Study Guide

JUST WOMEN WINTER 2015

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Introduction

Welcome to Just Women! We hope this leader’s guide will help you plan meaningful study sessions using the Winter 2015 issue of this magazine.

The focus of this issue of Just Women is celebrating the diversity of families.

As Chelsa Nickelson, Program Director for Disciples Women, points out families no longer are limited to a husband, wife, 2.5 kids and a dog but are composed in a variety of ways. In this study guide, we will consider this diversity by considering families in Christ as we look at You Should Never Underestimate: Women of Faith? by Kim Watkins and Raising the Bar: From Limbo to New Life Helping Immigrant Women and Children by Sharon Stanley-Rea. We will also consider foster families in Jamyia Finds a Home of Her Own by Kathleen Martin and step-families in Married into Motherhood: The Joys and Challenges of Being a Stepmom by Lashaundra McCarty.

In the four articles selected, we will consider our interconnectedness as a part of the family of God. And, we will celebrate the love and nurture that is provided within the family. As Nickelson, writes, “Here let us celebrate given families and chosen families.”

Preparation

In preparing for the study sessions outlined here, have an individual subscription for each woman in your group. If you need more magazines, go to Disciples Women’s web page http://www.discipleswomen.org, and follow the link to the online store and the Just Women catalog.

The four sessions in this study guide will ask your group to focus on what constitutes family and how do we live as a part of God’s chosen family. Read through the Winter 2015 edition and familiarize yourself with how the theme of family is developed in the articles. Ask your group members to read the article that you will be focusing on before your meetings so everyone will be prepared to participate in the study.
Session 1

**Supplies**

Bibles, the Winter Issue of *Just Women* focusing on the article “You Should Never Underestimate: Women of Faith?” by Kim Watkins.

A computer on which you can view the video about Real Faith Christian Church that can be viewed during your group meeting on the Disciples Church Extension Fund (DCEF) website at [http://www.disciplescef.org/real-faith/](http://www.disciplescef.org/real-faith/) to link to the YouTube 5.5 minute video narrated by Pastor Zedric Clayton.

**Opening Prayer**

_Potential of my soul, in your nature is wholeness._

_Your fulfillment is done in the world of manifestation, as it is in the spiritual realm._

_Give us our daily substance, from which all things come._

_We are released from the belief in limitations as we release others, by seeing the unlimited potential in ourselves and others._

_Do not let us lapse into duality; instead let us so use the principle that we do not slip into the state of believing there is an evil one._

_Take us to a place where we know there is only One. Amen._

Rev. Dr. Sheila McKeithen, Rev. Dr. Anna Price, And Rev. Dr. Mary Tumpkin


**Icebreaker**

Take or have someone take photos of the neighborhood around your church and of your community. Display these in a photo collage as the members of your group arrive. How would you describe your neighborhood based on these photos? How has the neighborhood changed (remained the same) over...
the years? How would you describe your congregation’s relationship with your neighborhood (with your community)?

Now turn your focus to your congregation. What are the characteristics of those who attend consider but do not feel restricted to identifying race, age, work status, marital status, etc.? What activities does your congregation offer again consider small groups, mission opportunities, outreach, etc.? What adjectives would you use to describe your congregation? What are the strengths and resources that you have as a congregation? What are the challenges that you face as a congregation?

**Scripture Focus**

Isaiah 58: 6 – 7

**Questions**

*Take a few minutes after you have completed the Icebreaker activity to view the video on the DCEF website. There is also a written story on the website.*

- Describe the community of Clarksdale, Mississippi. Describe the Women’s Ministry of Real Faith Christian Church.
- While many of the circumstances at Real Faith Christian Church seemed to indicate a congregation in decline perhaps even near death (i.e. the inability to finish their building project, the loss of the pastor, the decline in membership from 400 – 45), today the congregation is growing and reaching out to the community. What changed? How does the attitude of a congregation impact the effectiveness of its ministry? What characteristics are important for the leaders?
- Has or is your congregation facing difficult times? If this has happened in the past what helped turn things around? If this is your current reality, what brings you hope?
- Real Faith Christian Church is the story of community coming together in partnership for a shared vision. Who is involved in the partnership? What resources does the congregation of Real Faith provide? What assistance have they received? Who are your partners in faith? How do you live in covenant with one another?
- Watkins states, “The women of Real Faith have demonstrated their determination to make a difference in the lives of the people of their community, even amid their own struggles as a congregation dealing with a frustrating building situation.” What is the vision that you are working towards?
- Read Isaiah 58: 6 – 7. In this passage, the prophet Isaiah reminds the people of Israel that religious observance without compassion and care for the poor and the oppressed is not
pleasing to God. Indeed, Isaiah states that God calls for us to be a blessing to others. This includes concern for the physical well-being of others as we share food with the hungry, clothe the naked, and provide shelter for the wanderer. How do the ministries of Real Faith reflect this understanding? What ministries of your congregation focus on care and provision for the physical welfare of others? What ministries focus on welcoming the stranger and outsider?

