

Working for Justice



Exploration: Discovery

About this Setting

When we open ourselves to God’s presence and God’s word in worship, we open ourselves to moments of insight and discovery. We gather to discover how we are already and will more fully become a community of faith. We gather to discover God’s presence within, among, and around us. We come to see that a central means by which we experience this discovery is in doing the work of justice. We have the opportunity to discover that the longing for freedom, wholeness, and peace we share with all oppressed people is the taproot from which working for justice grows.

Activities in this Exploration provide worship planners resources to design services of worship that explore working for justice as an integral part of practicing our faith. These activities are made up of arts—rich, experiential elements in their design—to highlight how the imaginative use of music, arts, and words contributes to the worship life of a congregation. By choosing one or more activities from each category (Exploring & Engaging, Discerning & Deciding, and Sending & Serving), planners will have resources to use for the beginning, middle, and end of a worship service.

Many of these activities suggest an interactive style, inviting worshipers to reflect on their experiences of elements of the service (such as visual displays), or on God’s Word, or in sharing when they ask others to pray. This interactive style often engages young adults who prefer to be active participants in worship rather than observers. Not all congregations will find this comfortable at first, so experimenting with ways to create the spiritual space within which people share may be necessary. When these interactive reflections function as “a sermon” in worship, it often works well for the pastor or other theologically sensitive persons to be prepared to summarize and bring reflections to a close. When an interactive reflection

does not fit the worship needs of a congregation, preachers and worship leaders are encouraged to take the questions and thought starters in these activities into consideration as they prepare their own reflections.

About this Exploration

Working for justice is a vital ingredient in the personal and communal lives of God’s faithful people. God desires and requires the faithful to work for justice. By working for justice, we creatively level the playing field, break down walls, and nurture environments so that all may experience a whole and holy life free of oppression, degradation, and exclusion. We encounter stories, interpret scriptures, and participate in activities that bring a fuller awareness of how to engage actively in justice work in the home, church, community, and world.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Isaiah 1:1, 10–18
Luke 4:14–21

Leader Preparation

The text of the hymn “The Church of Christ in Ev’ry Age” by mid-20th century writer F. Pratt Green is prophetic in its scope and focus. This song is published in many hymnals, and can also be found through this link: <http://www.oremus.org/hymnal/t/t089.html>. It will be a good centering prayer with which to begin making choices for structuring experiences in which people explore what it means to live faithfully doing the work of justice.

- Find a place and time where you are able to reflect prayerfully.
- Fill your imagination with the ways you are connected to the suffering of injustice in your life, congregation, denomination, community, and world.
- Use the hymn as a vehicle for your prayer. Speak the words or sing them, but let them fill your heart and imagination.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Gathering in Vision and Hope (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Useful in many worship contexts throughout the church year, the hymn “O for a World,” by Miriam Therese Winter, is an ecumenical expression of vision and hope. It was written for a Presbyterian women’s conference by a Roman Catholic sister who teaches at a nondenominational seminary with Congregational roots, and it has been published in many denominational hymnals. For more information about Miriam Therese Winter, you may view her faculty profile at <http://www.hartsem.edu/faculty/winter.htm>.

Supplies:

- hymn: “O for a World” by Miriam Therese Winter (tune: Azmon); lyrics, <http://www.beckleypresby.com/id21.html>; music, <http://www.ccel.org/cceh/0000/x000069.htm>

This hymn has a remarkable ability to fill a range of spiritual and emotional needs, from expressing celebration of a vision to serving as a lament at the vision’s fragility. Its lyrics point our hearts and minds to a world transformed by fulfillment of the Gospel’s priorities of mutuality, respect, and well-being for all, including the poor and vulnerable.

The emotional and spiritual richness of this hymn make it useful in many ways. Sung at the beginning or end of a service, it can be a celebration of this vision and hope. Sung as part of a time of prayer, it becomes a prayer for the fulfillment of this vision. In the face of a national or international tragedy or crisis, it can take on the function of a lament at the contrast between harsh reality and the vision just beyond our grasp.

At a technical/musical level, the tone and style of accompaniment and the liturgical context in which it is sung contribute to and suggest this spiritual and emotional range. It sings well as a simple hymn. It works well accompanied by guitar, harp, or other “folk” instruments. It swings gently when played in a Gospel style.

In planning to use this hymn, consider the following questions:

- What is the emotional tone of the worship service you are planning?
- How will you accompany this song to complement that tone?

Prayer: *“We have no mission but to serve in full obedience to our Lord: to care for all, without reserve, and spread his liberating word.” Amen.* (v. 5, “The Church of Christ in Ev’ry Age,” verse 5)



2 Longing for Justice

Leader preparation: George Tooker’s painting “Embrace of Peace” offers an opportunity for discovery. Before using this image as part of a service of worship, please take time to engage the painting in some detail and to read about the artist’s life and work. The more we know of this artist’s journey, the more we understand his evocative images, which are in themselves witnesses for justice in an unjust world.

This artist lived at the edges of his world, always somewhat the outsider looking in. His shyness, his mixed Cuban-French heritage, his gayness, his participation in 1960s Civil Rights actions (such as Dr. King’s Selma-to-Montgomery march), and his reliance on centuries-old artistic techniques, when others were pushing the expressionist limits of technique and imagination all, set him apart from his times. His life partner, artist William Christopher, was raised by an African American family after the death of his parents. It was Christopher that led Tooker more deeply into exploring themes of working for justice.

- How might a life story such as Tooker’s help him identify with people’s longing for freedom, equality, and justice?
- What in your own story helps you experience longing for freedom, equality, and justice?
- How does this longing inspire you to participate in advocacy and action for justice?

Supplies:

- artwork: “Embrace of Peace” by George Tooker, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401
- hymn: “O for a World” (see Activity 1)
- small pieces of paper for writing prayer bids/reflections, to be distributed to worshipers along with bulletin
- pencils or pens

Invite worshipers to view George Tooker’s “Embrace of Peace” and to take note of emotions communicated in and stirred by this painting. Tell them of Tooker’s background. A musician playing a verse or two of “O for a World” would make a good background for this time of reflection. Then invite worshipers to consider these questions:

- For what are you longing?
- When you hear of the longings of oppressed people, what personal connections do you sense to those longings?

Provide paper and writing instruments, and invite folks to write a sentence or two to express their longing or their connection to the longings of others. Collect these papers and use them as part of a time of prayer later in the service.



3 Live in the Light

Leader preparation: Print the congregation’s response in this reading in the bulletin, or prepare to project it. Alternately, plan to teach the response verbally. People will catch on quickly and won’t need to see it in print.

Supplies:

- “Isaiah 1:1, 10–18,” Attachment: Activity 3



The reading of Isaiah 1:1, 10–18 from the attachment can function in a service of worship either as a reading of scripture or as a Call to Worship. Invite four people to serve as readers, and provide them with printed scripts in advance so they can prepare.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Scripture in a Round (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: When we hear the account of Jesus reading from scripture at worship, as recorded in Luke 4, we hear him identifying with a voice from the justice-making traditions of his faith community. This dramatic reading of scripture embodies this by presenting the Isaiah 61 text as a background to a reading of Luke 4.

Invite four readers to participate in presenting Luke 4 against the background of Isaiah 61. Three readers will prepare to read Isaiah 61:1–7 from three different versions—the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), *The Message*, the New King James, Hebrew, or another language common to members of the congregation (e.g., Spanish, Maori). One reader will prepare to read Luke 4:14–21 from the New Revised Standard Version. Given the nature of this activity, you might want to recruit your choir director and three others who regularly sing together to do this dramatic style of reading.

Invite the chosen readers to live with the texts for a week or so, reading them frequently and internalizing them (not necessarily memorizing, just making the texts their own). Then invite the readers to rehearse this reading together for a few minutes so they have a sense of how their four voices collaborate to present the heart of these texts to listeners. Have them pay attention to how they will draw the readings to a close as Luke 4:21 is read.

Supplies:

- Bibles of varying translations and paraphrases

The Isaiah readers stand around the room (one at the back, one on each side of the congregation). A fourth reader, who will read from Luke, stands at the lectern or wherever scripture is normally read aloud in your setting.

Present the text from Isaiah in a kind of round. Reader 1 begins reading Isaiah 61:1–3, 11. After Reader 1 says “The Spirit of the Lord . . .,” Reader 2 begins. Reader 3 begins when Reader 2 says “The Spirit of the Lord . . .” a few seconds Reader 2 begins. After a few more seconds, Reader 3 begins. Each reader continues to repeat the whole line, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,” as needed to continue providing a backdrop of sound for the reading of Luke 4. Finally, as the sound collage of the Isaiah 61 text is established, Reader 4 presents Luke 4:14–21 as the central focus of attention in this dramatic reading.

Reader 1: The Spirit of the LORD is upon me . . .

Reader 2: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . .

Reader 3: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . .

Readers 1–3 continue reading their texts, looping around to the beginning of the texts as needed, lowering the volume of their voices to provide a sound environment that allows people clearly to hear Reader 4.



Reader 4: Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit . . .

As the reading of Luke 4 ends, each Isaiah reader continues reading in a quiet voice to the end of the passage, and the “round” comes to a gradual end.

5 “You Gotta Give Them Hope”

Leader preparation: In a time when the election of openly gay candidates for public office is not so uncommon, it is good to remember when Harvey Milk was the first openly gay person elected to public office. In some ways, Harvey was an unlikely candidate; in some ways, he was just the right man for the right time. As his public role became clear, he was first and foremost an expression of hope among a historically oppressed community.

Wikipedia’s article about Harvey Milk provides a comprehensive overview of his life in order to better to appreciate the significance of his assassination and his continuing inspiration for those who dedicate their lives to working for justice: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvey_Milk. For background presented in text, audio, and pictures, the article on National Public Radio’s website presents a rich resource.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet connection for playing video clips from YouTube
- digital projector

Use the following video clips in a service of worship as reflections on the Word. Project at least the first two. The other two will make it a richer experience but can be skipped.

- “The Last Words of Harvey Milk,” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-U_owSvbn00
- “Harvey Milk Speech—Hope,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzQ3NFXwpV8>
- “Milk Movie Trailer,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zp0uYT0zDbA>
- “Gotta Give ‘Em Hope: The Legacy of Harvey Milk” (NPR), <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=96865519>

Conclude the viewing of these videos with a quotation from Harvey Milk from a speech he gave the day after he was inaugurated as San Francisco’s first openly gay supervisor:

The American Dream starts with neighborhoods. If we wish to rebuild our cities, we must first rebuild our neighborhoods. To sit on the front steps—whether it’s a veranda in a small town or a concrete stoop in a big city—is infinitely more important than to huddle on the living room lounge and watch a make-believe world in not-quite living color. . . .

Yesterday, my esteemed colleague on the board said we cannot live on hope alone. I know that. . . . The important thing is not that we can live on hope alone, but that life is not worth living without it. If the story of Don Quixote means anything, it means that the spirit of life is just as important as its substance.

Invite people to share their reflections.

- How did Harvey embody the spirit of Isaiah 61 and Luke 4?



- What does God's Spirit have to teach us in Harvey's biography?
- How do we embody hope for the world around us?

6 Longing and Praying

Leader preparation: This activity connects with Activity 2 above. Use the papers collected on which worshippers wrote their longings for themselves and for others. A worship leader can organize those responses into thematic units appropriate for public prayer.

Supplies:

- pieces of paper gathered in Activity 2

Use the worshippers' responses to create a prayer such as the following:

Leader: Gracious God, we live in praise of your loving presence in our world. We give you thanks because you are with us in all the circumstances of our lives and our world. Today we lift our hearts and concerns in prayer trusting in the love you have for us and for all you have made. Let us pray for (Worship leader improvises a bid for prayer based on themes reflected in what the worshippers wrote.) God, in your mercy,

People: Receive our prayer.

When prepared bids for prayer have been offered, invite worshippers to pray what is on their hearts saying:

Leader: For what else do the people of God pray this day?

People: (Pray in silence or voice your joy or concern you wish to lift in prayer.)

Leader: (The Leader may want to summarize bids for prayer as they are expressed.) God, in your mercy . . .

People: Receive our prayer.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 "Guide My Feet" (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Take time to internalize the spiritual strength of the lyrics and tune of the song "Guide My Feet." Take prayerful time to make this song your own vehicle for prayer.

Supplies:

- "Guide My Feet," Attachment: Activity 7
- song: "Guide My Feet" (tune: Guide My Feet); [YouTube video, http://tinyurl.com/FP_Song20](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FP_Song20); words and music, <http://www.hymnsite.com/fws/hymn.cgi?2208>

Invite people to join in singing "Guide My Feet," either with its original lyrics or with an appropriate paraphrase. The following verses were written for a congregation in the process of revitalizing its ministry.



- Lift our spirits while we run this race, (x3) For we don't want to run this race in vain.
- Spark our passions while we run this race, (x3) For we don't want to run this race in vain.
- Shape our visions while we run this race, (x3) For we don't want to run this race in vain.
- Guide our footsteps while we run this race, (x3) For we don't want to run this race in vain.

Alternative verses written by Rev. Jeremy E. McLeod ©2008. All rights reserved.
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8 Isaiah and Harvey Bless Us on the Way

Leader preparation: This activity contains passages from scripture placed in counterpoint with other sources. In this case, the paraphrase is of words from Isaiah 61 coupled with a quotation from Harvey Milk. Together, they create a way to bring scripture into dialogue with the themes of our lives.

Supplies:

- "Isaiah and Harvey Bless Us on the Way," Attachment: Activity 8

Use the litany on the attachment in a service of worship as a response to the reading of scripture.

9 "Singing for Our Lives"

Leader preparation: When Harvey Milk's assassin, Dan White, received what many felt was a trivial sentence for his crime, San Francisco's gay community erupted in violent protest. Out of that context, lesbian folksinger Holly Near composed a gentle, angry, and loving song that expresses longing and commitment to living as embodiments of justice making. Since then, the song has evolved to serve as a moving anthem for many communities and communities of faith working in the struggle for justice.

Supplies:

- song: "Singing for Our Lives," by Holly Near; lyrics on Holly Near website, http://www.hollynear.com/and_still.html
- "Moscone-Milk Memorial, 2008 (YouTube video presenting some of the historical connections in this song), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LbXq0oU5osg>
- "Singing for Peace: Our Global Family" (YouTube video with a more meditative presentation of images related to the song), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PcT3JKNggHg>
- computer with Internet connection and projection ability

If possible, have musicians accompany the singing of this song for congregational singing (piano, organ, or guitar). If preferred, project the video "Singing for Peace: Our Global Family" for people to watch, and lead them in singing along with its sound track. Alternately, project the video without its audio track after your musicians have rehearsed sufficiently to time their playing to the flow of the video's images.



Following the Church Year

When worship life follows the themes and rhythms of the church year, it is deeply connected to the stuff of scripture. Because the Bible often brings our attention to the themes of working for justice, our worship has frequent opportunities to reflect those themes as we pray, praise, and celebrate together.

When we gather for a service of worship that grows from the heart of scripture, our worship enters into relationship with God's presence within and among the community of faith. The Common Lectionary, a three-year cycle of scripture readings structuring themes for a year's journey through the seasons of the church year, is a rich, creative, and challenging resource for planners of worship.

"The Text This Week" website is a remarkable resource for scripture study and worship planning: <http://www.textweek.com/>. In each case the scriptures featured in this Exploration are appointed for particular weeks in the Church year. Using the resources at this website provides a delightful playground within which to spark creativity for planning services rooted in these themes.

Isaiah 1 is appointed in the Common Lectionary for two different weeks during "The Year of Luke," Year C. Luke/Acts explores what it means for followers of the Way of Jesus to widen the circle of the Good News to include all of the then-known peoples. Against this inclusive background, Isaiah's vision of God's justice is central to living out a life of faith that embodies the Good News among all the people of the world.

Isaiah 1 (<http://www.textweek.com/yearc/properc14.htm> and <http://www.textweek.com/yearc/properc26.htm>)

The season of Epiphany is rich with themes of discovering one's call to ministry, the richness of gifts for ministry in the whole of the Body of Christ, and the discipleship that leads us forward in ministry. Epiphany in the Year of Luke can call our attention to living out this calling in the Work of Justice for all people.

