

# Giving Testimony and Witness



## Exploration: Discovery

### About this Setting

“Discovering” the faith practice of giving testimony and witness in the worship setting seems obvious. We come to worship to affirm our faith. Our attendance itself is a testimony in contemporary culture where church/synagogue/mosque membership is not a popular choice. There are two challenges. Some worshippers expect “testimony” to come solely from the biblical witness to God’s deeds in the past, and consider personal witness-bearing presumptuous. Others come to worship hoping for an oasis of serenity and privacy after a busy week in an invasive world. Public sharing of a personal encounter with God can be unsettling or feel unsafe. To support these two groups, place the discovery of this faith practice in a biblical framework with clear directions, gradual stages, and many options.

The three Exploring and Engaging activities that follow are shaped for weekly congregational worship and can be adapted to contemporary, traditional, and blended services. The three Discerning and Deciding activities suggest worship planning that invites testimony. The three Sending and Serving activities take this faith practice to specific contexts in the community and worship contexts beyond the local church.



## About this Exploration

We are a people of story, built on the witness of our Bible and rooted in the testimony of our communities. Discovering the power of giving witness and testimony means recognizing that we each have a valid story, indeed, many stories, and that we can identify God's work within those stories. It takes courage to share one's own story; it takes openness to fully listen to the stories of others. Claiming this practice involves shaping a common language. Sharing our testimonies celebrates enriching traditions of communities and the particularity of personal experiences of grace.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:  
**Genesis 24:34–67**  
**Acts 16:16–34**

## Leader Preparation

Spend time considering your personal stories. What story from your childhood do people always tell about you? What story do you often tell about yourself? What story have you already told at least once about an encounter with God? What story about yourself have you never told anyone? Prayerfully offer these stories to God. Remember that people come to worship filled with many stories.

*Prayer: God, thank you for the stories in my life and the library of love that is this congregation. Help us to recognize the ways we have encountered you and to begin to share them with one another. Amen.*

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Gathering Words (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Greeting words, calls to worship, gatherings are times that knit the community together. The practice of testimony and giving witness that occurs in these opening moments often sets the tone of welcome and openness for the rest of the service. There are many ways to witness in the opening of worship, such as calling out and listening to words, extemporaneous stories as well as prepared personal testimony, sharing in movement, and greeting one another.

#### Supplies:

- hymn “Precious Lord, Take My Hand” (tune: Precious Lord)  
<http://tinyurl.com/3lyuggn>
- “Gathering Words that Invite Testimony,” Attachment: Activity 1

The gathering time for weekly worship offers opportunities for heartfelt witnessing in the midst of the community of faith. Many styles of gathering words inspire different people to share their faith stories. Print these in a bulletin or project them on a screen. It helps people to be able to see ahead of time what may be asked of them when they are developing skills of witness. One example follows, and others are on the attachment.

**One:** God gives us this beautiful earth and all that grows and runs and swims and soars.

**All:** God gives us this beautiful earth and all that grows and runs and swims and soars.

**One:** Thanks be to God for trees . . . *(people call out names of particular trees)*  
Thanks be to God for flowers . . . *(people call out names of flowers)*  
Thanks be to God for birds . . . *(people call out names of birds)*  
Thanks be to God for sea creatures . . . *(people call out names of fish, sea mammals, coral)*  
Thanks be to God for all animals . . . *(people call out names of animals)*

**One:** God gives us breath to live and spirit to sing.

**All:** God gives us breath to live and spirit to sing.

**One:** Thanks be to God for people we love . . . *(people call out names of people)*  
Thanks be to God for blessings we have . . . *people call out blessings, such as food, health, homes, employment, friends, caregivers, and so forth)*

**One:** God gathers us into a community of care and inspiration.

**All:** Let us worship God with love, thanksgiving, and praise.



## 2 Peace Like a River

**Leader preparation:** This is an invitation to expand the time of “Passing the Peace,” or to offer a time for each person to share a personal witness with a neighbor or the entire congregation. This simple format for testimony can become a welcome part of frequent worship services. Everyone participates by telling and listening to a story with one other person.

