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Key Verse:
Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

Ephesians 4:15 (NIV)

We should speak the truth in love based on Ephesians 4:15, that is follow the truth in love, or be sincere in love to our fellow-Christians (in reality, all that we meet). While we adhere to the doctrine of Christ, which is the Truth, we should live in love one with another. Love is an excellent thing; but we must be careful to preserve truth together with it. Truth is an excellent thing; yet it is requisite that we speak it in love, and not in contention. These two should go together—truth and peace. That we should grow up into Christ in all things. We should actually strive to grow into Christ (or become Christ-like), so that we are more deeply rooted in him. In all things; in knowledge, love, faith, and all the parts of the new man. We should grow up towards maturity, which is opposed to being children. The more we grow into an acquaintance with Christ, faith in him, love to him, dependence upon him, the more we shall flourish in every grace. He is the head; and we should thus grow, that we may thereby honor our head. The Christian’s growth tends to the glory of Christ.¹

Questions:

❤  As you reflect on Ephesians 4:15, how would reflecting this verse in your life and in the life of the church make an impact on those you encounter?

❤  We all encounter challenges in this world that are contradictory to the Christian lifestyle that we are called to live. What are some practical ways that we can “speak the truth in love” to those around us?

¹ https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/matthew-henry/Eph.4.2-Eph.4.16 (commentary is developed using portions of this site).
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The key idea for this week is “I believe the church is God’s way to accomplish his purposes on earth.” As United Methodists we believe in a universal church or “one holy catholic and apostolic Church” as we state in the Nicene Creed (see last page). This has broad meaning, unlike other churches, we have an open table during Communion meaning that all can come to the table (Wesleyan theology teaches that Communion is a means of grace). It also means that Methodism is not the only way to heaven as some denominations believe. But it also means that we are called to action and are called to grow in our faith. One way to do that is through a Small Group or Sunday School (some may call it Christian Education).

Christian education? What’s that?

What images come to mind when you hear the words Christian education? Are your first thoughts of children in classrooms studying the Bible? For many of us the Sunday school is the primary place that we think of when we consider what it means to provide Christian education. But exactly what is it that happens in a Sunday school class that enables Christian education and formation to take place?

Christian education happens when people...

♥ **Learn the Bible.** People learn about God’s love as they hear the stories of the Bible. In surveys that ask the question, “What is the most important thing children learn in Sunday school?” the answer is most often “the Bible.” It is in Christian education settings that children learn the stories of the people of God and become familiar with God’s teachings through their study of the Bible. It is in Sunday school that children develop a Christian understanding of the purposes of Scripture, and it is through their experiences in Sunday school that they learn to recognize God’s call to them through the stories of the Bible as well as through the lives of the Christians who surround them.

♥ **Accept God’s Grace.** Knowing the Bible is not enough. In fact, many people who are not Christians know more about the Bible than many of us who are Christians. Knowledge of the Bible doesn’t create Christians. The belief that the words of the Bible are God’s message to us is what impels a person to become a Christian. It is the recognition that God’s love shown through Jesus Christ is real. It is the acceptance of God’s saving grace offered through Jesus.

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Christ as a special gift that enables one to become the person God created him or her to be.

- **Grow in Christian Faith.** Christian faith becomes a reality when the stories of the Bible and our personal experiences of God’s love and grace inspire us to love God and to trust God’s guidance, as we make decisions about living our lives each day. Christians want to learn more about Jesus’ teachings. Christians want to discover the gifts of God that come through the Holy Spirit. Christians want to turn their full attention to learning more about what it means to live as a person of faith. Christians are not satisfied simply to know the Bible and to believe in God; Christians want to grow in their understanding of God’s purposes. Christians want their relationship with God to grow deeper day by day and year by year.