Luke 4 (<http://www.textweek.com/yearc/epiphc3.htm>)

Luke 4 and the Isaiah 61 passage it quotes are commonly chosen as central texts for ordinations or commissionings when the ministry being recognized is particularly connected to a calling grounded in the work of justice.

Attachment: Activity 3

Isaiah 1:1, 10–18

A reading adapted from *The Message*

Reader 1

Listen up, Heaven! Listen up, Earth!
You are the jury in this case!

Leader

God's people, hear God's call.

People

Keep it simple. Keep it real. Live in the Light.

Reader 2

People of God, God is asking,
"Why this frenzy of sacrifices?
When you come before me,
whoever gave you the idea of acting like
this, . . .
running here and there,
doing this and that—
all this sheer commotion
in the place provided for worship?"

Leader

God's people, hear God's call.

People:

Keep it simple. Keep it real. Live in the Light.

Reader 3

"Give up your worship charades.
I can't stand your trivial religious games:
Monthly conferences, weekly Sabbaths,
special meetings—
meetings, meetings, meetings—
I can't stand one more!
Meetings for this, meetings for that.
I hate them! You've worn me out!
I'm sick of your religion, religion, religion,
while you go right on sinning."

Leader

God's people, hear God's call.

People

Keep it simple. Keep it real. Live in the Light.

Reader 4

"When you put on your next prayer-
performance,
I'll be looking the other way.
No matter how long or loud or often you
pray,
I'll not be listening.
And do you know why?
Because you've been
tearing people to pieces,
and your hands are bloody."

Leader

God's people, hear God's call.

People

Keep it simple. Keep it real. Live in the Light.

Reader 1

"So, go home.
Wash up. Clean up your act.
Sweep your lives clean of your evildoings
so I don't have to look at them any longer.
Say no to wrong.
Learn to do good.
Work for justice.
Help the down-and-out.
Stand up for the homeless.
Go to bat for the defenseless."

Leader

God's people, hear God's call.

People

Keep it simple. Keep it real. Live in the Light.

Scripture taken from *The Message*. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002.
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Attachment: Activity 7

Guide My Feet

African-American traditional; alt.

Heb. 12:1-15

1 Guide my feet while I run this race, guide my feet
 2 Hold my hand while I run this race, hold my hand
 3 I'm your child while I run this race, I'm your child
 4 Stand by me while I run this race, stand by me

Yes, my God.

while I run this race, guide my feet while I run this race,
 while I run this race, hold my hand while I run this race,
 while I run this race, I'm your child while I run this race,
 while I run this race, stand by me while I run this race,

Yes, my God.

For I don't want to run this race in vain.

*This stanza may be added following stanza 1:
Wheel with me while I run this race . . .*

Attachment: Activity 8

Isaiah and Harvey Bless Us on Our Way

Leader: The Spirit of the Sovereign God is upon us
anointing us to preach good news to the poor,
heal the heartbroken . . .

People: The important thing is not that we can live on hope alone,
but that life is not worth living without it.

Leader: The Spirit of the Sovereign God is upon us
anointing us to announce freedom to all captives,
pardon all prisoners . . .

People: The important thing is not that we can live on hope alone,
but that life is not worth living without it.

Leader: God sends us to announce the year of God's grace—
to comfort all who mourn, to give them
bouquets of roses instead of ashes,
messages of joy instead of news of doom,
a praising heart instead of a languid spirit . . .

People: The important thing is not that we can live on hope alone,
but that life is not worth living without it.

Leader: May God's Spirit breathe within us to bring hope
and joy where there is oppression and sorrow.

People: Amen.

Working for Justice



Exploration: Scripture

About this Setting

Christians at worship are a community gathered in the presence of God and in the name of Jesus Christ. In the words of scripture we come into the presence of the Living Word, the creative, redeeming, and empowering presence of God. Scriptures in this Exploration bring us face to face with God's clear expectation that God's people will be a community of righteousness and justice.

Activities in this setting provide worship planners resources to design worship services that explore working for justice as an integral part of practicing our faith. These activities make use of the arts—rich, experiential elements in their design—to highlight how the imaginative use of music, arts, and story can contribute to the worship life of a congregation. By choosing one or more activities from each of three categories (Exploring & Engaging, Discerning & Deciding, Sending & Serving), planners will have resources to use for the beginning, middle, and end of a service of worship.

Many of these activities suggest an interactive style, inviting worshippers to reflect on their experiences of elements of the service (such as visual displays), or on God's Word, or on sharing that for which they ask others to pray. This interactive style often engages young adults who prefer to be active participants in worship rather than observers. Not all congregations will find this comfortable at first, and experimenting with ways to create the spiritual space within which people will share may be necessary. When these interactive reflections function as "a sermon" in worship, it often works well for the pastor or other theologically sensitive persons to be prepared to summarize and bring the reflections to a close. When an

interactive reflection does not fit the worship needs of a congregation, preachers and worship leaders are encouraged to take the questions and thought starters in these activities into consideration as they prepare their own reflections.

About this Exploration

Scripture asks, What does God require of us? Scripture answers the question with marching orders and a road map. It admonishes against oppression, reminding us that we are all created in the image of God, and demanding that we work for a just world rooted in love. In Jesus we see the embodiment of loving justice, which flows like an ever-flowing stream, rippling out to encompass all persons, even the whole world. In this Exploration, we will discover God's disappointment and anger with injustice, God's care for the poor and disenfranchised, God's zeal for justice as a way of life, and God's expectation that we will structure our lives and relationships as Jesus did.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Micah 6:1-8
Amos 5:18-24

Leader Preparation

Scripture can be encountered at many levels. When we engage the narratives and images of scripture with our imaginations, we enter into a dialogue with life as we know it and life as God envisions it. As preparation for leading others in engaging their imaginations for encountering the Living Word, read the following excerpt from a lecture by N. T. Wright and view the images linked to this excerpt.

There's a work of art which stands at the moment in the great new atrium in the British Museum in London. The director of the British Museum is a practicing Christian, Neil McGregor. And he has with great courage put this work of art there. It speaks volumes about the nature of Christian imagination, taking the great biblical story and making it live again, speaking into and engaging with our culture. It's a sculpture from Mozambique, and it's a sculpture of the Tree of life, the Tree of life which stood there in the Garden of Eden, but was inac-

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Getting Wet (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity invites people to enjoy water as they experience it in several ways. One of the discoveries in this activity is how easy it can be for creative worship planners to use common materials often found lurking in cupboards and storage places at church to provide experiential elements for worship. In preparation for it, get in touch with your "inner Martha Stewart" (or recruit someone for whom this is easy) and create a simple activity center at the entrance to the worship area. On a small table, decorated to please the eye, place a large bowl of water, a pitcher of water, and cups for people to drink, if they choose. Paper towels will be helpful for those who get their hands wet.

Supplies:

- small, simply decorated table at the entrance to a worship space (Depending upon the size of your group, you may need more than one.)
- containers of water such as large bowls and pitchers with water of various temperatures (warm, room temp, iced)
- glasses or cups
- "Wade in the Water," Attachment: Activity 1
- towels for drying off
- (optional) water fountain

Invite participants to explore water through touch, sound, and taste. Encourage playful spirits! As they explore, ask them to tell stories about their favorite memories of water. Perhaps it is a favorite swimming or boating place; perhaps it is watching a child play in water; perhaps it is baptism. Ask them to recall scriptural images of water. They may name creation when God separated the waters, the story of Noah and the flood, the story of Elijah and the valley of dry bones, the story of Jesus' baptism or Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, and Jesus at the well with the Samaritan woman.

To close, touch each person's head or hand with water and offer a blessing such as, "I bless you in the name of the Creator Spirit who in the beginning hovered over the waters and who was present at Jesus' baptism."

cessible, the Tree of Life which now grows on the banks of the Waters of Life coming out of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 and 22. But this tree of life is different, because it is made of decommissioned weapons after the Mozambique civil war. It's composed entirely of military hardware guns and stuff. It's a very powerful symbol of what Isaiah was talking about. There will come a time when people will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, a time of peace.

How do you re-imagine the Christian story after a civil war? Maybe you do it like this. You turn the weapons into a tree of life. What a wonderful symbol of engaging the culture, of taking a theme which spans Genesis to Revelation and of saying, put this in the middle of your world and imagine, imagine what God is like and what the world one day will be like.

From "The Bible and Christian Imagination," transcript of N.T. Wright's May 18, 2005, lecture at Seattle Pacific University, <http://www.spu.edu/depts/uc/response/summer2k5/features/imagination.asp>.

Prayer: *Blessings, dear one, as you open your imagination ever further to the narrative and images of scripture. Amen.*

2 Wade in the Water

Leader preparation: Fill your eyes, ears, mind, and heart with the sound and history of the historic spiritual "Wade in the Water." It can be sung in many ways. Its headwaters are in the journey of a particular people in a particular time and place toward liberation and freedom. Imagine how you and others in your time and place can follow the lead of this spiritual in finding your way to liberation and freedom. The audio and visual aids listed below may help you engage this powerful anthem.

Supplies:

- song: "Wade in the Water," African American spiritual (tune: Wade in the Water)
- article: "Wade in the Water," <http://www.osblackhistory.com/wade.php>
- video: "Take Six LIVE—Wade in the Water": <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CkKyeGSiscQ&feature=related>
- video: "Wade in the Water," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhjGzBCOw88>
- video: "Alvin Ailey—Wade in the Water from 'Revelation'": <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9uEq9Sjefg&feature=related>

The spiritual "Wade in the Water" relates to scripture in both the Old and New Testaments. The verses tell the story of the Israelite's escape from slavery in Egypt as found in Exodus 14. The chorus makes reference to the healing in John 5:4 when an angel troubled the water for healing. As the videos in this activity suggest, this song can be interpreted in a wide range of musical styles. What instruments will you use to accompany singing this song? Is it feasible to invite percussionists to participate? While people sing the song, is it possible to fill the room with the sound of water flowing in a stream or being poured from one vessel to another or to provide the sound of a waterfall?



3 Affirmation of Baptism

Leader preparation: Baptism is not something that happened only somewhere in our past. It is a day-to-day reality in our relationship with God. In the 16th century, Martin Luther suggested we look in the mirror every morning (when few of us are at our best, agreed?) and say, "You are a baptized child of God!" From time to time, it is good to offer people an opportunity to affirm this central fact of our faith in corporate worship.

This activity is as much about the physical realities of water as it is about the sacramental realities of this affirmation. Read the attachment "Affirmation of Baptism" with your imagination cued to the physical directions written in italics. How will you engage the water you are blessing, its touch and the sounds it can make? How will you invite people to do the same?

Supplies:

- "Affirmation of Baptism," Attachment: Activity 3

While singing the spiritual "Wade in the Water," invite the congregation to gather around the place of baptism in your church. That may be a baptismal font or a baptistery. Invite people to participate in the Affirmation of Baptism, as found on the attachment.



Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Praying through the Vendedora's Eyes and Ears (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: In order to prepare to lead worshipers in prayer, use your imagination and empathy to enter into the reality of La Vendedora's life and social location.

Supplies:

- artwork: "Vendedora de Piñas" by Diego Rivera,
<http://tinyurl.com/FPArt17>

As a worship leader, invite people to reflect on the La Vendedora's life and social location. Pose these or similar questions for consideration: *Who is she? What in her life calls us to give thanks? To confess? To pray in concern? To give praise?* From their reflections (and those from your own preparation), lead worshipers in a time of prayer, giving voice to the bids for prayer arising from the Vendedora's life and creating space for folks to give voice to their own bids for prayer as well.



5 Who's on Trial Here?

Leader preparation: Hard times often produce art that portrays the lives of oppressed and troubled people with stark clarity. The art of Diego Rivera is a great and forceful example.

Famous for his larger-than-life murals, Diego Rivera's tempestuous persona and provocative political stance catapulted him to mythic proportions during his lifetime. As a passionate civil rights advocate, his art pays tribute to the toilers of the soil—farmers and laborers. Aiming to make his art easily viewable by the average Mexican, Rivera is credited with reintroducing the fresco, a mural painted on fresh plaster, into modern art and architecture. Rivera provided an alternative to elite galleries and museums, making his artwork and political messages accessible to anyone.

—From Art.com

Invite six people to be part of a panel to reflect on Rivera's "Vendedora de Piñas" in the light of the court-style reading of Micah 6.

- Facilitator of this news-interview style panel discussion.
- One will speak from the perspective of La Vendedora herself
- Plaintiff's Attorney
- Defense Attorney
- Judge
- Jury Foreperson

Supplies:

- artwork: "Vendedora de Piñas" by Diego Rivera,
<http://tinyurl.com/FPArt17>

This presentation—on the themes of Micah 6 in the form of a panel discussion of folks involved in a trial of the "Vendedora," triggered by her status as an undocumented worker—will be an unscripted and largely improvised event. Like all improvisation, it will benefit from being firmly rooted in some basic understandings of how things are in the world. If you and your congregation live in an area where immigration issues strongly impact daily life, or if immigration is simply



an issue on the TV news, leaders for this discussion will want to be well grounded in your community's experience and understanding of what is at stake here.

In preparation for this improvised panel discussion, gather participants together for one or two brainstorming sessions to fill in the details of the story being discussed (the who, what, where, when, why). Along the way this group will come to understand more deeply their shared experience and opinions of the realities of undocumented persons, their lives, and society's response to them. The jury representative has a surprising verdict to report. That verdict will flow from these discussions among panel participants. *Who will be the one to remind us all that justice and mercy are at the heart of this matter?*

After brainstorming sufficiently, have the group "rehearse" their improvisation a few times, so that it can flow well and be limited to 10–12 minutes running time. Whether this discussion is a civil one or a shouting match is pretty much up to the group's sense of itself and the tone of their preparatory brainstorming.

Introduce the panel who will be reflecting on scripture today.

Prosecutor: Makes a case that La Vendedora creates a public nuisance and is not in the country legally.

Defense: Makes a case that she's showing the gumption to make a living and is being persecuted.

Vendedora Speaks from the reality of doing what she must do to make a living.

Judge: Speaks to the legal issues

Jury: Renders a surprising verdict.

Interviewer: Summarizes conversation with emphasis on humility, justice,

The panel may begin with this line spoken by the Interviewer: *So, just who is it that's on trial here? Is it La Vendedora? Or is it us?*



6 Imaginative Presentation of Scripture.

Leader preparation: Understanding the history and literary background of scripture texts often gives clues to how those scriptures can be presented as part of public worship. Micah gives an outline of a legal court proceeding in which God brings a complaint against humankind with the very mountains and hills serving as jury. For this activity, recruit four readers who will enjoy hamming it up a bit as they prepare and present the following script during a service of worship.

Supplies:

- "Court TV Transcript of Micah 6:1–8," Attachment: Activity 6
- small pieces of paper for the jury
- (optional) judge's robe

At the front of the sanctuary, set up a court scene with the judge, God, at a table and the two counsels facing the judge. Tell the congregation that they will serve as the jury for this court scene. Encourage the congregation to follow the script in their Bibles, Micah 6:1–8. Distribute small pieces of paper. At the end of the trial, have the "jury" vote for a verdict: innocent or guilty. Collect the papers. Have the bailiff tally the results and report to the judge.



Sending & Serving Activities

7 Living Words of God (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: At the root of one strain of the United Church of Christ's history, there is an understanding that God's Word is not a closed document: "For I am confident the Lord has more truth and light to break forth from His holy word" (John Robinson). With playful seriousness appropriate to the source of the quotation, the UCC, as well as many other denominations, embraced the "Still-Speaking" nature of God's presence by affirming, along with Gracie Allen, "Do not place a period where God has placed a comma."

God's Spirit lives and breathes within us and so our lives are capable of being living expressions of God's Word.

Supplies: None

In the spirit of the Still-Speaking God, invite people to call to mind words of scripture that support them in their faith journey or that express a sense of what God might be saying to the world through their daily choices and actions. Have people gather in small groups of two or three to share these words of God that connect them to the Word of God.

If there is time, invite one person from each small group to report briefly on the scriptures that were named in their sharing. Have someone to take notes so you can compile these texts in a page or two and share them back with the group for further inspiration and reflection.



8 We Limit Not the Truth of God

Leader preparation: In order to prepare the congregation for the end of worship and to carry God's word into their lives and worlds, introduce the hymn "We Limit Not the Truth of God." Call attention to the ongoing nature of worship; it does not end at the door of the building.

