's unconditional love is available for all. Then read the statement that Jesus gave at the end of the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 28, verse 19, and reflect on his teaching and how it parallels the woman's teaching.

WORSHIP SUGGESTIONS

As you begin your worship time, pass a basket of small bells and ask each participant to take one bell. Ask them to look at the bell and mentally name the bell for a woman in their lives who has exhibited strong faith. Ask them to pin their bells on a ribbon streamer as you sing the hymn together, thinking of how that woman answered God's call and shared her faith. Then during the prayer, ask them to softly ring the bells.

Hymn: First two verses of "We've a Story to Tell to the Nations" (#569—*The United Methodist Hymnal*)

If you don't feel comfortable singing the hymn, ask the group to read it in unison.

Prayer: Pray a prayer of thanks for the women who have answered God's call to share their faith with others and for all those who challenge the "outsider-insider" way of living.

SessionTwo

Call

THEME

All baptized Christians are called into ministry. No exceptions.

INVITATION

By our baptism, we are all called into ministry in the name of Jesus Christ. The invitation is always present. How do we respond? Will we risk following the call, even without the affirmation of the community? How does the story of the Samaritan woman in the Gospel of John invite us to hear Christ's call in our life—and give us courage to answer “yes” with our lives?

SCRIPTURE READING

John 4:1-42; Acts 2:42-47

YOU MAY NEED...

List of experiences cut apart, newsprint, marker, scissors, hymnals, Bible

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Discuss how experiences create relationships. To do this, print the following list (and any additional experiences you like) ahead of time and cut them apart so that you can hand out one slip to each pair of students. The pairs will discuss how the experience creates relationships in your community/families/church.

- Worship
- Sunday school class
- Study groups
- Children in same sports
- Gardening
- Coffee shop (or favorite gathering place)
- Card games
- Sports event—as spectator
- Sports event—as player
- Life passage celebrations (birthdays, weddings, baptisms, etc.)
- School gatherings

- Come together in large group and share your findings.

- Say: *Now imagine never feeling comfortable in doing any of these. Imagine yourself in a situation where being around other people makes you very ill at ease and therefore you avoid these situations. This is probably how the woman in our scripture passage felt about going to the well early in the morning.*
- Give background information about Samaria in Jesus' time if your students are unaware of this.

When the Hebrews came out of Egypt they divided the land into two kingdoms, the Northern Kingdom (later known as Samaria) and the Southern Kingdom (later known as Judea or Judah). The Northern Kingdom established Mt. Gerizim as the center of worship, and the Southern Kingdom worshiped in Jerusalem, later building the great temple there.

In 722 B.C. the Northern Kingdom fell to Assyria, and the conquering government brought people from many other lands to settle in this region known as Samaria. This brought other religious influences, and there was intermarriage. The Hebrew religion emphasized the importance of marrying within its religion.

Later the Southern Kingdom was also conquered and the core leadership was exiled to Babylon. Even in a foreign country they held their religious bond, and when they returned to Judah they rebuilt the temple. The leaders of Samaria, in the north, were against the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple in the south, and this created an even greater schism between the two countries.

At Jesus' time most people traveling from Galilee in the north (belonging to Judea, but north of Samaria) to Jerusalem went east across the Jordan River, many miles out of their way, in order to avoid going through Samaria. The people of Judea avoided any contact with Samaritans.

- Discuss the information in the Student's Guide that points out the parallel between the Sanga woman and the woman in the scripture. How does this relate to the way that we shun some people in our culture today? How have you seen women ignored in conversations that relate to business or to religious understanding?
- Ask students for definitions of the term "preacher." Then refer to page 11 of the Student's Guide where the woman at the well is identified as the first Christian missionary, first evangelist and first preacher. Discuss how this definition of preacher differs from those of the students.
- Ask students for examples of times when they have been simply bursting with so much excitement that they couldn't wait to tell others. This might include their engagement, the anticipated birth of a child, an achievement of their own or a member of their family, a new job, a new discovery, etc. Compare this to the excitement the woman must have had.
- Ask: *How would this man's acceptance of her change her life?*

- Ask the following question and write the students' answers on a large newsprint so that it can be cut apart and each answer given to a member of the group for the closing litany.

What about Jesus or about the Christian life do you feel is special enough to share with another person?