- **Become Part of a Christian Community.** Christians recognize that the ability to grow in relationship to God is possible only in fellowship with other Christians. Although Christians value time alone in prayer and communion with God, Christians also welcome times to praise God and give thanks for God’s gracious love and care in worship and prayer with one another. Through the bond of Christian relationship that develops, Christians strengthen one another so that they are able to carry their experience of God’s presence and love into the activities of their everyday lives.

- **Answer God’s Call to Christian Living.** Living a Christian life does not come automatically. It comes through study, worship, and learning together. Sunday school is a beginning for children and youth. Sunday school, as well as many other settings for Christian formation, is essential for adults! When people learn to follow the example of Jesus Christ, they become Christian examples, revealing the love of God through their own actions at home, at work, at play, at church, or anywhere they may be. A yearning to follow the example of Jesus leads Christians to recognize the needs of others and to seek ways to serve in God’s name. Through Christian education activities at church individuals and families find ways to serve God by serving others.

Christian education does not happen quickly. Christian education is not something we do once as children—then when we get older, we’ve simply got it. No, Christian education is a lifelong process of learning, believing, growing, and serving. Christian education is a never-ending process that is enabled in Christian community, as Christians continue to study, worship, fellowship, and serve together.
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The lessons of Christian education make it possible for us to practice love and to live as children of God. How well we—children, youth, or adults—learn those lessons day by day will determine what kind of church we are Sunday by Sunday.

Christian education is a sacred responsibility. To give Christian education less than our best would be unfaithful to the life God has called us to live and to the world God has called us to serve. If there is ever a generation somewhere, sometime, that does not know the power of God’s love, it will be because some generation did not continue to teach and learn.

Christian Education? What’s That? is published by Cokesbury and is available for free distribution. Permission is granted to duplicate for church use. For additional information about curriculum resources, call Curric-U-Phone at 800•251•8591, or email curricuphone@umpublishing.org.

Questions:

♥ Christian education enrollment is declining over all. That makes you a select group. Based on the article above, what would you tell someone about the importance of Christian Education?

♥ Of the five attributes of Christian Education listed, which is the easiest to do?
  ○ Which is the hardest and why?

♥ How can you make Christian education a “life-long process of learning, believing, growing, and serving” as the article mentions?
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Methodism started as a movement to inspire and train disciples for Christian living and to spread scriptural holiness across the land. John Wesley, our founder, taught that Christian living was to practice the means of grace and that scriptural holiness was the combination of personal holiness (a transformation of the heart) and social holiness (a transformation of the world).³

Questions:

♥ What is the power of getting together with a group to discuss a Biblical or Christian topic?

♥ What is the best way to encourage a “combination of personal holiness (a transformation of the heart) and social holiness (a transformation of the world)”?

Vital small groups fueled a movement⁴

This movement began with a few young college men who started the first small group in Methodism. Commonly known as the Holy Club, the concept of personal holiness and social holiness caught fire. The holiness of life was attained through these small groups that were called class meetings. Class meetings were small groups of people gathering in homes for prayer, study and accountability for the Christian life. Later, after Methodism spread from England to the United States, the movement of small groups and spreading scriptural holiness would emerge into congregations and eventually a denomination. Prior to that, the movement was a renewal community made up of small groups. As the movement started congregations and a denomination, it continued its same mission, help people live the Christian life through the means of grace and spread scriptural holiness. It employed the same core ministries of training laity to lead small groups, engaging in

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ministries with the poor (social holiness), and sending out exhorters (personal holiness through sending teachers and preachers to share the Gospel.)

Questions:

♥ John Wesley and his fellow Holy Club members had no idea what they would ultimately empower when they began. What does that say to you about the power of a small group?

Read the article below. Although initially aimed at Korean American United Methodists, the same can be true for any church. As you read this article, reflect on what attributes make a small group, a healthy and vibrant group. Then look at the discussion questions at the end of the article.

A gift from Korean American United Methodists

By Sam Hodges
June 2, 2014 | DALLAS (UMNS)

Less can be more, small can be beautiful and small group ministry can lead to church growth and more meaningful Christian lives.