Supplies:

- "We Limit Not the Truth of God," Attachment: Activity 8
- hymn: "We Limit Not the Truth of God" audio,
<http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/w/e/welimitn.htm>

George Rawson wrote the words to this hymn based on a 1620 farewell speech spoken by John Robinson to the pilgrims who were about to set sail on the Mayflower. Here is a portion of that speech:

I charge you before God and His blessed angels that you follow me no further than you have seen me follow Christ. If God reveal anything to you by any other instrument of His, be as ready to receive it as you were to receive any truth from my ministry, for I am verily persuaded the Lord hath more truth and light yet to break forth from His Holy Word.

Other tunes for this hymn that are commonly published in several hymnals include Ellacombe and Forest Green.



9 Wonderful Words of Life

Leader preparation: To appreciate more about the history and context of the hymn “Wonderful Words of Life,” visit the website “Hymn Pod,” <http://www.hymnpod.com/2009/08/26/wonderful-words-of-life/>.

Supplies:

- hymn: “Wonderful Words of Life” by Philip P. Bliss (tune: Words of Life), <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/w/o/wondword.htm>

The Bible is a living book as the stories can be read from three different perspectives: the narrative of the story, the context in and audience for which the story was written, and our contemporary situation. Invite people to enjoy singing the hymn “Wonderful Words of Life” from the perspective that they and the people around them are God’s living words.

As we think about working for justice, we are reminded that we are Christ’s body in the world. Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) wrote the following poem:

Christ has no body but yours,
 No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
 Yours are the eyes with which he looks
 Compassion on this world,
 Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
 Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
 Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
 Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
 Christ has no body now but yours,
 No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
 Yours are the eyes with which he looks
 compassion on this world.
 Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

Use the poem as a benediction and sending forth.

Following the Church Year

When our worship life follows the themes and rhythms of the church year, it is deeply connected to the stuff of scripture. Because the Bible often brings our attention to the themes of working for justice, our worship has frequent opportunities to reflect those themes as we pray, praise, and celebrate together.

When we gather for worship that grows from the heart scripture, our worship enters into relationship with God’s presence within and among the community of faith. The Common Lectionary, a three-year cycle of scripture readings structuring themes for a year’s journey through the seasons of the church year, is a rich, creative, and challenging resource for planners of worship.

“The Text This Week” website is a remarkable resource for scripture study and worship planning: <http://www.textweek.com/>. In each case the scriptures featured in this Exploration are appointed for particular weeks in the church year. Using the resources at this website provides a delightful playground within which to spark creativity for planning services rooted in these themes.



It's remarkable that the Bible Focus Passages for this scripture have both been appointed for use in The Year of Matthew, the Common Lectionary's Year A. One thread running through Matthew's gospel might be summed up in the words "Well, now what?" as the followers of the Way of Jesus struggle to understand how they will go about being "the church." Reading Micah and Amos in the light of such questions opens the opportunity to embrace the work of justice as central to the work of being the church living out God's Good News in the world.

The Season of Epiphany invites us to find God's presence in astonishing places, even if that's the wise foolishness of Jesus' teachings (the Beatitudes) read in the light of Micah's call to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God.

Micah 6: 1–8 (<http://www.textweek.com/yeara/epipha4.htm>)

The end of the church year looks forward to what it takes to remain faithful until Christ's return and the fullness of God's reign. Against that background, Amos reminds us that the Work of Justice will be part of living our faith throughout our journey of life and faith.

Amos 5: 18–24 (<http://www.textweek.com/yeara/propera27.htm>)

Wade in the Water

TOUCH IT

GUZZLE IT

SPLASH IT

LISTEN TO IT

SPRINKLE IT

PLAY WITH IT

DIP IT

DANCE IN IT

SIP IT

**FILL YOUR
SENSES WITH
WATER!**

DRINK IT

Attachment: Activity 3

Affirmation of Baptism

The Thanksgiving over the Water

While singing "Wade in the Water," the congregation moves from their seats to gather around the place of baptism in your church, either at the font or baptistery.

Leader: The enslaved people who taught one another, and us, to sing "Wade in the Water" pointed the way toward freedom, wholeness, and justice in community. We gather here to affirm the way that God continues lead us through oppression toward freedom, wholeness, and justice in community.

(Pause)

Leader: God dwells in you.

People: **And also in you.**

Leader: Let us give thanks to God.

People: **It is right to give God thanks and praise.**

Leader: Holy One, thank you for the gift of water.

Over it your Spirit hovered at the creation of the world.

Through it you led the children of Israel out of bondage

and into the Promised Land. In the fullness of time

you sent Jesus, who was nurtured in the water of Mary's womb.

And in it Jesus was baptized and recognized as your beloved child.

With the following words, the Leader reaches into the water and allows it to pour back into the font or baptistry.

Thank you for the water of baptism.

In it we are buried, sharing in Christ's death.

By it we share also in Christ's resurrection.

Through it we are reborn by the power of the Holy Spirit

as your daughters and sons.

With the following words, the Leader extends a hand over the water.

Now bless this water, we pray, by the power of your Holy Spirit. May it remind us that we have been

cleansed from sin and born again into new life, that we may

remain faithful until we are united with you in the life to come. Amen.

The Leader addresses the congregation.

Leader: Let us reaffirm the vows of our baptismal covenant.

Have you renounced all spiritual forces that rebel against God.

People: **I have renounced them.**

Leader: Have you renounced all the forces of evil, in whatever guise they present themselves, which corrupt and destroy God's good creation?

People: **I have renounced them.**

Leader: Have you renounced all sinful desires that seduce and draw you away from the love of God?

People: **I have renounced them.**

Leader: Will you continue to serve Christ, in union with the Church that Christ has opened to people of all ages and nations, races and classes, genders and sexual orientations, abilities and challenges?

People: **I will, with God's help.**

Leader: Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and communion, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers?

People: **I will, with God's help.**

Leader: Will you proclaim by word and action the Good News of God in Christ?

Attachment: Activity 3 (continued)

People: **I will, with God's help.**

Leader: Will you see and serve the Christ you encounter in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

People: **I will, with God's help.**

Leader: Will you work for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being?

People: **I will, with God's help.**

Leader: Let us affirm the unity that flows from our baptism into Christ.

People: **We come out of many traditions.**

We have confessed many understandings of Baptism: sacrament, symbol, sign.

Some of us were baptized before we remember.

Others only later when we said, "I believe."

Whether immersed, poured upon or sprinkled,

it is your action, gracious God, that defines our baptism.

Having put off the old nature, we have been clothed with Christ.

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free,

there is no longer male and female.

For we all are one in Christ Jesus—your sons and daughters through faith, heirs to the promise.

Old things have passed away.

Behold, you make all things new.

The Celebrant may invite the congregation to move forward and touch the water. In larger congregations, the water may be visibly poured into multiple vessels to be distributed at various stations. Each participant may dip a finger in the water to be placed to the head and/or the heart with these words:

Remember your baptism and be thankful.

Thanks be to God.

Alternatively, the Celebrant may dip an evergreen or palm branch in the water and sprinkle the congregation

Leader: Remember your baptism and be thankful.

People: **Thanks be to God!**

When all participants have returned to their places, the service of worship continues.

Leader: Having put off the old nature, we have been clothed with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female. For we all are one in Christ Jesus—your sons and daughters through faith, heirs to the promise. Old things have passed away. Behold, God is making all things new.

People: **Amen! Thanks be to God!**

Drawn from ecumenical sources by Bryce D. Rice. Used by permission. Adapted for this activity by Jeremy McLeod.

Attachment: Activity 6

Court TV Transcript of Micah 6:1-8

Readers: Bailiff, God, Counsel for the Plaintiff, and Counsel for the Defense.

Bailiff: (*motions for the congregation to stand*): All rise. Hear ye, hear ye, the Universal Court for the Global District of the Planet Earth is in session, the Honorable Judge, God the Almighty, the Creator of All, presiding.

God: Do you have a case to make?
“Plead your case before the mountains;
let the hills hear what you have to say.
Hear, O mountains, the LORD’s accusation;
listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth.
For the LORD has a case against his people;
he is lodging a charge against Israel.”

Bailiff: (*motions for the congregation to be seated*) You may be seated.

God: Counsel for the Plaintiff, what do you have to say?

Counsel for the Plaintiff: Thank you, your Honor. As you know, you’ve asked me to say:
“My people, what have I done to you?
How have I burdened you? Answer me.
I brought you up out of Egypt.
I paid a high price to get you out of the land of slavery.
I sent Moses to lead you,
also Aaron and Miriam.
Remember, too, my people,
what Balak king of Moab advised and
and how Balaam son of Beor responded.
Remember your travels from Shittim to
Gilgal,
and you’ll know about
the LORD’s righteous acts.”

God: So, Counsel for the Defense, what have you to say?

Counsel for the Defense: Your honor, we plead No Contest. My clients and I simply want to know what it is you want from us in return? My client asks:
“With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousand rivers of oil?
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

God: The Counsel for the Defense and the clients have missed the point. Before I render judgment, I just want to remind the Defendant that
“I have shown you, O humankind, what is good.
And what do I require of you?
Not a great deal, really. Simply
to act justly and to live mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.”

God: (addresses the Jury): Friends, you have heard the case presented by the Counsel for the Plaintiff and the Counsel for the Defense. What is your verdict? How do you find the defendant?

God: (after hearing from the Jury): Court is dismissed.

We Limit Not the Truth of God

By George Rawson, 1835

We limit not the truth of God To our poor reach of mind,
By notions of our day and sect, Crude, partial, and confined.
No, let a new and better hope Within our hearts be stirred:

Refrain:

The Lord hath yet more light and truth To break forth from His Word.
Darkling our great forefathers went The first steps of the way;
'Twas but the dawning yet to grow Into the perfect day.
And grow it shall, our glorious sun More fervid rays afford.

The valleys passed, ascending still, Our souls would higher climb,
And look down from supernal heights On all the bygone time.
Upward we press, the air is clear, And the sphere-music heard:

Refrain

O Father, Son, and Spirit, send Us increase from above;
Enlarge, expand all Christian souls To comprehend Thy love,
And make us to go on, to know With nobler powers conferred:

Refrain

Working for Justice



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Setting

“Walk the talk” sums up the essence of discipleship. It’s a journey that begins when we first encounter God’s presence in our lives and our world. That journey continues as we understand ever more deeply how God loves us and calls us to follow in the Way of Jesus in all we say and do. One primary way we deepen our experience of God’s love and hear God’s call is by being part of the worship life of a community of faith. The more our worship moves us to fall ever more deeply in love with God, the more fully we respond to our world with extraordinary and mutual respect and the more closely we understand that “walk the talk” calls us to work for justice.

Activities in this setting provide worship planners with resources to design services of worship that explore working for justice as an integral part of practicing our faith. Many of these activities make use of arts—rich, experiential elements—in their design. By choosing one or more activities from each of three categories (Exploring & Engaging, Discerning & Deciding, Sending & Serving), planners will have resources for the beginning, middle, and end of a service of worship.

Many of these activities suggest an interactive style of inviting worshippers to reflect on their experiences of elements of the service (such as visual displays), or on God’s Word, or on sharing that for which they ask others’ prayers. Not all congregations will find this comfortable at first and experimenting with ways to create the spiritual space within which people share may be necessary. When these interactive reflections function as “a sermon” in worship, it often works well for the pastor or other theologically sensitive persons to be prepared to summarize the reflections and bring discussion to a close. When

an interactive reflection is not indicated, preachers and worship leaders are encouraged to take the questions and thought starters in this activities into consideration as they prepare their own reflections.

About this Exploration

What does it mean when Jesus bids us come and follow? Working for justice invites us to search for the answer to this and other questions we have been asking. Opportunities will be presented to practice our faith by making conscious choices, exploring ideas and acquiring skills for the ministries to which we are called. These activities will lead you to ask another question: How do my daily plans and routines show my commitment to following Jesus lead in working for justice?

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Jeremiah 14:7-10, 19-22
John 10:11-18

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 "Guide My Feet" (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Take time to internalize the spiritual strength of the lyrics and tune of "Guide My Feet." Take prayerful time to make this song your own vehicle for prayer.

Leader Preparation

If discipleship means to give one's heart to and live by the teachings of another, everyone is a disciple of someone. We all have people, beliefs, or other factors that ground us in meaning, value, and purpose in life. Depth psychology suggests that everything we do in life has intention. Prayer is one way we express our intentions, so we really do "pray without ceasing." A key question, then, might be "To whom and for what am I praying?" Find a prayerful space within yourself and reflect on the following questions:

- To whom or to what have I given my heart? (We give our hearts to many people and things in differing degrees. This could be quite a list.)
- What deep commitments in my life shape my day-to-day choices and actions?
- How do my day-to-day choices and actions differ when I'm conscious about the ways my faith calls me to work for justice?

Supplies:

- "Guide My Feet," Attachment: Activity 1
- song: "Guide My Feet" (tune: Guide My Feet); video, <http://tinyurl.com/FPSong20>; words and music, <http://www.hymnsite.com/fws/hymn.cgi?2208>

Introduce the idea of discipleship as a matter of "walk the talk." What are some examples of "walk the talk" in parenting, at work, in school, in the park, at a restaurant? As Christians, what "talk" are we walking? Invite people into a conversation about discipleship using questions such as: *How do we decide what to do? What is our guide?*

When we make decisions in life, either as individuals or as a community of faith, we often seek guidance and advice. The hymn "Guide My Feet" was widely adapted in the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. *How might this hymn be important in the life of your congregation as it seeks a path of discipleship?*

The following alternative verses of this hymn were written for a congregation in the process of revitalizing its ministry.

Lift our spirits while we run this race, (x3) For we don't want to run this race in vain.

Spark our passions while we run this race, (x3) For we don't want to run this race in vain.

Shape our visions while we run this race, (x3) For we don't want to run this race in vain.

Guide our footsteps while we run this race, (x3) For we don't want to run this race in vain.

Alternative verses for "Guide My Feet" written by Rev. Jeremy E. McLeod. ©2008 All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Prayer: *Blessings, dear one, on your journey of discipleship. Amen.*



② Seeds to Grow in the Light

Leader preparation: Light and seeds are intimately related. This activity makes an imaginative link between the seeds sown for raising a crop and the gifts of spirit, interest, aptitude, and commitment recognized as gifts of the Spirit that we're given to live out in faith and life. Cut apart the words on the attachment and put them in envelopes. Cut apart the page (a paper cutter works very well), and put four or five strips into plain offering envelopes (or small, note sized envelopes).

Create a prayerful space within yourself to name, appreciate, and give thanks for the gifts you have in life and faith for engaging in the work for justice.

Supplies:

- "Packet of Seeds," Attachment: Activity 2
- artwork: "The Sower" by Vincent van Gogh, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15625&store_id=1401
- envelopes

Plan to distribute the envelopes to worshipers (either in their bulletin or as a kind of "reverse offering" in which people take one as baskets are passed around). Display "The Sower" by Vincent van Gogh. Invite people to share observations about what the subject of the painting is doing.

- Where did those seeds come from? Why is this farmer throwing them around on the ground?
- What are the hopes and dreams wrapped up in the action of sowing these seeds?

Call people's attention to the envelopes in their bulletins, and ask them to imagine these words as packets of seeds ready for planting. Suggest that these "seeds" are gifts of the Spirit already within them or available to them in life, faith, and ministry. For some, the words on the paper strips will be familiar aspects of their life and faith, ready for casting out into the world to grow and bear fruit. For some, these words may seem to be an odd fit. Ask them to consider that these may be aspects of life and faith for them to consider exploring in the practice of their faith. Maybe these words represent aspects of life and faith simply to celebrate as others exercise them in their day-to-day faith practice.

If your congregation has a playful tolerance for messiness (and a readily cheerful ability to get things cleaned up again), consider scattering handfuls of these "seeds" and invite others to do the same with theirs as a way of concluding this activity.



③ Awareness and Affirmation

Leader preparation: Genuine change begins with awareness. This activity is grounded in a scripture, Jeremiah 14:19–22 (in Eugene Peterson's paraphrase *The Message*), that begins expressing our fear that God's had it with us and moves toward an expression of trust. Make copies of the attachment for use in a bulletin or to project for the congregation.