- How is this article a celebration of family?

**To Go Deeper**

The addendum, *Know Your Community*, to Rick Morris’s book *From Our Doorsteps: Developing a Ministry Plan that Makes Sense*, is a good resource to help you learn how to gain a better understanding of your community and the needs that are present, It is available at the following website, [http://test.disciplescef.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/knowyourcommunityRE.pdf](http://test.disciplescef.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/knowyourcommunityRE.pdf). Consider what steps you might take as a group, congregation, to identify and reach the needs of your community.

**Closing Prayer**

Close with the Disciples Women’s Benediction or a prayer led by someone in your group.
Session 2

Supplies

Bibles, the Winter Issue of Just Women focusing on Jamyia: Finds a Home of Her Own by Kathleen Martin

Opening Prayer

Bless our children with healthful bodies, with good understandings, with the graces and gifts of thy Spirit, with sweet dispositions and holy habits; and sanctify them throughout in their bodies, souls, and spirits, and keep them unblamable to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jeremy Taylor, 1613-1667


Icebreaker

After all the members of your group arrive, have them sit in a circle. Choose one to begin the conversation. Ask each person to describe the home in which she grew up. After each person has had time to share. Go around the circle again, ask each woman to share about a significant person who nurtured them as a child. After everyone has shared, ask them what they have learned that is new.

Scripture Focus

Matthew 1: 18 - 21

Questions

• Martin provides us with information regarding foster children and what it means to be a foster parent. What surprised you? What are the qualifications of a foster parent? What are the responsibilities of a foster parent? What qualities do you believe that a foster parent should possess? What are the challenges of being a foster parent?

• While the story of every foster child is unique, there are shared commonalities in the experiences of these children. Summarize Jamyia’s story. What are the challenges that she has in establishing trust with her foster parents? What has helped her adjust?

• Why do you believe that the art work with Claretta’s and Jamyia’s handprints are so important to Jamyia? What are special symbols of connectedness in your home?

• Share experiences of foster parents and foster children of which you are aware. What are the challenges of these situations? What are the joys of these situations? What are the
characteristics that you identify in the foster parents that you know? What can you do to welcome foster children into your community (congregation)? What are the challenges of caring for a child on a temporary basis? What do you think motivates individuals to become foster parents? What can you do to assist foster parents as they provide love, nurture, and stability for these children?

- Read Matthew 1: 18 – 21. In the gospel reading, Joseph is given the task of taking care of a child that is not his own. Already engaged but not living as husband and wife, Joseph faces the choice of how to respond to a pregnancy in which he is not the father. Society says that Mary is guilty of adultery and Joseph has every right to divorce her or demand that she be stoned to death. A righteous man, we are first told that Joseph makes a decision to quietly divorce Mary. At this point, God intervenes and Joseph is told that he should not hesitate to take Mary as his wife and to care for the child. Joseph is obedient. The angelic message is that Joseph should accept Mary and adopt her child into the line of David. Imagine for a moment that you were Joseph. What emotions would you have experienced in this situation? What is the stigma of raising this child? Are there stereotypes or stigmas associated with being in foster care? Joseph is told that the child that Mary carries is the Son of God. How is foster parenting raising a child of God? What difference would it make if we considered all children as children of God?

- May is National Foster Care Month; brainstorm what you might do to provide information to your congregation about foster parenting and the needs of foster children.

**Additional Activity**

To help understand the process of foster parenting have your group watch Icebreaker Meetings: Tools for Connecting Birth and Foster Parents that is available on YouTube [http://youtube.com/watch?v=fPh0IWHNRCk](http://youtube.com/watch?v=fPh0IWHNRCk). This is a training video that explains the process of Icebreaker Meetings. For our purposes this video speaks to the complexity of foster parenting and can help us identify some of the challenges and rewards of foster parenting.