The tradition of Passing the Peace lends familiarity to the practice of testimony. A ritual with deep roots in many traditions, it emerges from two biblical strands: the “holy kiss” of greeting mentioned in the New Testament letters, and the opportunity for personal reconciliation before bringing one’s gift mentioned by Jesus (Matthew 5:24). The background of this tradition combines hospitality and vulnerability.

In some churches the ritual of Passing the Peace needs to be redefined because it has become a time of informal chatting that breaks the mood of worship for some. In some places insistence on physical contact becomes uncomfortable for those with a history of unwelcome touch or those who are conscious of health concerns. The important point is the experience of sharing a witness intimately and then more publicly in a worship context. Do not fight to reclaim Passing the Peace if it is already a problem. Simply introduce this practice as one of “sharing words of meaning” or “offering our stories.”

### Supplies:

- “Words of Invitation for Passing the Peace,” Attachment: Activity 2-1
- “Global Prayers for Peace,” Attachment: Activity 2-2
- a small bell

Invite the congregation to discover the practice of testimony and giving witness by having them share a brief story or statement with a neighbor. At the conclusion of this time, a few people may be willing to share their story with others.

Focus these brief testimonies on peace. You may want to read one or both of the global prayers for peace on the attachment.

*Invitation: (See “Words of Invitation for Passing the Peace,” Attachment: Activity 2-1.) As a way of sharing “peace” with one another, turn to someone near you. It may be a person with whom you came to worship, someone you have met only occasionally, or a completely new friend. Please tell that person something about “peace.” Perhaps there was a time when you felt amazingly peaceful. Perhaps you have a ritual when you need to find peace within yourself.*

Each person will have one minute to share. The ringing bell will remind you to switch from storytelling to story-listening.

After the conversation time, thank people for the gift they have given one another, the gift of peace. Invite those who are willing to share their story with the whole congregation. End with a prayer of thanksgiving (see “Prayer of Thanksgiving,” in Attachment: Activity 2-1).



### ③ Sing It! Say It!

**Leader preparation:** People love to sing! The lyrics of hymns and songs are often as familiar as biblical passages. The combination of words and melody stir deep emotions, but sometimes people cease to actually listen to what they are singing. Embedding personal witness in hymns is one way to discover the power of testimony and reinvigorate the songs. Tell the congregation in advance that the hymn will be interrupted. It is good for the congregation to remain seated.

**Supplies:**

- song: “You Are Salt for the Earth, O People” (tune: Bring Forth, irr. with refrain) [www.tinyurl.com/fp-salt](http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-salt)
- song: “Tú has venido a la orilla” (tune: Pescador de Hombres, 8.10.10 with refrain) [www.tinyurl.com/fp-orilla](http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-orilla)

Because music touches the heart in deep ways, it is often natural to share a witness in the midst of music. As the hymn is sung, all who are gathered will consider their own answers to the testimony prompt. This can be an invitation for anyone to share as he or she is moved in the pausing moment, or the witness in the midst of the song can be invited and prepared ahead of the worship service.

Sing “You Are Salt for the Earth, O People,” pausing after the third verse.

Prompt: *Share a very happy church story! Yes, tell a time in any church context when you were pleased and proud to be a part of the community of God’s people because, for all of the other stumbling moments, this was a time when the church stood for mercy, peace, or justice.*

Sing “You Have Come Down to the Lakeshore; Tu’ has venido a la orilla,” pausing after the second verse.

Prompt: *Please share a story when you felt God was calling you. It could be that first time you named yourself a Christian, or it could be a time when you walked away from a particular church. It could have included a vocational choice or a relational choice, doing something you were very nervous about doing or caring for someone else in a way that made you feel like Jesus was using your hands. There are probably many “call” moments in any life. Please tell us about one call moment for you.*

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### ④ Reverse Tenebrae (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Pastors often want to take a Sunday off after Easter. That is an ideal time to have a Laity Sunday. In a Tenebrae service, candles are extinguished to portray the betrayal, abandonment, and agony of the events of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. For churches that use a Maundy Thursday Tenebrae service, a service of reading and lighting candles will make sense. This serial monologue allows each of seven people to write only a couple paragraphs, with friends to edit the writing.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- writing materials
- eight white candles and a taper
- “Reverse Tenebrae (Service of Lighting)” script, Attachment: Activity 4-1
- “Order of Service,” Attachment: Activity 4-2



Invite eight people to participate in planning and writing a reverse Tenebrae service, or a “lighting” service. Each person stands, reads, and lights a candle, because all the stories are ones about the good news after the resurrection. One person represents Cleopas, the part that is written out as a guide. The other seven participants write their parts based on the prompt in the script. Schedule an hour for the planning meeting plus a 20-minute rehearsal with taper and candles.