Supplies:

- Bible
- "Awareness and Affirmation," Attachment: Activity 3

The litany “Awareness and Affirmation” may serve as a call to confession in a service of worship.

Pose these or similar questions as a preface to using the litany: *Where do you most feel the silence of God and doubt God’s presence in your world? What moves you beyond fear and doubt toward trust?*

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 From Seeds to Prayers (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Leading times of public prayer that make space for worshipers to speak their hearts will benefit from the worship leader’s comfort with a roomful of people sitting in silence. People may or may not speak aloud. As worship leaders, we walk a gentle line between encouraging people to find space for prayer in times of silence and the role of keeping the flow of worship moving appropriately. Create prayerful time and space to experiment for yourself how it feels to sit in silence. How long before you reach a point of discomfort? Are you comfortable with 10–15 seconds—or longer—of silence? If not, consider experimenting with ways to take pleasure in times of genuine silence.

Supplies:

- “From Seeds to Prayer,” Attachment: Activity 4

Theologian Frederick Buechner said, “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” This insight is the foundation of the following time of prayer. Invite people to recall the slips of paper from earlier in this service (if you used Activity 2 above), and to refresh a sense that the words on them are seeds to be planted in living a life of faith and doing the work of justice.

Then invite people to fill the silences between bids for prayer in litany “From Seeds to Prayer” by simply naming the seeds they feel moved to name in response to the content of the prayer. Folks may be inspired by the fact that this Litany is based on a “Prayer for the Church” that’s been in constant use for centuries and is remarkably candid in praying in response both to positive and negative aspects of life in the church.

5 Word and Reflection: We Who Believe in Freedom Cannot Rest

Leader preparation: When God’s people encounter God’s presence in the Word, in one another, and in the stories of inspiring role models, we learn more about how God moves among and within us to further the work of justice.

Read John 10:11–18. How do you picture this Good Shepherd? Where are the good shepherds in your world?

Read the biographical sketch of Ella Josephine Baker posted at the Ella Baker Center’s website, <http://www.ellabakercenter.org/page.php?pageid=19&contentid=9>. Ella Baker’s passion and commitment grew out of her own painful experience of being oppressed, both as an African American and as a woman. For decades she transformed that pain into a lifetime of activism, working for justice and empow-



ering others. Through the lens of her life, let yourself imagine what it means to live committed to working for justice for a lifetime. Might she be a good shepherd in her time and ours? Use a search engine's "images" search on the string "Ella Josephine Baker" to find a few pictures from Ms. Baker's life and career to share with the group.

Listen to the audio to "Ella's Song" so that you (or another member of your group) can lead others in singing the refrain, "We who believe in freedom . . ."

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- video: "Ella's Song," http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXy_TW-THCs or <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6Uus--gFrc>.

This activity is intended to serve as a discussion sermon in a worship setting. While ideally suited to smaller, more intimate settings, it also works in larger, more formal settings. In either setting it is important that people are able to hear clearly the audio of "Ella's Song" and, if possible, see video images as well. Leader(s) can help the group's reflections flow to become the substance of the reflections/sermon for this worship experience.

At the point in a worship service dedicated to hearing the Word and reflecting on it: In a moment of silence invite people to give their prayerful attention to memories from their own lives and to consider the ways in which they have experienced injustice in their lives or the lives of people they know and love.

Contemporary Reading: Ella Josephine Baker's Biography. Have one or more people read aloud from the biography of Ella Josephine Baker posted on her website.

Music for Reflection: "Ella's Song." Listen to and watch one of the videos listed above. Dr. Bernice Reagon Johnson (founder of Sweet Honey in the Rock and member of People's United Church of Christ in Washington, D.C.) composed this powerful setting of words drawn from Ella Baker's life and career.

For shared reflections, encourage people to talk by posing questions such as:

- What moves you about Ella Baker's story?
- What moves you about John's Gospel about the Good Shepherd?
- How do John's Gospel and Ella Baker's story weave together in your heart and mind?
- What might John and Ella show us about the ministry of working for justice?

As reflections draw to a close, ask the group to summarize what they experienced in encountering Ella Baker's story in the context of hearing about the Good Shepherd. Conclude this shared reflection by playing "Ella's Song" again, and encouraging the group to sing along with the refrain, "We who believe in freedom cannot rest."



6 I Am the Good Shepherd

Leader preparation: Sometimes engaging imaginations in worship is as simple as juxtaposing similarly themed elements in a way that lets people draw their own sense of meaning from the experience. That is the background to combining a presentation of a reading from John 10 with an inclusive language paraphrase of a hymn based on Psalm 23.



If there is a choir in your congregation, ask them to practice the hymn “Like a Child at Home,” sung to the tune Resignation (also known as Southern Harmony) so they can lead the congregation singing. This hymn tune may also be found in your congregation’s hymnal.

Supplies:

- Bible
- “Like a Child at Home,” Attachment: Activity 6a
- “Resignation,” Attachment: Activity 6b

Have the lay leader, worship leader, or whoever helps lead the service of worship practice reading John 10:11–18. Use the litany as printed on Attachment: Activity 6a. The hymn “Like a Child at Home” is sung to the tune Resignation.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Name It and Claim It (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Keeping our gifts under wraps can be a way to avoid investing those gifts in living in faith and doing the work of justice. Create a prayerful space within yourself to consider one of the gifts of experience, skill, or spirit you’ve been given and how investing it in the work of justice is a part of your life.

Supplies: None

Remind people of the words of Frederick Buechner: “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” Then invite people to turn to one another (in small groups of three or so) to share in a few words, one gift in their life they feel called to invest in their life of faith and in doing the work of justice. *Where do you feel your deep gladness meeting the world’s deep hunger?*

After folks have had an opportunity to share (about 2–3 minutes) continue with the benediction in Activity 8 below.



8 Benediction

Leader preparation: The combination of resources for this benediction weave together three important threads in a powerfully hopeful blessing for those whose faith calls them to work for Justice. Ella Baker’s simple words alternate with paragraphs from a text by metaphysical writer Marianne Williamson, which Nelson Mandela chose to quote as part of his Inaugural address as the newly elected black president of a post-apartheid South Africa. Taken together, these three elements challenge and inspire us as we depart a service of worship.

Supplies:

- “Benediction,” Attachment: Activity 8

Invite people to remember the gifts they bring to life and ministry, the seeds God has given them to scatter, nurture, and grow in life. Then invite folks to participate in the following benediction based in the words of Ella Baker and Marianne Williamson (from her book *A Return to Love*).



9 This Little Light of Mine

Leader preparation: Learn about the history of the song “This Little Light of Mine” through this link: <http://folkmusic.about.com/od/folksongs/qt/ThisLittleLight.htm>. You might also want to explore more deeply the role of music in the Civil Rights Movement as documented in the Smithsonian Folkways recording “This Little Light of Mine.” Download this collection’s liner notes (a link on the page just before the “Track Listing”) at <http://www.folkways.si.edu/TrackDetails.aspx?itemid=29288>. These notes may give you greater insight into the power of this music in its context.

Please do *not* print the words of “This Little Light of Mine” for the congregation’s singing. Make sure that the song leader and the choir know this piece well. The leader will “line out” the words for the congregation in keeping with the traditions of African American community singing. The worship leader will “line out” the words for the congregation and the singing will be more of an act of community than if eyeballs are buried in books or bulletins. Encourage folks to improvise harmony parts. Encourage folks to get up and move, get up and clap, get up and dance while they’re letting their light shine!

Supplies:

- song: “this Little Light of Mine,” <http://www.sing365.com/music/lyric.nsf/This-Little-Light-Of-Mine-lyrics-Bruce-Springsteen/B5D454241A07EBB14825736D000B9F14>

Imagine the power inherent in someone crushed into the margins of society and working to bring oppression and injustice to light and to an end, saying, “This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine!” While it may have been originally composed as a Sunday school song, it soon found its way into expressing the voice of oppressed people. Given this history, this is far from a sentimental children’s song. Invite people to sing this song mindfully, remembering all those who have sung it as a statement of dignity, self-worth, integrity, and commitment in the face of some of the worst oppression and discrimination a dominant culture can visit on minorities within it.

Following the Church Year

When worship life follows the themes and rhythms of the church year, it is deeply connected to the stuff of scripture. Because the Bible often brings our attention to the themes of working for justice, our worship has frequent opportunities to reflect those themes as we pray, praise, and celebrate together.

When we gather for a service of worship that grows from the heart of scripture, our worship enters into relationship with God’s presence within and among the community of faith. The Common Lectionary, a three-year cycle of scripture readings structuring themes for a year’s journey through the seasons of the church year, is a rich, creative, and challenging resource for planners of worship.

“The Text This Week” website is a remarkable resource for scripture study and worship planning: <http://www.textweek.com/>. In each case the scriptures featured in this Exploration are appointed for particular weeks in the church year. Using the resources at this website provides a delightful playground within which to spark creativity for planning services rooted in these themes.



Jeremiah 14:7–10, 19–22

(<http://www.textweek.com/yearc/properc25.htm>)

Here toward the end of The Year of Luke, Year C, the lectionary draws our attention to two important themes. As we look toward the ultimate meaning of our life of faith (the end of our journey), we are reminded of the importance of humble simplicity in living our faith and honest awareness of the ways in which our choices put us at odds with the ways of God.

John 10:11–18 (<http://www.textweek.com/yearb/easterb4.htm>)

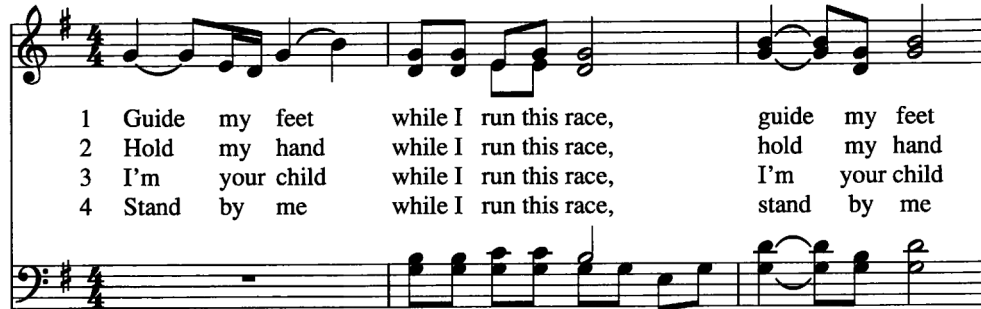
John 10 is rich with images of The Good Shepherd and an equally rich tradition has established the Fourth Sunday of Easter as a celebration that theme. In the Year of Mark, Year B, the Good Shepherd is remembered as a model of self-sacrifice for the well-being of the sheep and for the Shepherd's concern for "other sheep" not part of the flock in which we are most familiar and comfortable.

Attachment: Activity 1

Guide My Feet

African-American traditional; alt.

Heb. 12:1-15




1 Guide my feet while I run this race, guide my feet
 2 Hold my hand while I run this race, hold my hand
 3 I'm your child while I run this race, I'm your child
 4 Stand by me while I run this race, stand by me

Yes, my God.



while I run this race, guide my feet while I run this race,
 while I run this race, hold my hand while I run this race,
 while I run this race, I'm your child while I run this race,
 while I run this race, stand by me while I run this race,

Yes, my God.



For I don't want to run this race in vain.

*This stanza may be added following stanza 1:
 Wheel with me while I run this race . . .*

Attachment: Activity 2

Packet of Seeds

Faith	Hope	Love	Joy	Peace	Justice
Righteousness	Friendship	Patience	Kindness	Concern	Prayer
Endurance	Risk	Advocacy	Creativity	Courage	Simplicity
Community	Commitment	Acceptance	Grace	Freedom	Wholeness
Hospitality	Integrity	Wellbeing	Silence	Relationship	Dignity
Purpose	Understanding	Life	New life	Birth	New birth
Openness	Beauty	Forgiveness	Delight	Flexibility	Obedience
Release	Purification	Communication	Willingness	Solidarity	Clarity
Humor	Abundance	Education	Healing	Clarity	Responsibility
Harmony	Enthusiasm	Transformation	Surrender	Expectancy	Strength
Power	Synthesis	Truth	Spontaneity	Compassion	Inspiration
Turst	Serenity	Play	Balance	Adventure	Tenderness
Gratitude	Honesty	Hunger	Thirst	Humbleness	Passion
Faith	Hope	Love	Joy	Peace	Justice

Attachment: Activity 3

Awareness and Affirmation

Leader: Prayer begins with awareness —
Awareness of God’s presence,
Awareness of what call us to give thanks and praise,
Awareness of what calls us to confession and repentance.
Some days it just feels like God isn’t listening,

People: God, have you said your final “No” to your people?
Can you simply not stand us any longer?
If not, why have you treated us like this, beaten us nearly to death?
We hoped for peace—nothing good came from it;
We looked for healing—and got kicked in the stomach.

Leader: What’s the old saying?
Behavior has consequences?

People: We admit, O God, how badly we’ve lived,
and our ancestors, how bad they were.
We’ve sinned, they’ve sinned,
we’ve all sinned against you!

(Silence for reflection. Let yourself become aware of the ways your behavior has be more a part of the problem than the solution when it comes to matters of race and class, racism and classism in our world.)

Leader: Hear some Good News!
God does not walk out and abandon us.
God remembers and keeps faith with
the covenant made with God’s people.
Just as it is God who brings rain to water the earth
It is God who provides for our needs and
who walks with us, day-to-day,
in the work of doing justice.

Attachment: Activity 4

From Seeds to Prayers

After each statement by the Leader, invite the congregation to name the seeds/gifts for which they are moved to pray in response.

**Leader: Gracious God, we pray this day
for the well-being of your church.
Fill it with all truth and peace. (Silence . . .)**

The People name the seeds/gifts for which you are moved to pray in response to this prayer.

**Leader: Where it is corrupt, purge it;
where it is in error, direct it. (Silence . . .)**

The People name the seeds/gifts for which you are moved to pray in response to this prayer.

Leader: Where anything is amiss, reform it. (Silence . . .)

The People name the seeds/gifts for which you are moved to pray in response to this prayer.

Leader: Where it is right, strengthen and confirm it. (Silence . . .)

The People name the seeds/gifts for which you are moved to pray in response to this prayer.

Leader: Where it is in want, provide for it. (Silence . . .)

The People name the seeds/gifts for which you are moved to pray in response to this prayer.

Leader: Where it is divided, reunite it. (Silence . . .)

The People name the seeds/gifts for which you are moved to pray in response to this prayer.

**Leader: We join these and all our prayers,
praying as Jesus has taught us to pray:**

The People join in praying the Prayer of Jesus.

Attachment: Activity 6a

Like a Child at Home

Reader: John 10:11–13

Congregation: (“Like a Child at Home,” verse 1)

Our Shepherd is the Living God, we therefore nothing need;
In pastures green near wellsprings deep you settle us to feed.
You bring our wandering spirits back when we forsake your ways
And lead us for your mercy’s sake in paths of truth and grace.

Reader: John 10:14–16

Congregation: (“Like a Child at Home,” verse 2)

When we walk through shades of death, your presence is our stay;
A word of your life giving breath drives all my fears away.
Your hand, in sight of all our foes, provides our daily bread;
Our cup with blessings overflows, your oil anoints our heads.

Reader: John 10:17–18

Congregation: (“Like a Child at Home,” verse 3)

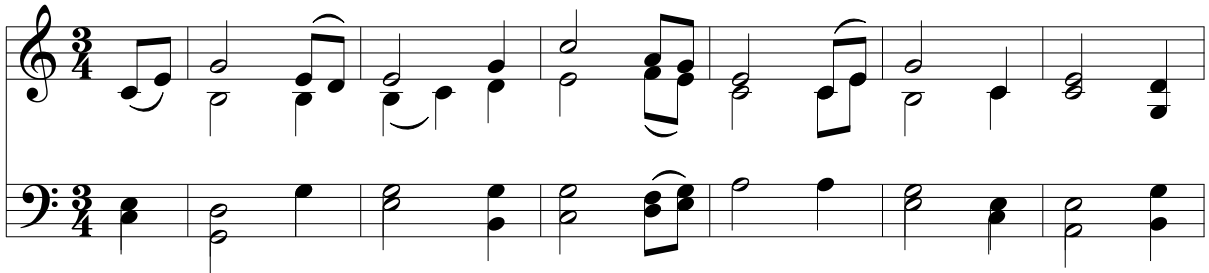
Your steady shepherd’s presence is with us all our days;
O! may your heart be where we dwell and all our works be praise.
In you our souls find settled rest—from you we need not roam—
No more a stranger, or a guest, but like a child at home.

