

RECONCILIATION



2021 RECONCILIATION BIBLE STUDY



A SERIES OF

VIBRANT TOGETHER

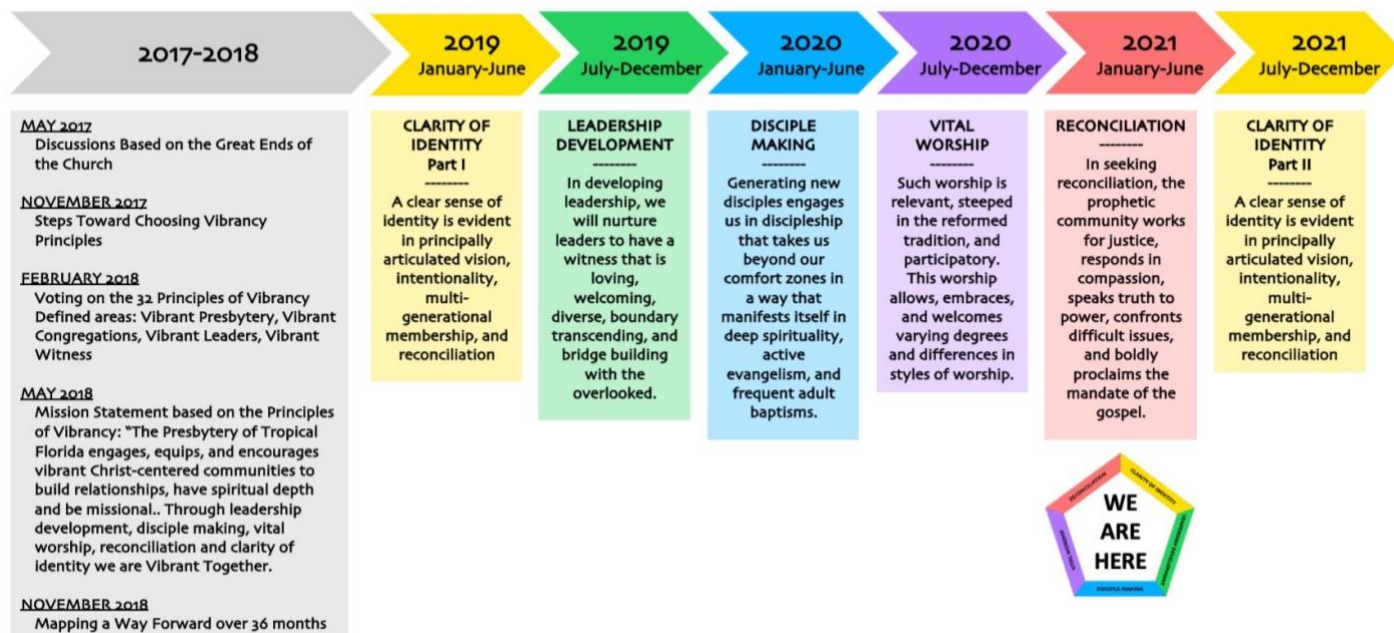
PRESBYTERY OF TROPICAL FLORIDA

2021 Reconciliation Bible Study

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TIMELINE





Introduction

Dear Presbytery of Tropical Florida,

At the February Assembly on February 6, 2021, we shared that the “Map for Ministry” (adopted in November 2018 that determines the work of the Presbytery) calls on us to together begin our work around the 5th sign of Vibrant Christ-Centered Community—**Reconciliation**.

What is here? Contained here is the curriculum that invites Congregational Conversation around the topic of Reconciliation. This curriculum is based off of the Confession of 1967. That confession’s theme is reconciliation. The curriculum is built around the statement on reconciliation that the Presbytery adopted November 2018. There are five segments (five congregational conversations) that comprise the curriculum.

How do we use this? It is my hope that congregations will hold conversations in Lent or in the weeks following Easter. Were you to use this as a Lenten conversation, the five conversations coordinate with the five weeks of Lent. This material is intended for your use, you may choose to use all of it or parts of it, you may design your own conversations based on the framework here. Feel free to innovate and be creative.

What is the desired outcome? We are hoping that congregations have a rich conversation around the notion of reconciliation. As a presbytery we set desired outcomes for our time of considering reconciliation when we adopted the Map for Ministry in 2018. Those outcomes included: *“Reach out to those who would never visit; Make friends and cultivate relationships, Discover the needs of the neighborhood to be the hands and feet of Christ; Incarnate God’s love through service; Form partnerships in the community; Volunteer in community events; Dismantle systems of injustice, racism, poverty.”*

How is this conversation larger than each congregation? We will be providing a wider conversation as we receive feedback from congregational conversations. Please email me (dbultena@tfpby.org) or Sandra Figueredo (sandra@tfpby.org) with results, sound bites, short video clips, or key findings and discussion points. We will be sharing those to spark further conversation.