After viewing this video, what did you learn about foster parenting? What surprised you? How does Icebreaker Meetings assist with identifying what is in the best interest of the child? One thing that you may notice is that contact between Jamyia and her mother and the child and her mother in the video is different. This helps to remind us that each child and his or her situation is different. The goal of foster care is to provide what is in the best interest of a specific child. What were some of the thoughts that you had about foster care before reading this article (seeing this video) that have changed?

**Closing Prayer**

Close with the Disciples Women’s Benediction or a prayer led by someone in your group.
Session 3

Supplies
Bibles, the Winter Issue of Just Women focus on Married into Motherhood: The Joys and Challenges of Being a Stepmom by Lashaudra McCarty

Opening Prayer
O God, our Father, we thank thee for our home and family; for love and forbearance; for friends and foe; for laughter enjoyed and sorrow shared; for daily bread of thy bounty in good times and bad. Help us to be mindful of thy gifts and glad to show forth thy praise; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

R N. Rodenmayer

Icebreaker
Play - Tell Me Something.

How to play ~
Once everyone has arrived, sit in a circle. Choose one person to begin by sharing something about her family. The next person on her left picks up from where she has left off by adding a snippet about her family. The two thoughts can be slightly different but should be linked.

Example ~
Woman 1: Yesterday I babysat for my three grandchildren. We made a snowman and had hot chocolate with little marshmallows.
Woman 2: I went to see my daughter and her family in Arizona over the holidays. My granddaughter and I hiked Saddleback.
Woman 3: I am looking forward to the day when I will be a grandmother.
Woman 4: I have great memories of baking cookies with my grandmother. She passed away five years ago. I still miss her.

When each woman has shared or when the story line seems to be coming to a natural end, ask what...
you have learned about the families of the women who are present. You may want to do this a couple of times with different women starting the story.

**Scripture Focus**

2 Timothy 1: 5

**Questions**

- Describe a mom – let each person share her description.
- McCarty speaks of the spiritual stretching that comes from being a step-mom. What is “spiritual stretching?” How does being a parent stretch each of us spiritually?
- McCarty speaks of the challenges of being step-mom. What are they? How is being a step-mom different than being a biological mom?
- Do you have a nickname? Who gave you that name? What does it mean? Shaun and John had worked out their understanding of what Caleb and Kylar would call her. What had they decided and what were their reasons. Kylar had a different idea. Share how Kylar “named” Shaun. What is the importance in naming? Shaun states that the name “Mom” stuck because it meant something to the children. It was an intimate name that connected them. What connects you to your family members?
- McCarty shares how her relationship with her niece Victoria was impacted by the addition of her step-daughter Kylar. Her time and attention became something for which they competed. She states that this is also true at times for Caleb and Kylar. How did McCarty address this competition? She states that she hopes that there will be a time when they realize that “there is no limit on the amount of love one possesses and can distribute.” How do we compete with others for God’s time and love? How do we act as if God has a limited amount of love to distribute? How might we live differently if we accepted that there is no limit on the love that God possesses and has to distribute? How might we live differently if we realize that there is no limit on the love that we possess and have to distribute?
- McCarty states “… I cannot replace every hurt moment or instance of disappoint. All I can do is love them where they are today – each day – and pray to God to fulfill the rest.” Take a few moment of silence. Consider who you need to love where they are today and silently pray for God to fulfill the rest. Ask if anyone would like to share.
- As we focus on the diversity of families, let us consider how your congregation recognizes and celebrates this diversity. Consider the composition of your membership – are there households headed by a mom and a dad, by single parents? Do you have foster families or adoptive families in your congregation? Do you have bi-racial families? Do you have grandparents who
are raising their grandchildren? Do you have immigrant or refugee families? Consider what images of God are being used in your congregation, is God spoken of as both mother and father, caretaker and sustainer? Do the images in your Sunday School material and on bulletin cover include a diverse understanding of the family of God? Do illustration and images in sermons and newsletter articles point to and celebrate the diversity of the family of God? Based on this how well does your congregation communicate and celebrate an understanding of the diversity of God’s family?

**Closing Prayer**

Close with the Disciples Women’s Benediction or a prayer led by someone in your group.
Session 4

Supplies

Bibles, the Winter Issue of *Just Women* focus on *Raising the Bar: From Limbo to New Life Helping Immigrant Women and Children* by Sharon Stanley-Rea, supplies listed with chosen icebreaker.