Psalm 23 paraphrase text by Rev. Jeremy McLeod, 2006. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Attachment: Activity 6b

Resignation

Traditional American; Southern Harmony, 1835




The first system of musical notation for 'Resignation' consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. The time signature is 3/4. The melody in the upper staff begins with a quarter note G4, followed by an eighth note A4, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note C5. The bass line starts with a whole note chord of G2, B2, and D3.



The second system of musical notation begins at measure 7. The upper staff continues the melody with a quarter note D5, an eighth note E5, a quarter note F5, and a quarter note G5. The bass line continues with a whole note chord of G2, B2, and D3.



The third system of musical notation begins at measure 14. The upper staff continues the melody with a quarter note A5, an eighth note B5, a quarter note C6, and a quarter note B5. The bass line continues with a whole note chord of G2, B2, and D3.



The fourth system of musical notation begins at measure 21. The upper staff continues the melody with a quarter note A5, an eighth note B5, a quarter note C6, and a quarter note B5. The bass line continues with a whole note chord of G2, B2, and D3.

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Attachment: Activity 8

Benediction

As we draw this service of worship to a close, remember the gifts you bring to life and ministry, the seeds God has given you to scatter, nurture, and grow in life. With hearts and spirits alive to our giftedness, we will now pray a benediction based in the words of Ella Baker and writer Marianne Williamson (from her book *A Return to Love*).

Leader: Our deepest fear is not that that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.

People: We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant,
gorgeous, talented, and fabulous?

Leader: Actually who are you not to be?

People: Give light, and the people will find the way.

Leader: You are a child of God.
Your playing small doesn't serve the world.
There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so
that other people won't feel insecure about you.
We are born to make manifest the
glory of God within us.

People: Give us light, and we will find the way.

Leader: It is not just in some of us. It's in everyone.
And as we let our light shine,
we unconsciously give other people permission
to do the same. As we are liberated from our fear,
our presence automatically liberates others."

People: Give us light, and we *will* find the way!

Working for Justice



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Setting

When it comes to practicing our faith in the work of justice, we do not do it in isolation. Our history as Christian communities of faith is a complex one, full of stories of the oppressive misuse of power as well as shining examples of people who act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Each time we gather for public worship, we have an opportunity to claim and test our heritage. We have an opportunity to live more deeply into the meaning of a centuries-old prayer for the church that says, in part: “Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in anything it is amiss, reform it. Where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it.” By understanding and celebrating our history, we have an opportunity to build memories for our future as we live into God’s future of righteousness, justice, wholeness, and peace.

Activities in this setting provide worship planners with resources to design services of worship that explore working for justice as an integral part of practicing our faith. Many of these activities make use of arts—rich, experiential elements—in their design. By choosing one or more activities from each of three categories (Exploring & Engaging, Discerning & Deciding, Sending & Serving), planners will have resources for the beginning, middle, and end of a service of worship.

Many of these activities suggest an interactive style, inviting worshipers to reflect on their experiences of elements of the service (such as visual displays), or on God’s Word, or on sharing that for which they ask others’ prayers. This interactive style often engages young adults who prefer to be active participants in worship rather than observers. Not all congregations will find this comfortable at first, and experimenting with ways to create the spiritual space within which people will

share may be necessary. When these interactive reflections function as “a sermon” in worship, it often works well for the pastor or other theologically sensitive person to be prepared to summarize the reflections and bring reflections to a close. When an interactive reflection does not fit the worship needs of a congregation, preachers and worship leaders are encouraged to take the questions and thought starters in these activities into consideration as they prepare their own reflections.

About this Exploration

In the faith practice of Working for Justice—as in everything—our past is our prologue. Christian tradition calls us to confess that the church has participated in the creation and perpetuation of injustice. But there is also much to celebrate as Christian people, because we have been claiming and testing our heritage in doing the work of justice. Grounded in this history, we follow God’s leading and discover new ways to practice our faith working for justice.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Psalm 34:15–22
Ephesians 2:11–22

Leader Preparation

Many of us live in a world detached from the history that helped us to become who we are and where we are. This Exploration reminds us of the importance of picking up the historical threads that give us insight into the challenges facing us and can inspire us in our day-to-day choice making in doing the work of justice.

The Letter to the Hebrews connects us to our history in a powerful way when it says that “a great cloud of witnesses” surrounds us in the struggle to be faithful to living God’s vision in a world hostile to that vision. Too bad the familiar translation of that phrase blurs its power. Reading the phrase in context makes it clear that many of the “witnesses” are also martyrs who suffered and died for being who they were in the world. Read Hebrews 11:32–12:3 and the Bible Focus Passages in at least two different translations. Consider these questions:

- To whom do you look when you want inspiration in your daily life, especially when you are work-

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Call to Worship (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: The Book of Psalms is a primary hymnbook for the Judeo-Christian traditions in worship. Using them to give voice to the themes of our worship is a simple (though far from simplistic) way to connect deeply with our roots while giving praise and offering prayers in our day-to-day worship.

Supplies:

- “A Call to Worship,” Attachment: Activity 1

The Call to Worship at the beginning of a service is a reminder that God has spoken and calls us to respond in worship. “A Call to Worship” on the attachment is an example of how to use scripture in a litany. Many hymnbooks provide a psalter, a way to sing the psalms responsively. Psalms were originally intended for singing. You may want to create a simple tune for congregation’s response in “A Call to Worship.”



2 Empowered by a Great Cloud of Witnesses

Leader preparation: The “Great Cloud of Witnesses” is a part of our life of faith we can celebrate in deeply serious as well as creatively playful ways. This activity gives us an opportunity to do both. As part of the beginning of a worship service, invite people to create their personal lists of “witnesses” or “saints.” That’s the deeply serious part. You will then invite them to add these names to a visual representation of the “Great Cloud.” That’s the playful part.

Create a display of construction paper (or helium) “balloons” in your worship space that resembles a large bunch (cloud) of balloons. Make sure the strings dangle where people can reach them. Recruit volunteers to help put the tags on the balloons. Near the display of balloons, display a copy of Miro’s “Kopf.”

Supplies:

- construction paper in a variety of colors to make balloons
- yarn to create “balloons” with 1’–2’ of string dangling from them
- Bible
- construction paper cut in 4” × 12” pieces, on which people can write the names of their “witnesses” or “saints”
- large-tipped marking pens
- artwork: “Kopf” by Joan Miro, <http://tinyurl.com/FPArt18>

ing for justice, wholeness, dignity, and peace in your community and world?

- Who are the people of faith, contemporary and historical, who give you hope?

Take prayerful time to appreciate these people and give thanks to God for those whose faith, life, and actions inspire and help you live in faith, hope, and love with compassion, gratitude, and grace.

Prayer: *Blessings, dear ones, as you embrace the sources of inspiration and hope in your work for justice. Amen.*

Welcome people to worship and invite them to join in using their imaginations to help create the worship space for the day. Comment on why there's a big bunch of balloons filling part of the worship space. Note that the balloons are not yet complete. Read Hebrews 12:1–2. Remind the participants that in Hebrews 11 the writer names of people from Cain and Abel through the Old Testament prophets as the “cloud of witnesses.”

Display a copy of Joan Miro's “Kopf.” Invite people to study it, and talk about the way it presents a deconstructed, disjointed view of a human head. Ask if folks ever feel like that.

Invite folks to find a quiet and peaceful place within themselves from which to pray. After a few moments of silence, use this guided meditation:

Think back over your life and the bit of history in which they've lived. In what ways have the concepts of freedom, equality, wholeness, peace, and integrity shaped human life during you lifetime? *(Pause)* Call to mind the hundreds, the thousands, the uncountable numbers of people who have lived and hoped and worked for justice in this country and in the world. *(Pause)* To whom do you look when you want inspiration in your daily life, especially when you are working for justice, wholeness, dignity, and peace in your community and world? *(Pause)* To whom do you look when you want inspiration in your daily life, especially when you are working for justice, wholeness, dignity, and peace in your community and world? *(Pause)* Who are the people of faith, contemporary and historical, who give you hope?

Lead a prayer giving thanks to God for those whose faith, life, and actions inspire and help us all to live in faith, hope, and love with compassion, gratitude, and grace. Then invite people to come forward to create name tags bearing the names of the “witnesses” and “saints” that empower them for living, and affix these names to the balloons (virtual or real) in the Great Cloud. This part of this activity will benefit from the help of some volunteers to assist in making and hanging tags on the balloon strings.



③ Servant of Us All

Leader preparation: Augustine of Hippo (November 13, 354–August 28, 430) is credited with this thought: “Those who sing pray twice.” Cultures around the world use simple, repetitive words set to easily remembered music as vehicles for our spirits to enter into profound times of prayer. The Community at Taizé in France uses such prayer chants to engage people from all over the world in prayer and praise on a daily basis. Visit <http://www.taize.fr> to listen to examples of these repetitive (mantralike, *ostinato*) prayer chants in use.

Supplies:

- song: “Servant of Us All,” Attachment: Activity 3

Written in the style of the prayer chants from the Community at Taizé, this paraphrase of the prayer attributed to Francis of Assisi can be sung in many ways. The congregation can sing its refrain repeatedly while a choir or soloists sing the verses. If a choir is present, it is best when they sing the choral parts, providing an “envelope” of sound to support the congregation's singing. Alternatively, everyone can sing both refrain and verses in the pattern of two refrains followed by a verse and ending with two refrains.



Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Hearing God's Word (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Consider our fragmented world and the divisions and segments we live with everyday. In preparation for this activity and with those points of divisiveness in mind, read Ephesians 2:11–22 with an awareness of just how good this news is today as much as when it was first written. The “Bible Gateway” website, <http://www.biblegateway.com>, is a great resource with which to compare versions and make a choice of which to use in a given setting.

Supplies:

- Bible

Before reading this passage aloud as part of worship, invite people to call to mind the fragmentation of our world into mutually mistrustful segments defined by class, race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, age, gender, sexual orientation, market segment, and political ideology. Ephesians 2:11–22 was and remains a radical message that runs counter to business-as-usual in our world. As you read this text, invite the hearers to let themselves feel that reality, and let your reading reflect those feelings.



5 Breaking Down Barriers

Leader preparation: In a highly polarized world, it is hard not to be aware of the barriers separating people from one another. Walls and highways divide districts and countries. Ideologies divide families and nations. Violence tears apart communities and lives. Rigid fundamentalisms—of all stripes, right, left and middle—may be only chief among the defining sins of our times.

Working for justice by breaking down walls of fear and misunderstanding requires openness, vulnerability, and willingness to dialogue. One story from traditions about the life of Francis of Assisi provides a parable that illustrates the importance of repairing or building bridges to heal the divisions that endanger the integrity of this world's peace. See the online article “St. Francis, The Wolf and the City,” http://www.globalchristians.org/tmk/tmk16_stfrancis.htm.

Supplies:

- “St. Francis and the Wolf,” Attachment: Activity 5
- a means of playing music
- (optional) a dancer or mime to play the wolf
- (optional) jazz ensemble

Part of this Reflection on the Word is a dramatic presentation of a story attributed to the life of a small man with a big spirit, Francis of Assisi. The story of Francis and the wolf becomes a parable for our times, too. Fear and misunderstanding divide people. Compassion and understand bridge the divide.

The piece was written for a jazz vesper series and contains music cues descriptive of mood/tone for music choices. If you have musicians capable of improvising in your congregation—not necessarily jazz folks, just folks comfortable improvising. You may want to include this element in your reading as well.

Encourage people to reflect on the barriers of fear, hate, and misunderstanding dividing our world in terms drawn from the story of “Francis and the Wolf.” In each situation:



- Who are the villagers; who are the wolves?
- How might bridges be built in these situations?
- Where are we called to be bridge builders, the reconcilers?



6 Prayers from the Middle of the Bridge

Leader preparation: As worshipers reflect on the places we're called to be bridge builders and reconcilers, draw together bids for prayer that grow from these reflections.

Supplies:

- song: "Servant of Us All," Attachment: Activity 3

As the congregation and choir sing the refrain of the song "Servant of Us All, Lover of the World, make us instruments of your peace," a worship leader speaks aloud the congregation's bids for prayer related to ministries of bridge-building and reconciliation.

This time for prayer should also make space for individuals to speak aloud their own bids for prayer. When no one has spoken for some time, bring the singing and the time of prayer to a close.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Closing Litany (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Some powerful words have woven themselves through our culture's struggle to journey toward a world living out a just and sustainable peace.

A 19th century Transcendentalist Unitarian minister first said, "Look at the facts of the world. You see a continual and progressive triumph of the right. I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice. Things refuse to be mismanaged long."

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., made these words his own, using their core insight in words like these: "When our days become dreary with low-hovering clouds of despair, and when our nights become darker than a thousand midnights, let us remember that there is a creative force in this universe, working to pull down the gigantic mountains of evil, a power that is able to make a way out of no way and transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows. Let us realize the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice."

Today these words are woven into the carpet on the floor of the Oval Office in Barack Obama's White House: "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice"

Supplies:

- "A Litany of Hope," Attachment: Activity 7

Share the background of the litany (as described in the Leader preparation above). Use the litany as a response to hearing the Word.



8 Embodying the Word

Leader preparation: This activity can be connected to Activity 2 above since it also uses the painting “Kopf” by Miro. We started out with that image of a disjointed, deconstructed face. As worship comes to a close, we can celebrate with images that point the way toward a vision of wholeness in human community. If it is easy for you to do so, considering displaying the poster listed under Supplies. Invite the participation of a diverse group of folks to be part of a mime presentation in worship. While this need not be a big production over which to lose sleep, it will be good to rehearse the group once or twice so they are comfortable with how this little scene will unfold.

This activity reminds us that speaking is not the only way to share the Word. It is inspired, in part, by a saying attributed to Francis of Assisi: “Embody the Gospel at all times. If necessary, use words.”

Supplies:

- artwork: “Kopf” by Joan Miro, <http://tinyurl.com/FPArt18>
- (optional) artwork: “Martin Luther King’s Beloved Community,” https://www.reachandteach.com/store/index.php?l=product_detail&p=909

Display “Kopf” by Joan Miro and, if possible, “Martin Luther King’s Beloved Community.” As the mimes slowly gather, have worshipers view “Kopf” and its disjointed, deconstructed look at a human head. The find places within the worship center (chancel) where they can stand, but not see others (standing back to back, or at odd angles, or semi-hiding behind chancel furnishings). Pose these questions to the congregation: *What if we weren’t so disjointed, so disconnected? How might our world be different?* After a few, probably awkward moments, the youngest mime begins to coax other mimes out of their isolation and into playful and cooperative relationship. S/he has a balloon (real or mimed) with which to invite people into a simple game of “volleyball.” One by one each mime finds a way into something resembling a circle to enjoy the game and one another. The mimes should take 2–3 minutes and come to a close with folks gathered in a circle before parting (with hugs, handshakes, and high fives) to return to their seats in the congregation.



9 The Arc of the Universe Bends Toward Justice

Leader preparation: Read the Leader preparation for Activity 7 above. In this activity we make those words our own by singing them when our worship calls us to embrace the length and breadth of time and energy at the core of our work for justice.

Supplies:

- “The Universe Is Bending,” Attachment: Activity 9

Introduce the hymn with the historical information contained in the Leader preparation for Activity 8 above. Invite folks to sing the song after they have let their imaginations embrace the “Arc of the Universe.” That arc connects us back through Theodore Parker through all history as well as to Dr. King and into this generation’s part in the unfolding work of justice.



Following the Church Year

When worship life follows the themes and rhythms of the church year, it is deeply connected to the stuff of scripture. Because the Bible often brings our attention to the themes of working for justice, our worship has frequent opportunities to reflect those themes as we pray, praise, and celebrate together.