- Read the first paragraph of the "Historical" section on page 12 of the Student's Guide. Give each student a *United Methodist Hymnal* and ask them to turn to page 35. Read together the pledge that we give to newly baptized members of the faith. How does this statement reflect every baptized person's calling, male or female, to ministry?
- Read Acts 2:42-47. Tell the students that the early Methodist movement stressed this concept of sharing. This involves what Marcus Borg calls "a politics of compassion."¹

The term "sharing resources" means that all needs are met, even the need to answer God's call. How do we share resources so that all people are able to use their gifts for God's calling?

- Reflect on the story of Mary Bosanquet in the Student's Guide. Use the questions for reflection in the student piece (p. 14) as well as those below.
 - 1] What sort of courage did Mary Bosanquet have in her counter-cultural ministry in the late 18th century?
 - 2] How did this woman exhibit her desire to be involved in the Methodist actions of piety and justice rather than argue the belief system? How does such action bring about results?
 - 3] How does Mary Bosanquet's persistence compare with that of the woman in today's scripture?
 - 4] What courage do women exhibit today and what barriers must they overcome when they take leadership roles in the church and/or become clergy?
 - 5] What calling do we have to encourage women's leadership in the church in our day?

WORSHIP SUGGESTIONS

Hymn: "Here I Am, Lord" (#593—*The United Methodist Hymnal*)

If you don't feel comfortable singing the hymn, ask the group to read it in unison.

Litany: Cut apart the answers from the newsprint and say: *We are all called to share the story of Christ and his way of living. I will give each of you one of the answers suggested*

¹ Marcus J. Borg, *The Heart of Christianity* (San Francisco, Harper, 2003), 142–143.

*earlier. We will use these as a litany. Between the reading of each answer we will all pray together: **Help me, God, to live in Christ by following my calling to share with others.***

Write the response on a chalk/whiteboard or newsprint.

Prayer: Close the litany with a simple request to God, such as “*Give us the courage and the excitement of the woman at the well and of other women in our religious heritage. Amen.*”

SessionThree

Women's Identity

THEME

Too often women's identities are defined by confining social prescriptions and roles by the world, rather than by knowledge and acceptance of one's identity as a child of God for ministry in the world.

INVITATION

How do we, in the Christian tradition, understand and interpret the story of Eve? Our interpretation will influence our understanding of women's identity in our world today.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Genesis 1:26-3:24, Exodus 38:8

YOU MAY NEED...

Paper, crayons, tape, newsprint figures of a man and a woman, hymnals, Bible

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Begin the session by asking the students to draw a symbol or a scene that describes interpretations about Eve that they have heard or have held in the past. After these are complete, ask them to share their drawings and the interpretations. Make a collage of these on a bulletin board or on the wall. (This will be added to later.)
- Explain to the students that the Bible was not originally written in English. The New Testament was written in Greek and had no spaces and no punctuation. Give a copy of the following sentences to several students to read. Ask the students about the difficulty they had in reading the sentences. Then check the reading with John 8:12.

AGAINJESUSSPOKETOTHEMSAYINGIAMTHELIGHTOFTHEWORLDWHO
EVERFOLLOWSMEWILLNEVERWALKINDARKNESSBUTWILLHAVETHE
LIGHTOFLIFE

Explain that the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and had no punctuation or spaces, but also no vowels. Write this one on a chalk/whiteboard or newsprint and ask the whole class to try to read it.

THLRDSMSHPHRDSHLLNTWNT

Then check their reading with Psalm 23:1. Ask how this experience helps them understand the job of a translator.