Prior to your group meeting visit the Refugee and Immigration web pages [https://www.discipleshomemissions.org/dhm/dhm-ministries/refugee-immigration-ministries/rim-resources/childrens-resources/](https://www.discipleshomemissions.org/dhm/dhm-ministries/refugee-immigration-ministries/rim-resources/childrens-resources/) and familiarize yourself with what is there.

Opening Prayer

O God, may your Church discover and then identify its life with groups of people who suffer injustice and remain unheard. May your Church be the voice of the voiceless. Let your Church find them and struggle with them and so find the way of your cross and the way to true responsibility. Amen.

Emilio Castro Uruguay


Icebreaker

The Balloon Game

Refugees face many issues each day that we may take for granted. This game will provide your group members with an opportunity to consider what it may be like for refugees to “juggle” all the life issues they face each day.

Supplies - 5 balloons in five colors, marker and 3 x 5 card for scenario card.

How to Play ~

1. Blow up five balloons.
2. On a 3 x 5 card print the following: Imagine you are a refugee trying to juggle all the competing pressures of living in the United States. These balloons face some of the issues you might face each day. Your challenge is to keep as many balloons in the air as possible. When a balloon hits the floor your turn is ended.
3. Provide the following instructions. Today, we are going to consider what it might be like to be a refugee. I have five balloons. The red balloon represents food. The yellow balloon represents language. The blue balloon represents education. The purple balloon represents housing. The green balloon represents the fact that you are a minor. Your goal is to juggle the balloons for 30 seconds. If a balloon hits the floor your turn is over and it is the next person’s turn.

4. Play.

Alternate Icebreaker
Supplies: My Life as a Refugee App

Download and Play My Life as a Refugee that is available through the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on android and apple mobile devices. Visit the app store to download for free.

Alternate Icebreaker
Supplies - Music source and a pole (you can use the handle of a broom)

As the music plays, play limbo by taking turns passing under the pole as it lowers. Anyone who touches the pole is out of the contest and the one who goes under last wins.

Scripture Focus
Matthew 2: 13 – 18

Questions
Summarize the information on immigrants and refugees that you found on the DHM website. You may want to focus on assistance that Week of Compassion is providing.

- Merriam-Webster defines limbo as: 1) an abode of souls according to Roman Catholic theology barred from heaven because of not having received Christian baptism, 2) a place or state of restraint or confinement, neglect or oblivion, a state of uncertainty, 3) a dance or contest that involves bending over backwards and passing under a horizontal pole lowered slightly for each successive pass. In Stanley-Rea’s article she describes the state in which immigrants find themselves as “caught in limbo and searching for hope.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
- Summarize what is going on in many Central American countries. What would hope look like in this situation?
- What experience face the children and families that are arriving from Central America? How long might the process take? What feelings and emotions might a child experience as they
experience the dangerous journey and process of obtaining refugee status in the United States? What emotions and concerns would motivate a family to make such a journey?

- Stanley-Rea compares the experience of these children and families to that of Mary, Joseph and Jesus in the flight to Egypt. Read Matthew 2: 13 – 18. What emotions do you think Mary and Joseph were experiencing? Scripture speaks of, “A voice in Ramah wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they were no more.” Compare this experience of the slain children with the socio-economic circumstances that face those who remain in Central America. How would you feel to have to choose between staying in such an environment or fleeing to a foreign country?

- Stanley-Rea states that in America we participate in the limbo by lowering the pole. In the Islands, the Limbo can be a part of the mourning ritual that involves the pole being raised to symbolize life that rises out of death. What would Resurrected Life look like for the children and families that are fleeing from Central America? The article concludes with an assessment from the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, “There is no way to humanely detain families.” Do you agree or disagree? If you agree what do you believe should be our response to the situation in Central America and to the arrival of the children and their families?

- The issue of immigration and refugees from Central America has been a source of debate and in many instances disagreement. What are the obstacles to welcoming the stranger and providing hospitality to the sojourner? How can these obstacles and barriers be overcome?