When we gather for a service of worship that grows from the heart of scripture, our worship enters into relationship with God's presence within and among the community of faith. The Common Lectionary, a three-year cycle of scripture readings structuring themes for a year's journey through the seasons of the church year, is a rich, creative, and challenging resource for planners of worship.

"The Text This Week" website is a remarkable resource for scripture study and worship planning: <http://www.textweek.com/>. In each case the scriptures featured in this Exploration are appointed for particular weeks in the church year. Using the resources at this website provides a delightful playground within which to spark creativity for planning services rooted in these themes.

Psalm 34:15–22

(<http://www.textweek.com/yearb/properb16.htm>)

Psalm 34's invitation to "taste and see" God's good presence in the company of the brokenhearted sets the context (the table?) within which to read one of John 6's visionary reflections on the Bread of Heaven and life in the community of faith.

Ephesians 2:11–22

(<http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=211>)

In the Year of Mark, the breathless immediacy of Mark's Gospel is set against the inclusive vision of Ephesian's affirmation of the community of faith gathered as equals in the household of God.

A Call to Worship

Based on Psalm 34:15-22

Leader: God is close to the brokenhearted
and saves those who are crushed in spirit.
A righteous may have many troubles,
but it is God who delivers them from them all;

People: **Taste and see that God is good;**
blessed is the one who takes refuge in God.

Leader: God protects all the righteous one's bones,
not one of them will be broken.
Evil will slay the wicked;
the foes of the righteous will be condemned.

People: **Taste and see that God is good;**
blessed is the one who takes refuge in God.

Leader: The Lord redeems his servants;
no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him.

People: **Taste and see that God is good;**
blessed is the one who takes refuge in God.

Attachment: Activity 3

Servant of Us All

Hymn Paraphrase of the Prayer Attributed to Francis of Assisi
 Suggested pattern: Refrain x2, vs. 1, Refrain x2, vs. 2, Refrain x2
 Refrain may stand alone as a prayer chant, alternate with verses,
 or continue repeating as verses are sung over it.

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 Rev. Jeremy McLeod
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Ostinato Refrain

Ser - vant of us All, Lov - er of the World,
 Make us in - stru - ments of your Peace!

Verses

Where ha - tred reigns, let us sow love
 Use us each day to con - sole the world.

Where in - jury wounds, let us sow pardon.
 Use us each day to build brid - ges of love.

Where dis - cord breaks let us sow un - ion.
 Use us to give and we will re - ceive

Where dark - ness dwells let us sow light.
 As we for - give we are touched by for - give - ness,

Where sad - ness weeps let us sow joy!
 And in our dy - ing we are born to new life!

Where sad - ness weeps let us sow joy!
 And in our dy - ing we are born to new life!

To Refrain
 To Refrain

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 Published in at ucc.org in 2003 (Resources in a Time of War)
 and in the Ad/vent/Christmas 2004 edition of "Alive!Now"

Attachment: Activity 5

St Francis and the Wolf

Music: Something pastoral and peaceful, such as "The Pastoral Symphony" from Handel's Messiah (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mnTQo3WS7rM>).

Reader 1: Let me tell you about a place called Gubbio. Gubbio is a beautiful and peaceful village in the middle of Italy. But not all that long ago the people who lived there were full of fear and anger.

Music: A sour note to disturb the peace.

Reader 2: People were shouting, men and women were grabbing swords, knives, pitch forks—any weapon they could find.

Reader 1: What made the people so angry?

Reader 2: The answer—a wolf!

Music: Music to represent an old starving wolf, such as the wolf theme played by French horns in Peter and the Wolf by Sergei Prokofiev (<http://www.philtulga.com/Peter.html>).

Reader 1: An old, starving wolf came down out of the mountains because food was hard to find.

Reader 2: And, because the wolf was starving it was killing the villages' animals and had even attacked some people.

Reader 3: The people were getting ready to go into the woods, hunt out the wolf, and kill it.

Reader 4: They weren't going to sit back and wait for the wolf to attack again.

Music: Music in which the beat begins to sound militant/military.

Reader 3: They'd do what they needed to do so their homes and property would be safe and secure.

Reader 2: With all that noise and commotion going on, no one noticed a young man called Francis visiting from a nearby town of Assisi.

Reader 1: But Francis spoke up.

Music: Music just gets a little louder.

Reader 2: Folks were carrying on so loudly, they didn't hear him at first.

Reader 1: But . . . Francis . . . spoke . . . up!

Music: Tacit . . . temporarily.

Francis of Assisi: People of Gubbio, I can see how angry you are. But before you go into the wood to kill this wolf, please let me try and help.

Music: A big, musical laugh!

Reader 4: "Why, what can a runt like you do?" said the mayor, a big burly man.

Reader 1: "Perhaps nothing, my friend," said Francis. "But I would like to meet this creature. Perhaps I can talk to this wolf and make sure it will never again bother the village."

Reader 3: "He speaks to the animals," some of the children said.

Reader 4: But the adults burst out with laughter.

Music: An even bigger, musical laugh!

Reader 1: "Please, I will go into the wood alone," said Francis. "I need just a few hours; what harm can waiting a little do?"

Reader 3: The people muttered to themselves, but eventually they agreed to let Francis have a try.

Attachment: Activity 5 (continued)

Music: The mood turns introspective, prayerful.

Reader 1: Francis remembered how God loves all creatures and then, . . .

Reader 2: without weapons or armor, he walked into the dark wood.

Reader 1: After an hour, Francis found the wolf. The creature was curled up in its lair.

Reader 4: When it saw Francis, it sprang to its feet, stared at the young man, and started to growl.

Music: Bass growl and soothing keyboards.

Reader 1: Francis looked at the wolf and almost cried. He could see the wolf was starving and was so thin its bones showed in the side of its body.

Reader 2: Francis stretched out his hand and scratched the wolf behind its torn right ear.

Music: Can a string bass whimper?

Music: Back to opening music for a peaceful small town.

Reader 2: An hour later Francis was back in the village.

Reader 4: “Well,” said the mayor, smirking, “have you, uh, spoken to the wolf?”

Reader 1: “I have,” said Francis. “We had a good talk. The wolf is old and starving. So, this is what I suggest. If you will feed the wolf, the wolf will never again harm anyone. He’s promised. Do you?”

Reader 4: Well, the people thought it over.

Reader 3: The idea seemed so simple.

Reader 2: It might work.

Music: “peaceful small town” theme gets a little brighter, a little more up tempo.

Reader 4: So, for the next two years the people fed the wolf, and the wolf would go from house to house visiting.

Reader 2: The wolf became a frequent and welcome visitor to their village.

Reader 3: The wolf was old, so before long, people could see that he’d be dying soon.

Music: The music begins to slow down again.

Reader 4: The villagers made him a comfortable bed in the home of the old woman who knew the most about herbs and living and dying.

Reader 2: Everyone came to say goodbye to the wolf who had become their friend. After a few days, the wolf finally died.

Music: Tacit.

Reader 4: When he died, the people of the village were sad that this wolf who had become a friend was gone.

Music: Begin to introduce “Servant of Us All.”

Reader 3: But when they remembered the wolf and how they came to be friends, they also remembered a gentle man named Francis . . .

Reader 1: who had helped them learn how to trust in the power of compassion, how not to let their anger and fear make them do hurtful things, and how to make peace and seek understanding instead.

Music: Invite worshippers to join in singing “Servant of Us All.”



A Litany of Hope

Leader: When our days become dreary with low-hovering clouds of despair,

People: **Let us remember that the arc of the moral universe is long, and it bends toward justice.**

Leader: When our nights become darker than a thousand midnights,

People: **Let us remember that the arc of the moral universe is long, and it bends toward justice.**

Leader: Let us remember that there is a creative force in this universe, working to pull down the gigantic mountains of evil.

People: **Let us remember that the arc of the moral universe is long, and it bends toward justice.**

Leader: Let us remember that there is a power that is able to make a way out of no way and transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows.

People: **Let us realize that the arc of the moral universe is long, and it bends toward justice.**

*Adapted from the words of Dr. King, recorded in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Harper/Collins, 1991), p. 252.*



The Universe Is Bending

Jeremy McLeod

$\text{♩} = 84$ F Dm B \flat Gm F F/A Gm/B \flat Dm

The U-ni-verse is bend-ing. stretch-ing long and stretch-ing out, em -

5 F Dm C Dm 3 F B \flat C

brac - ing all our strug - gles with gen-tle arms of Hope. The

9 Am F B \flat C Dm 3 F 3 C/E B \flat

U - ni-verse is bend - ing, stretch - ing long and stretch - ing out and it's

13 F Dm F/A B \flat F/C B \flat F 1. F 2.

lead - ing to-ward Just - ice* by the Clear Light of Love. The Love.

**Substitute:*

Free-dom
Whole-ness
Joy and Peace

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Working for Justice



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Setting

“Actions speak louder than words.” To be a person of faith is to witness to our faith in our choices, in our relationships, and in our actions. This is particularly the case when we live out the aspect of our faith that calls us to work for justice. When worship opens our hearts and minds to the reality of oppression and injustice in our world, we have the opportunity to respond by doing the work of justice.

Activities in this setting provide worship planners with resources to design services of worship that explore working for justice as an integral part of practicing our faith. Many of these activities make use of arts—rich, experiential elements—in their design. By choosing one or more activities from each of three categories (Exploring & Engaging, Discerning & Deciding, Sending & Serving), planners will have resources for the beginning, middle, and end of a service of worship.

Many of these activities suggest an interactive style of inviting worshipers to reflect on their experiences of elements of the service (such as visual displays), or on God’s Word, or on sharing that for which they ask others’ prayers. Not all congregations will find this comfortable at first and experimenting with ways to create the spiritual space within which people share may be necessary. When these interactive reflections function as “a sermon” in worship, it often works well for the pastor or other theologically sensitive persons to be prepared to summarize the reflections and bring discussion to a close. When an interactive reflection is not indicated, preachers and worship leaders are encouraged to take the questions and thought starters in this activities into consideration as they prepare their own reflections.

About this Exploration

All are created in the image of God, children of God, unique and diverse in their own context. Jesus imagined a different context from the one in which he lived. He imagined the realm of God, rooted in love and justice. God is angered by injustice and we are called to respond. When working for justice, we see the face of God in others around us. When we explore context and mission, we wake up to the just and unjust realities of our local communities and world.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**Proverbs 22:1–2, 8–9,
22–23**
Romans 13:8–14

Leader Preparation

The theological movement known as “Liberation Theology” gives us an important insight: Living our faith shares something crucial with the business of real estate: location, location, location. In this case, “location” points to the sum of all that makes us who we are—gender, race, class, sexual orientation, geographic location, financial resources, education, access (or lack of it), and the ability to interact effectively with others and our environments, to name a few factors. We understand everything we experience through the lenses provided to us by our “location” in life. These mission activities ask us to understand our faith through the lenses provided by the lives of people living in extreme situations.

Before preparing to lead activities in this Exploration, create a prayerful space within which to reflect on the location (or “context,” if that word makes more sense to you) within which you live your life and out of which you understand the “big questions” of your faith and spirituality.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 What in the World? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: For the week or two prior to a worship service, let your imagination take note of images and events in the world around you that let you know what the world is like and who you are in that world (your location, your context). Check out newspapers, the Internet, and news magazines.

If possible, create a PowerPoint presentation of a variety of headlines and photos.

Supplies:

- (optional) artwork: “Shotgun Third Ward” by John Biggers
https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=17101&store_id=1401
- (optional) PowerPoint presentation of current headlines

Welcome people to worship, and invite them to a journey of the imagination in which they take note of “images and events in the world around you that let you know what the world is like and who you are in that world.” Invite some to share. Ask: *If we were putting pictures all over these walls that described our community and our world as they are today, what pictures would you place there?* If you display “Shotgun Third Ward,” point out the way the painter creates the context in which folks are living.

For the sermon, reflect on the pictures that people suggest as well as the articles, headlines, and photos you considered that paint the world within which we live and worship. *What in the world created the world in which we live?*



2 Where Are We Praying Today?

Leader preparation: Study John Biggers’ painting “Shotgun Third Ward,” (<http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=2072>.) Take in its details. Where does the artist direct your attention? What touches your heart? Read about John Biggers’s life and art. (The Smithsonian’s biography is posted online at http://americanart.si.edu/search/artist_bio.cfm?ID=414; another article is posted at <http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/5aa/5aa200.htm>.) The man facing out of the painting carrying a lighted candle bears a resemblance to the artist himself. What might this suggest to you? Biggers’s art repeatedly used the image of the shotgun house. For more information about shotgun houses, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shotgun_house.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Shotgun Third Ward” by John Biggers, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=17101&store_id=1401



Prayer: *Blessings, dear ones, as you name and claim the perspective on life and faith that comes to you with the facts of your location in life. Amen.*

Invite people to reflect on what they see in “Shotgun Third Ward.”

- What is happening in this picture?
- Who lives in these “shotgun houses”?
- How do the various people in this painting engage what’s going on around them?
- What picture of the world is suggested by this painting?
- Where are you in the painting? Where is light and hope in the painting?
- Where else, beside Houston, Texas (the setting for this painting), might this event take place today?

③ Lead Us from Death to Life

Leader preparation: Satish Kumar, an ecologist, nonviolence activist, and former Jain monk, is credited with having paraphrased verses from the Hindu scripture *The Upanishads* to create what has become known since 1981 as the “World Peace Prayer.” Whether you sing it to the tune composed by Marty Haugen or simply read the words aloud, create a prayerful space within yourself from which to make this prayer your own.

Lead us from death to life,
from falsehood to truth.
Lead us from despair to hope,
from fear to trust.
Lead us from hate to love,
from war to peace.
Let peace fill our hearts,
our world, our universe. Amen.

—Satish Kumar

To learn more about Satish Kumar, visit his biographical page, <http://www.resurgence.org/satish-kumar/>, posted on the website of Resurgence, the ecological organization and magazine of which he is the founder (<http://www.resurgence.org/>).

Supplies:

- song: “Lead Us from Death to Life” by Marty Haugen (tune: World Peace Prayer; text by Haugen and Satish Kumar), http://www.giamusic.com/search_details.cfm?title_id=184 (available in print in *The New Century Hymnal*, #581, The Pilgrim Press)

This is one of those songs that hovers in the spiritual realm between lament, longing, and celebration. It realizes that there are many things in our world that are challengingly un-peaceful. Its melody and setting, however, can be interpreted in an upbeat way. It provides a way for people to both pray for and affirm commitment to living on the journey toward peace.



Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Romans 13 (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Romans 13 urges us to live in the present moment with a sense of urgency about being present to others in love. The centuries-old words of a Latin hymn, often appointed for use on Maundy Thursday, resonates today in a setting by Jacques Berthier, a brother of the community at Taizé in France. This activity invites you to combine these two elements in a prayerful reading of scripture during worship. By using an Internet connection, it will be easy to find and use the materials suggested in this activity.

Supplies:

- song: “Ubi caritas,”
<http://www.taize.fr/spip.hp?page=chant&song=503&lang=en> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G2o27qpvfUc>
- “Romans 13:8–14,” Attachment: Activity 4

At the point of a service given to hearing and reflecting on the words of scripture, a musician introduces the Taizé setting of “Ubi Caritas,” continuing to play it quietly as the reader presents the text from Romans and, as indicated, invites people to join in singing the song. See the litany on the attachment.

5 Our Actions Are Our Words

Leader preparation: Sometimes the texts of scripture as well as the world in which we worship ask us to look at deeply painful realities. This should not be easy to do. Whether or not you intend to use the whole movie *Gran Torino* as part of a worship service, obtain a copy and watch the entire film. You will be introducing that experience to others and leading them in discussion after they have viewed clips or the whole film, and you will be best prepared to do so once you have experienced the wrenching impact of the film for yourself. This activity is not for the faint of heart or mind.

Supplies:

- movie: *Gran Torino*, on loan from your local library or rented or purchased from sources such as <http://www.amazon.com/Gran-Torino-Full-Screen-Clint-Eastwood/dp/B0020MKTOS>
- technology to present this film or online clips

The movie *Gran Torino* is hard to watch. It depicts hard realities. Its language is harsh. Its violence is pervasive. Yet, as it unfolds, hard-hearted hatred is transformed by the persistence of mutual respect and love. The central character’s self-sacrifice certainly gives witness to the power of that love. So, encourage people to take a deep breath or three (or four), find a prayerful place from which to view this movie, and then play either the whole film (say, in a retreat setting), or the following three clips.