That last idea, especially, is embraced by Korean American United Methodists. The proof is in a new English-language translation of a small group ministry leader training guide.

“Longing to Meet You,” originally published in Korean four years ago, combines practical advice with Wesleyan theology.

http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/a-gift-from-korean-american-united-methodists
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Bishop Hee-Soo Jung, president of the denomination’s Korean Ministry Plan, calls the English translation “a gift from the Korean community for the revitalization of the United Methodist Church.”

The Rev. Paul Hak-Soon Chang, executive director of the Korean Ministry Plan, hopes the book will eventually be translated into other languages and reach far beyond the denomination.

For now, though, the aim is more specific and modest.

“Our first target is the English-speaking Korean Americans, the ‘next generation’ Korean Americans,” Chang said, stressing that it would be valuable for any English-speaking congregation.

Korea is a country of mega-churches, with some far larger than the biggest in the United States. But among the throngs coming for worship are many who meet elsewhere in groups of seven to 12 for Bible study and mutual accountability and support.

“The secret to those large churches is the small group ministry,” Chang said. “Almost every large church in Korea has a very strong small-group ministry, and the Methodist churches are not an exception.”

Such groups constitute important building blocks for those churches by strengthening individual Christian lives, said the Rev. Keihwan Kevin Ryoo, associate pastor of First United Methodist Church of Rapid City, S.D., and pastor of Rapid City Korean Church.

“In the 21st century, people want to have a meaningful relationship within the church,” Ryoo said. “And in order to grow, in order to be mature as a Christian, you’ve got to have a good Christian community to grow in.”
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Materials abound for training small-group ministry leaders, but Korean American United Methodists noticed a dearth of materials grounded in the theology of John Wesley, founder of Methodism.

The Korean-language original version of “Longing to Meet You” fills that gap with its emphasis on grace, including prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace. It also offers stresses the importance of prayer, Bible reading and working through a series of questions aimed at providing an honest, supportive environment for Christian growth.

About 3,000 copies of two editions of the Korean-language version have been distributed, with roughly 300 clergy and 1,500 laypersons going through training sessions tailored to the book, Chang said.

The book already has begun to be used in the Korean Methodist Church, a separate denomination in Korea, he added.


She had translated articles and sermons but never a full-length book. The experience, given the subject, was a labor of love.

“T’ve witnessed how churches grow through small group ministry,” she said. “For me, it was so exciting to bring those assets into Wesley theology.”

On the cover for “Longing to Meet You” is the late Japanese Christian artist Sadao Watanabe’s depiction of the Last Supper. The image is fitting, Chang said, since it shows Jesus in small group ministry with the disciples.

John Wesley did not make the cover, but his example, as well as his theology, informs the book.
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Ryoo notes that Wesley insisted that followers of Methodism spend time in weekly class meetings, believing them crucial to Christian formation.

Questions:

♥ Why reasons can you give that Bible Study and mutual accountability might be more approachable in a Small Group?

♥ How can we foster “meaningful relationship within the church” within either a Small Group or Christian Education class?

♥ What might a study with “emphasis on grace, including prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace” look like for our culture here at St. Stephen’s?
  ○ Do you think it would be different than “Longing to Meet You” that was written for Korean Americans?
Sunday School*

Small Indian Reservation Church Offers Big Ministry

If a church's size is measured by how many bodies occupy the pews on any given Sunday, then Wilbur Memorial United Methodist Church in White Swan is small.

However, if the number of people a church serves is the yardstick, the White Swan church is large indeed. It is the weekly ministry that makes this church a community focal point, particularly with children and youth.

Located in a remote corner of the Yakama Indian Reservation in Washington state, the White Swan church operates as a kind of social services agency supported in part by federal grants, tribal money and a connection with the school district. Every school day, five buses unload children, kindergarten-age through fifth grade, at the church's doorstep to join in the congregation's after-school program.