- Ask the students to look at the section “God Created Human Beings” and review what they learned about the Hebrew language in that scripture and its interpretation. Call attention to footnotes #15 and #16 and the glossary as they struggle with the words.
- Recognize the difficulty in translating into English when our language has very few non-gender words/pronouns. In order to help the students with non-gender understanding, ask them to list animals that have a non-gender name and then feminine and masculine names, such as: chicken = hen and rooster; sheep = ewe and ram; horse = mare and stallion; deer = doe and buck.
- Ahead of time use the thesaurus program on your computer to look up the words “helper” (assistant, aide, collaborator, co-worker, colleague, partner) and “aide” (assistant, adviser, helper, supporter). What sort of relationship do the words denote? Discuss the occurrences of the Hebrew term *ezer* and the different uses that the term is used for. Do the uses denote subordination or interdependence?
- As you reflect on the two creation stories, suggest that the Bible may be seen more as the way that we as people have grown in our understanding of God than a history of what actually happened in the past. The Bible may be seen more as “why” something happened than “how” something happened.
- Use some of the questions that are found under “Reflection with the Scripture” (in the Student’s Guide) to draw out discussion.
- Read the section in the Student’s Guide under “Further Biblical Study” titled “The Fall.” At the end of this we see that Adam and Eve continue to carry on their divine responsibility, their calling, even through their struggles. Ask the students, *How have you grown spiritually through a struggle?*
- Discuss the materials in the Student’s Guide under “Further Biblical Study” about the passage in Genesis 3:16 and the Hebrew verb *mashal*. This verse is often used as a proof text to demonstrate male superiority over the female. Remind the students that proof texting does not take into account the different ways that the same word is interpreted elsewhere in the Bible or even in the same book in the Bible. It usually lifts the passage out of context.
- Discuss the place that Frances E. Willard had in the development of leadership of women in the church. Reflect on groups/activities in your church today, or in community organizations, that help women develop leadership.

WORSHIP SUGGESTIONS

Show the students the two figures (of a man and a woman) that you made from newsprint. Discuss whether there are actions that men are capable of but that women cannot do. Ask them to write on the figures actions in ministry that *can be shared by both* men and women. (Write the same action on both figures.)

Place these figures OVER the collage of past interpretations of Eve and talk about how both men and women must answer the call of God to carry out their ministry, calling forth their own individual gifts, and being partners in ministry in the world.

Ask that the students consider some individual gift that they recognize in themselves, or some gift that another has named for them that challenges them into new ways of living. Invite them to offer that gift in one word or phrase as an offering to God. Then suggest that they make the gift a prayer as they sing the hymn.

Hymn: “The Voice of God Is Calling” (#436—*The United Methodist Hymnal*)

If you don't feel comfortable singing the hymn, ask the group to read it in unison.

Prayer: Pray a prayer of dedication similar to this: *Our God, we recognize that we have special gifts that you have given us, no matter what our gender. You challenge us to offer our best to you and to the people of this world. As a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ, we recognize your call. Amen.*

LEADER NOTE

Tell the students that they will need to save this session because they will need the Old Testament biblical references from this when they study Session Five.

Session **Four**

Inquiry ↔ Faithfulness/Knowing

THEME

Women, like men, come to their commitments to live their vocation sometimes through faith and sometimes through inquiry. The two are related; they dance together in our life in ministry with Christ.

INVITATION

Are there moments when you have been challenged to go deeper into faith and action, to live more intently this call of God in your life? We celebrate the women who call down through history and into contemporary life, “Come! Live your calling—not based on gender, class, culture, race, etc.—but on your baptism as a child of God!”

SCRIPTURE READINGS

See “Biblical Women” in Session Four of the Student’s Guide.

YOU MAY NEED...

Newsprint, markers, Bibles, The Faith We Sing songbooks, copies of the litany in Session Four of the Student’s Guide, copies of Addendum One: Historical Timeline

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Begin the session by drawing four concentric circles on a large sheet of newsprint similar to the cross section of a tree. Allow space between the circles and in the center for the students to draw small pictures or write words. If you have more than six in your class, divide the class into groups of four to six and give each group newsprint and markers so that the discussion doesn’t take as much time.

Ask the students to share among those in their group some time in their childhood when they felt warm, either physically or emotionally. Ask that, as they speak, they draw a picture or symbol of that time in the center circle of the circles. Share such an experience of your own. Give them three to five minutes to do this.

Ask that someone from each group label the center circle “**Experienced Faith.**” Explain that in this instance we will identify faith as our relationship with God. Explain that what they just shared is a part of their experienced faith. Their experience of warmth laid the foundation for their relationship with God. This part of our faith also includes worship, experiential activities as we study, experiences in nature, etc.

Ask the students to write in the next circle the name of a person who has helped them better understand God. Give them a few minutes to do this, and then have each group write “**Affiliated Faith**” inside that circle. Explain that the affiliated faith includes those relationships with other people that have helped them grow in their relationship with God.