At the next Presbytery Assembly (May 2021) commissioners will be looking at the issue of racism and anti-racism training. Those discussions may arise in your congregational conversations too—they are a part of the reconciliation conversation. Some have already shared that they find discomfort in such conversation—such discomfort is part of the way in which we discern and learn together. It is my prayer that these conversations help us to truly seek reconciliation and become ever more **Vibrant Together**.

In Christ,
Rev. Dr. Daris Bultena

WHAT THE PRESBYTERY HAS SAID
OF BEING VIBRANT CHRIST-CENTERED COMMUNITIES:



In seeking reconciliation,
the prophetic community works for justice, responds in compassion, speaks truth to power, confronts difficult issues, and boldly proclaims the mandate of the gospel.

SCRIPTURE TEXT FOR CONVERSATION:

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷ So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰ So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

CONFESSION OF 1967 REFERENCES FOR CONVERSATION:

9.12 | The reconciling act of God in Jesus Christ exposes the evil in people as sin in the sight of God. In sin, people claim mastery of their own lives, turn against God and each other, and become exploiters and despoilers of the world. They lose their humanity in futile striving and are left in rebellion, despair, and isolation.

QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION:

Focus Question 1: *What does reconciliation mean to us?*

Focus Question 2: *With whom are we reconciling?*

Large-scale Question: *What does this say to us about the issues of race, power, and poverty/wealth?*

PRAYER FOR RECONCILIATION:

Holy God, we believe that you want to bring about true justice
and lasting peace on earth;
we believe that you are, in a special sense,
the God of the suffering, the poor and the downtrodden.
We praise you who gives justice to the oppressed
and bread to the hungry;
who sets captives free and makes the blind to see;
who protects strangers, orphans, and widows
and obstructs the plans of the wicked.
In your mercy hear our prayer. Amen.

-- Adapted from BCW Page 613

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SCRIPTURE TEXT FOR CONVERSATION:

I John 3:16-24

¹⁶ We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. ¹⁷ How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

¹⁸ Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. ¹⁹ And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him ²⁰ whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

²¹ Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; ²² and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

²³ And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. ²⁴ All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

CONFESSION OF 1967 REFERENCES FOR CONVERSATION:

9.44 a. | God has created the peoples of the earth to be one universal family. In his reconciling love, God overcomes the barriers between sisters and brothers and breaks down every form of discrimination based on racial or ethnic difference, real or imaginary. The church is called to bring all people to receive and uphold one another as persons in all relationships of life: in employment, housing, education, leisure, marriage, family, church, and the exercise of political rights. Therefore, the church labors for the abolition of all racial discrimination and ministers to those injured by it. Congregations, individuals, or groups of Christians who exclude, dominate, or patronize others, however subtly, resist the Spirit of God and bring contempt on the faith which they profess.

9.45 b. | God’s reconciliation in Jesus Christ is the ground of the peace, justice, and freedom among nations which all powers of government are called to serve and defend. The church, in its own life, is called to practice the forgiveness of enemies and to commend to the nations as practical politics the search for cooperation and peace. This search requires that the nations pursue fresh and responsible relations across every line of conflict, even at risk to national security, to reduce areas of strife and to broaden international understanding. Reconciliation among nations becomes peculiarly urgent as countries develop nuclear,

chemical, and biological weapons, diverting human power and resources from constructive uses and risking the annihilation of humankind. Although nations may serve God's purposes in history, the church which identifies the sovereignty of any one nation or any one way of life with the cause of God denies the Lordship of Christ and betrays its calling.

9.46 c. | The reconciliation of humankind through Jesus Christ makes it plain that enslaving poverty in a world of abundance is an intolerable violation of God's good creation. Because Jesus identified himself with the needy and exploited, the cause of the world's poor is the cause of his disciples. The church cannot condone poverty, whether it is the product of unjust social structures, exploitation of the defenseless, lack of national resources, absence of technological understanding, or rapid expansion of populations. The church calls all people to use their abilities, their possessions, and the fruits of technology as gifts entrusted to them by God for the maintenance of their families and the advancement of the common welfare. It encourages those forces in human society that raise hopes for better conditions and provide people with opportunity for a decent living. A church that is indifferent to poverty, or evades responsibility in economic affairs, or is open to one social class only, or expects gratitude for its beneficence makes a mockery of reconciliation and offers no acceptable worship to God.

QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION:

Focus Questions 1: *In what ways are we a prophetic community?*

Focus Question 2: *What challenges does this present?*

Focus Question 3: *What is a biblical definition of justice?*

Focus Question 4: *How do our churches embody that definition?*

Large-scale Question: *What does this say to us about the issues of race, power, and poverty/wealth?*

PRAYER FOR JUSTICE:

O God,
you have bound us together in a common life.
Help us, in the midst of our struggles for justice and truth,
to confront one another without hatred or bitterness,
and to work together with mutual forbearance and respect;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

-- Prayer 3, BCW pg. 630

WHAT THE PRESBYTERY HAS SAID
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SCRIPTURE TEXT FOR CONVERSATION:

Luke 10:29-37

²⁹ But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’ ³⁰ Jesus replied, ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, “Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.” ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?’ ³⁷ He said, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.’

CONFESSION OF 1967 REFERENCES FOR CONVERSATION:

9.31 | To be reconciled to God is to be sent into the world as God’s reconciling community. This community, the church universal, is entrusted with God’s message of reconciliation and shares God’s labor of healing the enmities which separate people from God and from each other. Christ has called the church to this mission and given it the gift of the Holy Spirit. The church maintains continuity with the apostles and with Israel by faithful obedience to his call.

QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION:

Focus Questions 1: *How would you describe compassion in our church?*

Focus Question 2: *How do we manifest it to those outside the church?*

Large-scale Question: *What does this say to us about the issues of race, power, and poverty/wealth?*

PRAYER FOR COMPASSION:

Tender and compassionate God,
sustain in our hearts the spirit of loving-kindness.
Strengthen our work with neighbors of different creeds
and beliefs, cultures, and ethnicities.
Guide us as we bring healing to this earth
and all its creatures.
Preserve in our hearts
songs of peace and rhythms of justice.
In your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen.

-- Adapted from Prayer 3, BCW page 606

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SCRIPTURE TEXT FOR CONVERSATION:

Luke 13:31-35

³¹ At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, ‘Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.’ ³² He said to them, ‘Go and tell that fox for me, “Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. ³³ Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed away from Jerusalem.” ³⁴ Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁵ See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.”’

CONFESSION OF 1967 REFERENCES FOR CONVERSATION:

9.43 | In each time and place, there are particular problems and crises through which God calls the church to act. The church, guided by the Spirit, humbled by its own complicity and instructed by all attainable knowledge, seeks to discern the will of God and learn how to obey in these concrete situations. The following are particularly urgent at the present time.

9.44(a) | God has created the peoples of the earth to be one universal family.

QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION:

Focus Questions 1: *Where has our church spoken truth to power?*

Focus Question 2: *How do our neighbors see our church doing this?*

Focus Question 3: *What difficult issues has our church confronted?*

Focus Question 4: *What difficult issues has our church yet to confront?*

Large-scale Question: *What does this say to us about the issues of race, power, and poverty/wealth?*

PRAYER FOR CONFRONTING DIFFICULT SITUATIONS:

You give us prophets, holy God,
to cry out for justice and mercy.
Open our ears to hear them,
and to follow the truth they speak,
lest we support injustice
and seek to secure our own well-being.
Give prophets the fire of your word,
but give them love as well.
Though they are called to speak in your name,
help them never to forget
that they stand with us before you,
and have no Messiah other than your Son,
Jesus Christ, the Lord of all. Amen.

-- Prayer 2, BCW Page 29

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SCRIPTURE TEXT FOR CONVERSATION:

Luke 4:14-19

¹⁴ Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵ He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

¹⁶ When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'

CONFESSION OF 1967 REFERENCES FOR CONVERSATION:

9.20 | God the Holy Spirit fulfills the work of reconciliation in human life. The Holy Spirit creates and renews the church as the community in which people are reconciled to God and to one another. The Spirit enables people to receive forgiveness as they forgive one another and to enjoy the peace of God as they make peace among themselves. In spite of their sin, the Spirit gives people power to become representatives of Jesus Christ and his gospel of reconciliation to all.

QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION:

Focus Questions 1: *For our church, what is the mandate of the gospel?*

Focus Question 2: *How do you see our church boldly proclaiming that?*

Large-scale Question: *What does this say to us about the issues of race, power, and poverty/wealth?*

PRAYER FOR RECONCILIATION:

By your word, O God, your creation sprang forth,
And we were given the breath of life.
By your word, eternal God,
death is overcome,
Christ is raised from the tomb,
and we are given a new life in the power of your Spirit.
May we boldly proclaim this good news,
by the words of our mouths
and the deeds of our lives,
rejoicing always in your powerful presence;
through Jesus Christ our risen Lord. Amen.

-- BCW page 511