- It has been suggested that in addition to welcoming and providing haven for children fleeing from Central America, long term solutions must also be implemented. These solutions include addressing the root causes of this humanitarian crisis. Poverty and lack of opportunity must be addressed through investment in sustainable development. Violence and child and crime victim protection systems must be addressed through development and investment in community-based youth violence protection programs, providing resources and technical assistance for shelters for women and children fleeing violence and support of well-trained, well-resourced child protection systems in areas from which children are fleeing. Do you agree or disagree with the need for long-term solutions? Why or why not? Can you identify ways that you are involved in these long term solutions, i.e. support of fair trade? Find ways to support fair trade from Disciples Women at discipleswomen.org/linkbylink-demand or at Week of Compassion at weekofcompassion.org You can be more informed about the issues and ways of being involved by receiving *The Disciples’ Advocate* published by Disciples Home Mission. Individual copies are available as a free download (PDF) or by going to the DHM website and completing a subscription.

**To go deeper**

According to Week of Compassion you can assist in the following ways:
• Pray for those seeking refuge, for their families, for the communities they flee, and the communities who receive them.

• To learn more about the dynamics in Central America that are driving this crisis, how you can become involved in advocating on behalf of these unaccompanied children, and the realities of the situation on the border, visit the Refugee and Immigration Ministries Resource Page. These resources are great for helping your church understand the complicated dynamics and finding a way to respond.

• If you or your church is in a community that has been affected by the influx of refugees, consider a ministry of hospitality, such as that being coordinated by Lilies of the Valley. Troubling reports are emerging that, in some instances, DHS is dealing with the developing crisis by dropping off women and children after initial screening in potentially vulnerable spaces, such as parking lots and bus stops. As one recent example, there have been reports of more than 50 children and women being dropped off at shopping center parking lots in Yuma, Arizona. Faith communities in Yuma are working together to provide housing, gather clothing and food donations and help coordinate bus tickets so that these women and children can reach relatives elsewhere in the United States and await their court dates to determine if they can stay or will be deported. If this is something your church is engaging in, please be in touch with your Regional Office, RIM, or Week of Compassion. There may be opportunities for us to collaborate.

• Finally, put your Compassion into Action by partnering with Week of Compassion to support the needs of these children. Your support has already provided much needed aid, but there is much more to do.

**Closing Prayer**

Close with the following prayer written by Rev. Dr. Sharon Stanley-Rea or with the Disciples Women’s Benediction.

Let us Pray,

Voice 1: God, whose spirit migrated over the waters of chaos before creation to bring it beauty and order, we remember the fleeing children and their families here today because of those conversations that have taken place in the hush of the night in Honduras, (Voice 2) in El Salvador, (Voice 3) in Guatemala (Voice 1) and elsewhere among families aching for an exit from extortion, violence, murders, and poverty.

Voice 2: We gather because of wrenching decisions to board the beast for transit, to corral coy and costly coyotes and journey north—not for what can be gotten...but because staying safe in untenable
conditions is most often no longer even an option.

Voice 3: We gather because the children are gathered right now, ages two and ten and teens--on trails and in teams and with trauma and near tragedy—trying to leave terrors behind and find safety among us.

ALL: COMFORT THEM, LORD!

Voice 2: When many in our land have said the solution to their pain is to expedite their removal more quickly—

ALL: GIVE OUR GOVERNMENT AND ALL LEADERS FAR MORE COMPASSIONATE RESPONSES.

Voice 3: When busloads have been denied access points for care by cars full who have come in to push them back with their shouts—

ALL: BE THAT STILL, SMALL VOICE THAT BUILDS TO AN EVER PRESENT ROAR FOR JUSTICE AND WELCOME!

Voice 1: When families on all sides of borders are searching for hope to be reunited and find help in this world where you gave us more than enough to share—

ALL: MAY THE STRENGTH OF YOUR HOLY SPIRIT BE WHAT IS FOUND AND FELT—IN EACH PERSON AND IN OUR POLICIES.

Voice 3: And when souls of the children feel like parched plants from their real desert wanderings—

ALL: GOD, COME HOME TO THEIR HEARTS AND OURS, AND GIVE THEM ROOTS DEEP IN THE SOIL OF GOD’S MARVELOUS LOVE UNTIL WE ALL CAN ACT KNOWING AND TRUSTING JUST HOW DEEP AND HOW WIDE YOUR LOVE REALLY IS.

Voice 1 & 2 & 3: You have brought us here to hear their cries. Make our hearts open now, and give us the power to understand and to respond.

ALL: AMEN.