In the next circle ask the students to share with the members of their group and draw or write something that tells about a belief that they used to hold but no longer hold, such as a belief that God would zap them if they were bad. It may take a little longer for them to accomplish this. You may have to call time and just ask them to remember their thoughts on this.

They will write in this third circle the words “**Inquiring Faith.**” This is what you have been doing with this study as you’ve dug into the scripture and all of the background provided by the author. At this point help the students recognize that our faith is our relationship with God, our beliefs are simply that—beliefs that may change from time to time.² The inquiring faith begins in the late teens to early 20s and hopefully continues throughout our lives. If we fail to inquire or search for meaning, then we are simply accepting what someone else has told us instead of thinking for ourselves.

For the fourth circle have the students write the name of someone who exhibits a very close relationship with God. This may be someone they do not know personally. This circle will be labeled “**Owned Faith.**” Help them realize that as we engage in inquiry, we come to our own faith (relationship with God) and we are not threatened if someone has a different belief than we. We recognize that each person searches for the path to their relationship with God in the way that is important and best for them. We have no need to insist that everyone believe exactly the same.

Using the concept of a cross section of a tree, explain that sometimes we become stunted in our growth at one stage or another, but we must use all of our styles of faith throughout our lives, just as a tree cannot be healthy if we cut one of its rings away. It is also important to recognize that, just as a seedling oak is as much an oak as a hundred-year-old oak tree, so everyone has some sort of faith even if it doesn’t include all of the styles. So we learn to accept people where they are.

- Ask the students to look over the various biblical women who were mentioned on pages 25–26 in the Student’s Guide. As you review the women, look at the timeline in Addendum One. If time allows, have them look up the Bible reference for them. Ask the students to choose one that they identify with and explain why they identified with that person and what the person risked in following God’s call. Continue in this manner with the historical and contemporary women mentioned in the Student’s Guide (pp. 26–29).

2 In this study, “faith” is being used to mean our relationship with God, whereas “belief” is being used to mean a conviction that something is true (may include opinion and judgment).

WORSHIP SUGGESTIONS

Litany: Use the litany “God Gives Gifts” in the Student’s Guide on page 30.

Hymn: “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus” (#2129—*The Faith We Sing*)

If you don’t feel comfortable singing the hymn, ask the group to read it in unison.

SessionFive

Brokenness-Wholeness

THEME

To affirm the leadership of women, particularly ordination, as an example of the church's trustworthiness

INVITATION

The United Methodist Church affirms the full participation of women, including ordination, through our Biblical and historical understandings. Yet, there are tensions within the Biblical text. Is there any way to find wholeness in the Biblical texts about the role and identity of women?

SCRIPTURE READINGS

1 Corinthians 11:7-12, 14:20-25, 14:33a-35; 1 Timothy 2:11b-15; Galatians 3:28

YOU MAY NEED...

Newsprint with title "Women Leadership in Our Church" (make three columns: Local Congregation, District, Conference), markers, long ribbon or ball of yarn, hymnals, Bible

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Ask each person, as he or she enters, to add a woman's name on the newsprint entitled "Women Leadership in Our Church," listing the name and the position she holds. When the students have all assembled, look over the list and ask if there are any additional names to be added. (Ahead of time, check on women in district and conference leadership so that you can add them here if necessary.)
- Pray a prayer of thanks for those women in leadership in your church. This might be an "open eyed" prayer asking the students to look at the list they have created. Allow a time of silence for persons to pray for women on the list they want to specially pray for.
- Review the study you did in Session Three using the two Genesis stories of creation. At the conclusion of your review ask the students to recite Galatians 3:28 together, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

- Review the information in the Student's Guide about the Corinthians and Timothy passages. Lift out some of the questions from "Reflection with Scripture" on page 36. Do you agree with Paul on the interpretation of the Genesis passages? After your review, recite Galatians 3:28 together again.
- All three of these New Testament passages were written in response to a letter or some other means of communication that told the author something about a problem in their church. We have lost the letters that prompted these responses, so we don't know what the circumstances were. Invite the students to speculate about the circumstances.
- Name circumstances that are different for women today than they were for women 2,000 years ago (merged households, women educated, both spouses earning paycheck, single households, men taking more parenting responsibility, etc.).
- What other beliefs or customs do we find in the Bible that we now limit to biblical times and not today (slavery, eating pork, women required to cover heads, women not needing schooling, etc.)?
- Discuss how we can listen to God's call instead of determining what we do simply by gender. Talk about how God's call may be something that culture associates with a specific gender, but it may also be something altogether different.