- Trailer: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_ghMTDQZCk&feature=related
- Climax: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YQN-3p2HqPA&feature=related>
- Finale: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SJLbR9TEMD8&feature=related>

After a few moments of silence to allow time for people to take in what they’ve



just seen, encourage them to reflect on the following or similar questions. Be ready to acknowledge feelings stirred up by the experience of watching this film.

- What did Walt Kowalski learn about the people he started out hating?
- What role did his faith play in this learning?
- What might have motivated his choices depicted in this movies climax?
- What might we learn from the witness of his actions?

6 Prayers in Pictures

Leader preparation: Two or three weeks before this service, encourage people with access to cameras (digital or other) to take pictures of their surroundings, their communities, and their environment with an eye to recording images addressing two themes:

- What in our immediate world gives evidence of suffering, oppression, and injustice?
- What in our immediate world gives evidence of the work of “setting things right” or the work of justice.

Invite folks to send one or two of their pictures to the church office (by e-mail or hard copy) in time to be organized into a montage of images to be displayed (as a poster or projection) during the service.

GIA Press and onelicense.net control the copyrights for Taizé materials in the United States. You can contact them at <http://www.onelicense.net/>.

Supplies:

- Taizé prayer chant: “Within Our Darkest Night,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6MS6fE7lcCc> and <http://www.taize.fr/spip.php?page=chant&song=316&lang=en>.

While the people sing the Taizé prayer song, display the pictures collected from photographers in the congregation. Encourage people to speak aloud their concerns for prayer over the singing when they are moved to do so. When no one has spoken for a time, bring the singing and this time for prayer to a close as well.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Discouraged . . . or Trusting? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Prepare for the song “His Eye Is on the Sparrow.” If this song is not in your hymnal, you might want the choir or a soloist to practice the song in order to lead the congregation.

Supplies:

- song: “His Eye Is on the Sparrow” by Civilla D. Martin (tune: Sparrow), <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/hym/h/i/hiseyeis.htm>
- “Reading and Singing God’s Word,” Attachment: Activity 7

According to a posting on Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/His_Eye_is_on_the_Sparrow, Civilla Martin reflected on writing her popular gospel song “His Eye is on the Sparrow” with these words:



Early in the spring of 1905, my husband and I were sojourning in Elmira, New York. We contracted a deep friendship for a couple by the name of Mr. and Mrs. Doolittle—true saints of God. Mrs. Doolittle had been bed-ridden for nigh twenty years. Her husband was an incurable cripple who had to propel himself to and from his business in a wheel chair. Despite their afflictions, they lived happy Christian lives, bringing inspiration and comfort to all who knew them. One day while we were visiting with the Doolittles, my husband commented on their bright hopefulness and asked them for the secret of it. Mrs. Doolittle’s reply was simple: “His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.” The beauty of this simple expression of boundless faith gripped the hearts and fired the imagination of Dr. Martin and me. The hymn “His Eye Is on the Sparrow” was the outcome of that experience.

The song was soon embraced by the African American community, both for worship and for the gospel concert stage. Versions by singers like Ethel Waters (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethel_Waters) and Mahalia Jackson (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eM_JRAPSvVM) brought home the depth and power of this song to express deep trust in God’s presence and providence in times of discouragement and oppression.

Lead the congregation in the litany on the attachment.



8 Affirming the Dream

Leader preparation: If you want a more complete sense of the impact of Dr. King’s sermon and its resonance in this benediction, here’s a link to the full text: http://www.ecoflourish.com/Inspiration/Christmas_Sermon.html

Supplies:

- “A Benediction Affirming the Dream,” Attachment: Activity 8

Part of the challenge of living a faith that works for justice is staying in touch with hope in the face of horror. Dr. King’s 1967 Christmas Eve sermon is just such a statement of faith. Lead the congregation in a benediction dialog from Romans 13 and an excerpt from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s sermon “Et in Terra Pax,” preached on Christmas Eve 1967, about four months before he was assassinated.

9 We Shall Overcome

Leader preparation: This anthem of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement has a rich, if somewhat unclear, history. While its origins are unclear, its impact on those struggling for African American Civil Rights was powerful. The following link will help gain an appreciation for this history: “‘We Shall Overcome’: The History behind the Ultimate Protest Song,” http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/256160/we_shall_overcome_the_history_behind.html?cat=37.

Alternatively, you may want to consider singing Dan Schutte’s “City of God”:

- “City of God,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-zRAUH8yBcQ&feature=related>
- “City of God” accompaniment package, <http://www.ocp.org/products/90496>

**Supplies:**

- song: “We Shall Overcome,” African American spiritual (tune: Martin); “Pete Seeger—We Shall Overcome,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OhnPVP23rzo>; link to a Library of Congress page with PDFs of an accompaniment for this song, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/aaohhtml/exhibit/0919001.html>

Invite people to join in singing “We Shall Overcome.” Consider following the practice from Civil Rights Movement use of the song by encouraging people to join hands while singing.

Following the Church Year

When worship life follows the themes and rhythms of the church year, it is deeply connected to the stuff of scripture. Because the Bible often brings our attention to the themes of working for justice, our worship has frequent opportunities to reflect those themes as we pray, praise, and celebrate together.

When we gather for a service of worship that grows from the heart of scripture, our worship enters into relationship with God’s presence within and among the community of faith. The Common Lectionary, a three-year cycle of scripture readings structuring themes for a year’s journey through the seasons of the church year, is a rich, creative, and challenging resource for planners of worship.

“The Text This Week” website is a remarkable resource for scripture study and worship planning: <http://www.textweek.com/>. In each case the scriptures featured in this Exploration are appointed for particular weeks in the Church year. Using the resources at this website provides a delightful playground within which to spark creativity for planning services rooted in these themes.

Proverbs 22:1–2, 8–9, 22–23 (www.textweek.com/yearb/properb18.htm)

Reading Proverbs 22, we come to understand just how thoroughly rich and poor find common identity and cause in the household of God. On this foundation the Lectionary brings us to Mark’s remembrance of a foreigner who seems to remind Jesus of the inclusiveness of God’s love and the community built up by that love.

Romans 13:8–14 (<http://www.textweek.com/yeara/advent1.htm>)

When it comes to observing the laws of faith, Romans 13 cuts to the bottom line: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” It also sounds a wake up call, urging us to be firmly grounded in our faith as a simple way of life. This much-needed and powerful reminder is appointed twice in the Lectionary.

The First Sunday of Advent traditionally paints a dire picture of the power of hope in the midst of dark times. Romans reminds us to wake from our slumber (are we numbed by the threatening times in which we live?) and live out the Law of Love.



In the thick of the Year of Matthew, Year A, attention turns to the foundations for relationships within the community of those following the Way of Jesus. The Law of Love and the mutual vulnerability of direct, honest, and compassionate communication are at the heart of this community of faith (<http://www.textweek.com/yeara/propera18.htm>).



Romans 13:8-14 from *The Message*

Leader: Don't run up debts, except for the huge debt of love you owe each other. When you love others, you complete what the law has been after all along. The law code—don't sleep with another person's spouse, don't take someone's life, don't take what isn't yours, don't always be wanting what you don't have, and any other "don't" you can think of—finally adds up to this: Love other people as well as you do yourself. You can't go wrong when you love others. When you add up everything in the law code, the sum total is love.

People (singing): **Ubi caritas et amor, deus ibi est.** (repeat 3 times)

Leader: But make sure that you don't get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all your day-by-day obligations that you lose track of the time and doze off, oblivious to God. The night is about over, dawn is about to break. Be up and awake to what God is doing! God is putting the finishing touches on the salvation work he began when we first believed. We can't afford to waste a minute, must not squander these precious daylight hours in frivolity and indulgence, in sleeping around and dissipation, in bickering and grabbing everything in sight. Get out of bed and get dressed! Don't loiter and linger, waiting until the very last minute. Dress yourselves in Christ, and be up and about!

People (singing): **Ubi caritas et amor, deus ibi est.** (repeat 3-5 times)

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Reading and Singing God's Word
Psalm 124 (from *The Message*), with musical refrains from
"His Eye Is on the Sparrow"

Reader: If God hadn't been for us—all together now, God's Beloved, sing out!

People (singing):

**I sing because I'm happy, I sing because I'm free,
For His eye is on the sparrow, And I know He watches me.**

Reader: If God hadn't been for us when everyone went against us,
we would have been swallowed alive by their violent anger.

People (singing):

**Why should I feel discouraged, why should the shadows come,
Why should my heart be lonely, and long for heaven and home,
When Jesus is my portion? My constant friend is He:
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.**

Reader: If God hadn't been for us when everyone went against us,
We would have been swept away by the flood of rage, drowned
in the torrent;
We would have lost our lives in the wild, raging water.

People (singing):

**"Let not your heart be troubled," His tender word I hear,
And resting on His goodness, I lose my doubts and fears;
Though by the path He leadeth, but one step I may see;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.**

Reader: Oh, blessed be God! He didn't go off and leave us.
He didn't abandon us defenseless,
helpless as a rabbit in a pack of snarling dogs.
We've flown free from their fangs, free of their traps, free as a bird.
Their grip is broken; we're free as a bird in flight.
God's strong name is our help, the same God who made heaven and earth.

People (singing):

**I sing because I'm happy, I sing because I'm free,
For His eye is on the sparrow, And I know He watches me.**

Scripture taken from *The Message*. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.



A Benediction Affirming the Dream

This benediction dialog weaves together Romans 13 and an excerpt from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s sermon "Et in Terra Pax," preached on Christmas Eve 1967, about four months before he was assassinated.

Leader: People of God, hear the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.:
"If you lose hope, somehow you lose that vitality that keeps life moving,
you lose that courage to be, that quality that helps you go on
in spite of all. And so today I still have a dream."

People: **The hour has come to wake up from our slumber,
because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.**

Leader: "I've seen too much hate to want to hate, myself, and every time I see it,
I say to myself, hate is too great a burden to bear."

People: **The night is nearly over; the day is almost here.**

Leader: "Somehow we must be able to stand up against our most bitter opponents and say:
We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering.
We will meet your physical force with soul force."

People: **So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.**

Leader: "Do to us what you will and we will still love you . . .
But be assured that we'll wear you down by our capacity to suffer,
and one day we will win our freedom."

People: **We still have a dream.**

Leader: "We will not only win freedom for ourselves;
we will appeal to your heart and conscience that we
will win you in the process,
and our victory will be a double victory."

People: **We still have a dream.**

Leader: Let us go in peace to be the brilliant, vulnerable, loving people
God has created us to be. Amen!

Working for Justice



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Setting

To live in this world as persons of faith offers us the opportunity to embody God's vision of a world made whole, to live as though the reality of God's reign of peace is already established. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of the Beloved Community. Francis of Assisi prayed to be an instrument of God's peace. Jesus pointed to our treatment of "the least of these" and to a simple meal of common foods created from grain and grape as foretastes of a time when God's vision of wholeness, integrity, well being, and peace (*shalom*) is fulfilled.

Activities in this setting provide worship planners with resources to design services of worship that explore working for justice as an integral part of practicing our faith. Many of these activities make use of arts—rich, experiential elements—in their design. By choosing one or more activities from each of three categories (Exploring & Engaging, Discerning & Deciding, Sending & Serving), planners will have resources for the beginning, middle, and end of a service of worship.

Many of these activities suggest an interactive style of inviting worshippers to reflect on their experiences of elements of the service (such as visual displays), or on God's Word, or on sharing that for which they ask others' prayers. Not all congregations will find this comfortable at first and experimenting with ways to create the spiritual space within which people share may be necessary. When these interactive reflections function as "a sermon" in worship, it often works well for the pastor or other theologically sensitive persons to be prepared to summarize the reflections and bring discussion to a close. When an interactive reflection is not indicated, preachers and worship leaders are encouraged to take the questions and thought starters in this activities into consideration as they prepare their own reflections.

In particular, activities 2 and 5 (and maybe 9) offer opportunities for the “ham bones” to shine. If you are blessed with some folks who love presenting live theatricals, they will have a grand time with setting the stage for and leading Activity 2. They will also have a field day with presentations of Matthew 25 and Faith Ringgold’s “Tar Beach” in Activity 5. Fair warning, however: undertaking this much theatre as part of a worship service takes time to develop well. Give folks at least six weeks to pull together these elements so they can flow well and engagingly in worship.

About this Exploration

Imagine a world where all are in right relationship with God, with other human beings, and all of God’s creation. Jesus calls us to this future where we live out God’s love in all that we are and all that we do. We do justice because we are inspired by God’s vision of healing and reconciliation, restoration and wholeness, and abundance for all. As a people of hope, we accept the call to be God’s hands and feet. In this Future and Vision Exploration, we are challenged to stay focused on this vision of hope as we live out God’s call to do justice.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Matthew 25:31–46
Isaiah 58:1–14

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 A Call to Worship, Isaiah 58:1–14 (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: The words of scripture are used in worship in many ways. One way is to use scripture in a way that gives the congregation’s voice an expression in worship. Litanies of all sorts do just this. Scripture passages all by themselves, however, do not always work well as congregational language without some adapting.

Supplies:

- “Call to Worship, Isaiah 58:1–14,” Attachment: Activity 1

The Call to Worship on the attachment has been adapted from Isaiah 58 to function as a dialogue so the congregation’s voice affirms God’s promises.

2 Be Thou My Vision

Leader preparation: “Be Thou My Vision” is a hymn derived from an eighth-century Irish folk song. The folk song got its start in Ireland around A.D. 433, when on the night before Easter, St. Patrick defied a royal decree by lighting candles. The king of Tara had traditionally lit a fire beginning a pagan spring festival. It was his order that no one could light a fire before him on this night. When the king learned of St. Patrick’s arrogance, the king was so impressed he let St. Patrick continue services. The hymn can be found in many hymnals.

Supplies:

- hymn: “Be Thou My Vision,” Irish song, tr. Mary E. Byrne (tune: Slane), <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/b/t/btmvision.htm>
- (optional) guitar and flute for accompaniment

Invite people to sing this hymn as an opening prayer for a time of worship. It is an affirmation of living each day with God’s vision as our vision. As an introduction to the hymn, pose this question: *How do we see the world differently when we look at it through God’s eyes?*

The lilting, Celtic quality of this hymn’s melody (Slane) can become obscured if accompaniment for singing this song is too heavy or grand. Consider accompanying this tune with guitar and flute.

Leader Preparation

This Exploration invites us to inhabit the world created by artist and author, Faith Ringgold, a world in which a young girl’s imagination lets her hope for a better life for herself and her family. This and the other activities with songs for this Exploration will work well with a folk-style ensemble to accompany them. If you do not already have a folk group functioning in your setting, perhaps this is a good project around which to organize one. Find people who play guitars, melody instruments (such as a flute or clarinet), and percussion (congas rather than a band-style drum kit), and you’re in business.

Read Matthew 25:31–46 and Isaiah 58:1–14. How do these passages call you to dream of a better world, a better community, a better life? What dreams or visions give you hope and call you into a future of wholeness, justice, and peace? Following Cassie Louise Lightfoot’s lead (in the book *Tar Beach* by Faith Ringgold), if you could fly, to

what would you fly to claim as your own?

Place the poster “Tar Beach II” (<http://tinyurl.com/FPArt16>) in a conspicuous and visible space to remind everyone of the importance of dreaming God’s dream.

Prayer: *Blessings, dear one, on your journey of faith, hope, and love into a future embraced by God’s Reign of Peace.*



③ Welcome to Tar Beach—Preparing for a Picnic

Leader preparation: This activity looks more complicated on paper than it is “on its feet” in a worship service. Drawing on imagery from Faith Ringgold’s book *Tar Beach*, it invites worshipers to engage in a theatrical style of presenting and reflecting on God’s word. In addition to purchasing a poster of this image for study and display, the following links offer resources about this artist and her work.

