

Module 6 – Exercise on how language and images of God affect faith

**(Divide the large group into 3 groups, each reading one of the stories and discussing questions.*

Story 1

While walking home after work, Ruth was raped by a stranger posing as a jogger. She was a teenager. Days afterward, he called her house, bringing more terror to her parents. He was never apprehended. Fear and anger covered her and her family. Many images of God fed them in their grief. Now an adult, Ruth is one of many survivors of violence who say that predominantly male-identified language and images of God hurt.²

Story 2

A man in prison was visited by a young pastor who had been assigned there by his seminary. The pastor tried to console the man by assuring him of the love of God the Father. The man stopped the pastor. “Don’t talk to me about a father’s love. I only saw my father a few times in my life, and each time he beat me. He abused me and my mother and my sisters and brothers. That’s what I know of fathers.”³

Story 3

With great joy, we gathered for the baptism of our granddaughter, Hannah. Though I believe Scripture’s promise that Hannah is created in the image of God, I was troubled that her baptismal service included only male and neutral language for God. Yes, I know the theological and ecumenical reasons for baptizing in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; still I wondered why other parts of the liturgy didn’t include more expansive images for God (Mother of all life; Holy Wisdom calling us to her table).

And then I wondered: Would it be so surprising if Hannah were to struggle more than her older brother in seeing herself in the divine image? If the worship they experience uses mostly male pronouns and images to speak of God, wouldn’t it be entirely possible for our grandson to carry a deeper sense that he bears God’s image?

Questions:

1. How can we support the need for someone like “Ruth” who is able to see God only as a woman/mother?
2. How can we as a community of Christ respond to someone who cannot see God as a father because of the sins of an earthly father?
3. How can we include girls as well as boys in our language of being created in God’s image?