WORSHIP SUGGESTIONS

Ask the students to stand in a circle. Begin passing a long ribbon, or a ball of yarn, around the circle, each person holding onto part of the yarn/ribbon. Each time a person passes it to the next person in the circle, he/she will say to that person, " (Name) , God calls you to use your gifts for Christ's Church. Blessings on you as you answer God's call."

Hymn: "Filled with the Spirit's Power" (#537—*The United Methodist Hymnal*)
or "Many Gifts, One Spirit" (#114—*The United Methodist Hymnal*)

If you don't feel comfortable singing the hymn, ask the group to read it in unison.

SessionSix

Moving On...

THEME

To explore, challenge, and claim our call to participate in God's Reign, where all are called to ministry.

INVITATION

How will you live faithfully the call of Jesus Christ in your own life? If you are a woman, how do you experience claiming your full participation in the Reign of God? If you are a man, how do you continue to live faithfully by opening the avenues for women's leadership?

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30; Matthew 28:19

YOU MAY NEED...

Paper, pencils, woven fabric, large candle, copies of the 1956 General Conference Drama (Addendum Three), copies of the Historical Timeline (Addendum One)

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- As the students enter, ask them to make a list of any young women in their families (or close friends) and their relationships (for example Mary—daughter; Jody—niece; Sheilah—friend). Ask them to fold the page with the names and put their name on the front and place the sheet on the table where you have placed a woven fabric and a candle.
- Ask two students to read Matthew 15:21-28 and Mark 7:24-30 for the group. Ask that everyone listen to determine the difference in the gospel writers' telling of this story. Then ask the students to close their eyes and think with you as you lead them:
 - 1] *Think again about the emotions the woman must have felt as an outsider, one compared to the dogs beneath the master's table. (Pause)*
 - 2] *The Canaanite woman did not miss the opportunity to speak up for her rights. When have you ever missed an opportunity to override the insider-outsider paradigm in a constructive way? (Pause)*

- 3] *Think of the young women you listed as you entered. How have you helped any of them to overcome a mind-set of exclusion? (Pause)*
 - 4] *When have you thought outside the box for ways to help women follow their call from God? (Pause)*
 - 5] *Open your eyes and turn to a “nudging neighbor” and share any thoughts about this that you would like.*
- Use the drama in Addendum Three (1956 General Conference Reader's Theatre) as a play reading. Assign parts and read them aloud. After the reading ask for discussion about the different viewpoints brought up in the drama. Recognize that the vote on this was done with a totally male clergy.
 - Recall the drama of the 1956 General Conference (Addendum Three). Review the section of The Social Principles that was printed in the Student's Guide. Tell the students that it is believed that when the North Central Jurisdiction of The United Methodist Church elected the Rev. Marjorie Matthews as bishop in 1980, she was the first woman bishop of any Christian denomination to be elected. We now have women in all areas of leadership in the church. Reflect on ways that your local church and the United Methodist denomination is inclusive of women.
 - 1] Do we see men and women as partners in leadership (such as men as teachers in children's classes, women on finance committee, women serving sacraments, men in leadership in hospitality)?
 - 2] How do our worship resources (hymns, prayers, scripture readings, creeds, bulletins) help or hinder the partnership of men and women?
 - 3] Have we had a woman pastor? How would you now (after this study) answer a neighbor who said, “Why do you have a woman pastor?”
 - Read “The Charge” from the Student's Guide (p. 45). Ask any women who would like to share something of their own story of being led by God and responding, even when it meant that they must step outside the expectations of others.

WORSHIP SUGGESTIONS

Prayer: Tell the students that sharing the stories they told (or heard from other members of the group) is one way that they can mentor young women. Explain that when the young women hear about others they have more courage to step out on their own. Ask that each person take up his or her own list of names from the table and open it. Then ask that they read the names silently and pray a prayer for each name, asking God to guide them in mentoring the woman.

Hymn: Woman in the Night (#274—*The United Methodist Hymnal*)

If you don't feel comfortable singing the hymn, ask the group to read it in unison. If you are reading the song, you may want to have different individuals read the verses, with all participants reading the refrain together.