Nearly 70 kids, many of whom have learning disabilities or behavioral problems, work with tutors for homework help, and participate in learning activities and organized recreation, and have snacks. Financial support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Yakama Nation and private donors makes it all possible.

Church member and teacher Glenda Hargrave has parlayed her passion for education into the ministry.

"I believe that education is the key to getting people where they want to go in life," she said. "We try to create an enthusiasm for learning here." She smiles. "Sometimes, the kids even ask me for homework. It's really awesome."

Before moving to White Swan, Hargrave ran her own private school for 22 years. In this, the fourth year of the program, Hargrave says the average attendance has more than doubled over last year, and she has a waiting list of 20 kids. The ministry works well, in part, because of the ongoing connection with teachers, who refer children to the program.

"Teachers tell us they notice a difference in the kids' school work," she said. And when a child "forgets" to do homework, it's not unusual for a teacher to call Hargrave

http://www.umc.org/resources/sunday-school
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and check on the student. "I make sure they do their homework the next night," she said, demonstrating her stern teacher face.

Teen-agers benefit from the program too. High school students are paid to work as tutors and supervisors of the children, learning valuable life skills from a job that doesn't take away too many hours from their own homework responsibilities.

Tutor Janice Piel says she works in the program because she likes teaching. As the children thunder off the bus, Janice is one of the first to greet them and lead them into the church, her quiet presence a calming contrast to the boisterous energy of the kids. "I really like kids," she says with a grin as she offers assistance to a fifth-grade boy hard at work on his science studies.

Wearing her high school letterman's jacket close about her, Leona Plumlee comments that she is glad for the opportunity to "learn greater responsibility" in this job. But she and the other tutors agree it's really the fun aspect of the job that makes it so appealing.

Sharon Piel, a more mature tutor, sees what the program brings to the White Swan community. "Many of these kids come from broken homes, and they need a place where they are safe and not getting into trouble," she said. "I've seen the kids here really take an interest in their work. They begin to appreciate learning. That is good for their future."

The church expanded the ministry last summer. Taking only a week off in between school and summer break, 50 students continued to develop their skills each day, all day long, with lesson plans in school work and enriching activities and crafts. The program was bolstered by the volunteer efforts of a nondenominational group called YouthWorks out of Minneapolis. YouthWorks sent ongoing groups of 50 to 70 high school youth per week to help with the program and to mentor the children. Photos of all the youth who visited are displayed in a corner of the meeting room.

The Rev. Jane Sautter, pastor at Wilbur Memorial United Methodist Church, finds great satisfaction in the ministry taking place each weekday.

"People from all over the country helped us this summer — people from Ohio, Georgia, Minnesota. It was truly amazing. And all of them expressed to us what a great program we have going here," she said. "It's been very satisfying."
Local United Methodist support has been vital too. Visiting volunteers went home and raised funds or collected donations of supplies to the school. The Aldersgate United Methodist Church in Bellevue, Wash., purchased and built a playground for the kids. And people from throughout the Pacific Northwest Conference volunteer or send regular contributions to the ministry.

Despite all that's working with the ministry, Sautter adds that the children make it all worthwhile. "This is a place where kids truly feel loved, and there is so much hope in that," she said.

It takes a lot of work to create a special place, Sautter admits, estimating that about 90 percent of her time is spent writing and administering grants, researching funding sources and developing community partnerships. But, she adds, this is where she wants to be.

"I feel called to this work here, and I feel a power and a peace knowing I'm where I'm supposed to be," she said. "When God's will and mine intersect ... well, it's a beautiful thing."

And where vision and need intersect, it is just as beautiful.

**Question:**

- ♥ This is just one example of where a church serves the community. In what ways does this article inspire you?

- ♥ How can you use your Small Group or Christian Education class to make a difference in our community?
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Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, light from light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and became truly human.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.