- http://www.literarytraveler.com/authors/faith_ringgold_tar_beach.aspx
- <http://www.learner.org/courses/globalart/work/251/index.html>
- *Tar Beach* is featured by the Public Television program “Reading Rainbow,” Season 8, Episode 6. One segment of this show features Ruby Dee reading the story along with images from the book. A reference librarian at your local public library will enjoy the challenge of finding a copy of this video and getting it for you. Alternatively a video of this program can be found for sale at Amazon.com, http://www.amazon.com/Reading-Rainbow-Tar-Beach/dp/B000J0PV6O/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=dv&qid=1286050301&sr=1-1

Supplies:

- book: *Tar Beach* by Faith Ringgold (Crown Books for Young Readers, 1996), <http://www.faihringgold.com/ringgold/book01.htm>
- artwork: “Tar Beach II” by Faith Ringgold, <http://tinyurl.com/FPArt16>
- card table(s) and chairs
- large plastic tablecloth or other floor covering
- flour, salt, baking soda, buttermilk for a recipe of Irish Soda Bread, <http://bakingbites.com/2007/03/traditional-irish-soda-bread/>
- bowl, measuring cups, and large spoons for mixing the bread dough
- portable toaster/oven large enough to bake the bread.
- grapes for crushing (about ½ pound per 25 worshipers)
- food processor, hand-held blender, or juicer to crush grapes
- strainer to separate juice from pulp
- pitcher/flagon into which to pour juice
- chalices and bread plate(s) for celebration of Holy Communion (recommended: one bread station and two cup stations for every 150 worshipers)

Create a worship center with card tables and chairs that evokes the images of Ringgold’s story *Tar Beach*. You might want to lay down a large plastic table cloth or some other covering to protect the floor when mixing the bread and crushing the grapes. Display the poster “Tar Beach II.” Imagine that your church’s chancel is the rooftop picnic location in Ringgold’s story and that you are using these props to invite people’s imaginations into the picnic at Tar Beach.

At the beginning of the service, after an opening hymn such as “Be Thou My Vision,” introduce “Tar Beach II” to the congregation. Reflect on how this image and the story that it tells will provide the setting in which the themes for this worship service will develop. Provide your own words for this introduction or use the following paragraphs.

Welcome to worship today and to a journey of the heart and imagination that takes us to a rooftop in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City, and from there on to a journey of imagination and freedom. We’re here today on Tar Beach. I know, it’s not a beach . . . really. It’s the tar-covered roof top of an apartment in a part of town where poor and working-class African American people could find a place to live when other neighborhoods were closed to them. Author and artist Faith Ringgold invites us



into a place where a young girl named Cassie Louise Lightfoot lived with her mother, father, and younger brother. They didn't have a backyard, so they and their friends would fix up part of the roof of their apartment building with card tables and chairs and call it Tar Beach. What it lacked in sand and sea breezes, it made up for in great views of the city, the George Washington Bridge, and a great big bowlful of stars overhead. For Cassie Louise and for us, it's a great place from which to take off, dream, and learn. So, here we are on Tar Beach. Here are some tables where we'll share a meal. Here's where Cassie Louise will learn that she can fly. Here's where she will help us learn that our dreams and visions can take us to find our way toward a world of abundance, freedom and justice for all people.

Prepare for a picnic on Tar Beach: Invite children (and playful adults?) to join worship leader(s) at the tables "on Tar Beach" to help prepare food for a special picnic. Every meal takes preparation. Today we're going to share that work right here as part of this service. So, if you are young enough, or old enough, to consider yourself a child, please join me down here on Tar Beach. We're going to make some bread and squeeze some grape juice for the celebration of Holy Communion later in this service.

Working at one end of the table, delegate the juicing of grapes to some older children able to understand the task easily. If possible, recruit a teenager or young adult to coach in this process. Set the freshly squeezed juice in its pitcher on the Communion Table along with chalices and bread plates.

At the other end of the table, lead the younger kids in measuring flour, salt, soda, and buttermilk and then in mixing the dough for Irish Soda Bread. Yes, this is likely to be messy. Embrace it! Form the dough into two or more smaller loaves (think large biscuits; they'll bake faster than one large lump of dough) and put them on a greased baking sheet that will fit into the portable oven(s).

Put the bread in the portable oven(s) and bake (about 20–30 minutes) while the rest of the worship service unfolds. Recruit one person to pay attention to the baking and to turn off the oven when the bread is done.

When the bread is in the oven, invite helpers to return to their seats and continue with the Call to Worship.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ Naming and Praying the Vision (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Consider your own dreams and visions. What empowers you? Who empowers you? Where do you see God's shalom in your life and ministry? What gives you hope?

Supplies: None

In preparation for a time of prayer, invite people to think about the particular dreams or visions that give them hope and lead them forward in a life of faith. Structure a time of corporate prayer that provides space for people to name their visions (aloud or silently) and pray for God's continuing presence in those dreams and visions.



5 Dream God's Dream

Leader preparation: To get to know more about Bryan Sirchio and the spirit he brings to his music, visit his website at <http://www.sirchio.com/index.php?page=bio>. Following links there, you'll be able to get a wider sense of how his music can help a congregation celebrate as a progressive community of faith.

Supplies:

- song: "Dream God's Dream"; video, <http://tinyurl.com/FPSong19>; lyrics, <http://tinyurl.com/FPSong19a>
- musical accompaniment and song leader accompaniment books and other song resources, available at <http://sirchio.com>

Invite people to join in singing this song as it affirms our dreams and imaginations as the Spirit's way to lead us into a world "in which there is justice everywhere." After the singing, pose these questions for the congregation to ponder:

- What dreams or visions give you hope and call you into a future of wholeness, justice, and peace?
- What would the world look like if "God's dream" was a reality?
- What would you add to the song?
- How does this song inspire you to work for justice?
- What dream do you dream? Is it God's dream?

After discussion, sing the song again or close with prayer.

6 Reading and Reflection

Leader preparation: The narratives of scripture lend themselves to dramatic forms of storytelling and physical embodiments of their truths. Such presentations need not be fussy or complicated. For a little inspiration watch clips of *Godspell* online at YouTube. Let your imagination think of how your worship space can lend itself to being the stage on which a dramatic presentation of scripture can unfold.

Supplies:

- Bible

Present Matthew 25:31–46 as a drama. A fine example of this can be found beginning at about the 2 minute, 41 second (2:41) point in the following video clip: "Godspell, Pt. 13," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VjO1LZVgBf4&p=FE8ADAEDFF19AF64&playnext=1&index=47>. Alternatively, if your congregation regularly uses video clips in worship, consider playing this clip as the "reading" of Matthew 25.

Reflect on how God calls us to a future "in which there is justice everywhere." These reflections may be by one person (as in a sermon), as a discussion among a few (as in a panel), or a discussion open to all present.

- How does God call us into this future? Writer and theologian Fred Buechner in his book *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* suggests: "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."
- How does compassion call us into God's future?
- How does injustice call us into God's future?
- How do our deep (psycho-spiritual) hungers call us into God's future?
- How does God's Word call us into God's future?



Sending & Serving Activities



7 I Come with Joy (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This profound and simple hymn has been published in many recent hymnals from several denominations. It will be easy to find, most likely in the hymnal already in use in your congregation. This hymn celebrates both the individual and communal realities present when we gather together for Holy Communion. Brian Wren writes hymns with a grounded focus on the holy in common places. “I Come with Joy” provides a fine context within which to celebrate Holy Communion.

Supplies:

- hymn: “I Come with Joy” by Brian Wren (tune: Dove of Peace), <http://www.oremus.org/hymnal/i/i032.html>

When we gather at the table that Jesus has prepared for us and to which he invites us, we know we are a forgiven people. That understanding empowers us to be workers for justice in our families, in our communities, in the world. We are bound together at the table; we are bound by all that God has done, is doing, and will do.

Use the hymn “I Come with Joy” as an invitation to communion. Encourage people to use their bodies as well as their voices to express the joy that is ours as a forgiven people living into God’s vision of wholeness, integrity, well being, and peace is fulfilled.

(option) Sing verses 1–3 before communion and verses 3–5 (yes, repeating verse 3) after communion.



8 Holy Communion on Tar Beach

Leader preparation: The simple meal in Faith Ringgold’s book *Tar Beach* was the stuff of that family’s daily life. Today we gather for a different, but also simple meal to celebrate God’s presence in the common stuff of our lives and our dreams of wholeness, integrity, and justice.

Supplies:

- chalice(s), bread plate(s)
- bread and juice
- “Litany for Communion,” Attachment: Activity 8

If you used Activity 3 above, use the bread and juice you made in that activity. Otherwise, provide fresh bread and juice as appropriate to your congregation. Or, bring other common elements of the stuff of your congregation’s life. Be sensitive to food allergies, such as gluten intolerance, as you provide communion elements.

The litany on the attachment is adapted from a liturgy from The Seekers Church in Takoma Park, Maryland, <http://www.seekerschurch.org/liturgies/communion1999.htm>.



9 “I Believe in a Better Way”

Leader preparation: Singer-songwriter Ben Harper brings an uncommon passion to his music. His song “I Believe in a Better Way” provides stirring images and a catchy refrain for congregational singing. In the event that links to Harper’s video have gone awry, perform a Google search on the string “Ben Harper Better Way Video YouTube” and it should be the first option to be clicked.

Supplies:

- hymn: “I Believe in a Better Way,” by Ben Harper; lyrics, http://www.ultimate-guitar.com/tabs/b/ben_harper/better_way_crd.htm; video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOZj1Xyx354>
- “Benediction,” Attachment: Activity 9

Invite musicians to learn “I Believe in a Better Way” so they can lead the congregation in singing it as a benediction song. A soloist or small group can sing the verses while the congregation joins in the refrain, “I believe in a better way.”

Include the benediction litany on the attachment. in the bulletin and credit its source. It is an excerpt from “The Litany of Resistance” from the Christian Peacemaker Teams archive. It was written by Jim Loney, a Canadian gay man who was one of the “CPTers” held hostage in Iraq 2005. The full litany is posted online at http://www.cpt.org/resources/worship/litany_of_resistance.

When God’s vision for a world made whole becomes our vision, our lives, our communities, and our world are never quite the same.

- Cassie Louise Lightfoot, main character in Faith Ringgold’s book *Tar Beach*, would say, “Anyone can fly. All you need is somewhere to go that you can’t get to any other way.”
- Jim Loney, a Canadian gay man and member of a Christian Peacemaker Team who was held hostage in Iraq in 2005, gives us words for a benediction full of hope.
- Singer-songwriter Ben Harper gives us words and music to affirm, “I believe in a better way.”

As you send the congregation from worship into the world, ask them: How will you work for justice this week? How will you live in hope and demonstrate your belief in a better way?

Following the Church Year

When worship life follows the themes and rhythms of the church year, it is deeply connected to the stuff of scripture. Because the Bible often brings our attention to the themes of working for justice, our worship has frequent opportunities to reflect those themes as we pray, praise, and celebrate together.

When we gather for a service of worship that grows from the heart of scripture, our worship enters into relationship with God’s presence within and among the community of faith. The Common Lectionary, a three-year cycle of scripture readings structuring themes for a year’s journey through the seasons of the church year, is a rich, creative, and challenging resource for planners of worship.

“The Text This Week” website is a remarkable resource for scripture study and worship planning: <http://www.textweek.com/>. In each case the scriptures fea-



tured in this Exploration are appointed for particular weeks in the Church year. Using the resources at this website provides a delightful playground within which to spark creativity for planning services rooted in these themes.

Matthew 25:31–46 (<http://www.textweek.com/festivals/newyear.htm> and <http://www.textweek.com/yeara/christa.htm>)

This text is appointed for use twice in the Common Lectionary, both of which keep our vision fixed firmly on God’s future. On New Year’s Day our attention is drawn toward a future in which compassion for the “least of these” is a hallmark of being faithful to our relationship with God.

Similarly, this text is appointed at the end of The Year of Matthew, Year A, for the celebration of the Reign of Christ. We’ll know that we are living in the Reign of Christ when compassion for “the least of these” flows freely.

Isaiah 58:1–14 (<http://www.textweek.com/yeara/epipha5.htm>, <http://www.textweek.com/yearc/properc16.htm>, and <http://www.textweek.com/festivals/ash.htm>)

This text is appointed in three interestingly different settings. In the Year of Matthew, we find it paired with a portion of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5, 13–20). Isaiah 58’s pointed call to work toward justice can then be seen as part of being faithful to Jesus’ injunction to be salt of the earth and a light for the world.

There in the Year of Luke, Year C, Isaiah 58 and Luke 13 offer complementary visions of honoring both the ways of justice and the Sabbath.

Finally, a creative tension is built into the texts appointed for worship on Ash Wednesday. Centuries of tradition call us to a ritual recognition of our mortality in the outward sign of a cross-shaped smudge of ashes on our foreheads. In that context Both Isaiah 58 and Matthew 6 warn us against making public displays of piety in favor of embodying our faith in the way we live our lives with humility, justice, and grace.

Attachment: Activity 1

Call to Worship
Based on Isaiah 58:1-14

Leader: People of God, let us gather today
in the name and the presence of the One
who calls us to work for justice in this world.

People: **The One who calls us
to loose the chains of injustice
and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free
and break every yoke.**

Leader: People of God, let us gather today
in the name and the presence of the One
who blesses us with daily bread
and calls us to share it in community.

People: **The One who calls us to share our food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—
to clothe the naked, and not to turn away
from our own flesh and blood.**

Leader: People of God, let us gather today
in the name and the presence of the One
whose promises ring in our hearts, minds, and lives.
When we embody our faith in working for justice,

People: **God promises, “Then your light will break forth like the dawn,
and your healing will quickly appear;
then your righteousness will go before you,
and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.
If you do away with the yoke of oppression,
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,
and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
then your light will rise in the darkness,
and your night will become like the noonday.”**



Attachment: Activity 8

Litany for Communion

One: We gather now as one body, joined around your table.

Many: **Here we celebrate God's presence among us, united in Christ's spirit, broken and whole all at once; nourished and hungry, loved and loving, sinner and forgiven. We make one circle of knowing, believing, rejoicing, and being, as God lights and rests among us.**

One: This is the table of the Heavenly Feast, the joyful celebration of the people of God.

Many: **Christ invites everyone to eat the bread of life, to drink the cup of the new covenant.**

One: Jesus said, "I am the bread of life . . .

Many: **She who comes to me shall never hunger; he who believes in me shall never thirst."**

One: In the beginning,

Many: **God provided every plant yielding seed for food.**

One: *When God's people were in the wilderness,*

Many: **God fed them with miraculous food.**

One: When the crowds were hungry,

Many: **Jesus fed five thousand with two fish and five loaves of bread.**

One: When two were walking towards Emmaus,

Many: **they recognized the Anointed One as they broke bread together.**

One: On the night of his arrest, Jesus took bread,

Many: **and after giving thanks to God, broke it and said, "This is my body which is for you; do this remembering me."**

One: After supper, Jesus took the cup and said,

Many: **"This is the cup of the new covenant; whenever you drink it, do this remembering me."**

One: God of abundance and mercy, we give joyful thanks for your eternal love and healing presence in our celebration around these your gifts of grain and grape.

Many: **May your Spirit bless and fill this body of Christ that we may attend faithfully to our call to be your servants with one another and throughout the world. Amen.**

Adapted from a liturgy from The Seekers Church in Takoma Park, MD; used under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share-alike 3.0 United States License: <http://www.seekerschurch.org/liturgies/communion1999.htm>.

Benediction

One: With the help of God's grace

All: **We will struggle for justice.**

One: With the compassion of Christ,

All: **We will stand for what is true.**

One: With God's abiding kindness,

All: **We will love even our enemies.**

One: With the love of Christ,

All: **We will resist all evil.**

One: With God's unending faithfulness,

All: **We will work to build the beloved community.**

One: With Christ's passionate love,

All: **We will carry the cross.**

One: With God's overwhelming goodness,

All: **We will walk as pilgrims of peace.**

One: With Christ's fervent conviction,

All: **We will labor for truth.**

One: With God's infinite mercy,

All: **We will live in solidarity with all people.**

One: In the end there are three things that last:

All: **Faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love.**

One: Let us abide in God's love.

All: **Thanks be to God.**

Excerpt from "The Litany of Resistance" from the Christian Peacemaker Teams archive, written by Jim Loney, a Canadian gay man who was one of the "CPTers" held hostage in Iraq 2005. See http://www.cpt.org/resources/worship/litany_of_resistance.