### 5 Tell Us Your Stuff, Preacher!

**Leader preparation:** Reflecting on and discussing personal storytelling, testimony, autobiographical sermon illustrations, and self-revelation is important for those who practice witness. This activity is perfect for a group of clergy who meet in a community-wide support group, or it could be used with multiple staff in large churches, fieldwork students, or lay leaders who plan worship. Whenever testimony is encouraged in worship, planners realize that TMI means “testimony might injure,” as well as “too much information.”

#### Supplies:

- artwork: The Sower by Van Gogh [www.tinyurl.com/fp-uCCR2](http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-uCCR2)
- Bible

Open with a reflection on Vincent van Gogh’s “The Sower.” Read Mark 4:1–9. Invite insights and thoughts based on the picture. Focus the discussion on testimony as a means of sowing good news, not as public confession, self-advertisement, or even memoir. This is about the use of personal stories in the worship context.

For introductions, invite the participants to share a short form of a story they are often called upon to tell.

List the forms this practice takes. People will suggest sermon illustration, being the first to share/prompt a particular kind of witness, jokes about oneself, stories about one’s family, sharing one’s call with a search committee, perhaps “telling one’s story” in a recovery group based in the church, and giving a short list of possible witnesses, of which some are autobiographical and some are not. Nothing is good or bad except at a particular time.

The following questions may guide the discussion:

- Are witnesses in a worship context always about “conversion” or “call”? Is this part of the definition? When are other stories appropriate?
- What different things motivate witnessing by the worship leader: personal relief or confession, modeling Christian behavior, prompting stories from other people, illustrating a biblical passage?
- What are helpful self-revelations? How frequently does one talk about oneself? In what contexts?
- How do people “practice” for this practice? Ideas may include journal writing; sharing with a prayer partner, soul friend, or pastoral relations committee; waiting a certain amount of time from an event (a month? a year?) before telling it so that it is more reflection and less breaking news.
- Remember an experience when you regretted sharing a story about yourself or your family. What insights did you gain?
- Remember an experience when you realized that it was “all about you,” and the focus was on your willingness to share personal details rather than inspiring people into their own witness. What insights did you gain?
- What are some ethical dimensions of telling stories that include other people even tangentially (even positively) in a public context?



This is a conversation. All conclusions are personal matters (unless a church has some very specific rules). It is both an invitation to try sharing stories if one has been hesitant in the past, and a caution for one who has become too glib or offered too much personal information in the past. It is a reminder that, although the focus in Jesus' parable about the sower is on the soil and the conditions of reception for the seed, our responsibility as sower is to make sure our good news comes as a seed—healthy, wholesome, at the peak of time to be planted from a generous casting of our arms and hearts. A seed—we do not throw full-grown sequoias or even mustard seed bushes at people!

Close by inviting each person to share a story he or she would like to be able to tell about God's presence in her or his life. These stories are confidential for this conversation only.

*Blessing Prayer: O God, in our practice of witness and testimony give us wise and discerning minds, open and vulnerable hearts, a healthy hybrid of humility and confidence, and a willingness to walk the fields where we meet all your children. Teach us to be a fertile listening ground to the stories of others in counseling and mission and worship that we may help each germinate and grow one hundred-fold. Amen.*



## 6 A Circle of Conversation

**Leader preparation:** While contemporary worship styles, which are many and various, seem to be fluid and flexible, occasionally this style carries the stamp of the originating pastor or musical leader and fails to do the self-evaluation and periodic adjustment that allows it to continue to touch and engage people in worship. Often this is a result of a clearly remembered conflict that no one wants to revisit, particularly when people find that “contemporary is the new traditional.”

This is not a “typical” worship evaluation with questionnaire and focus group, but the purest form of testimony: a circle of witness with a prayerful opportunity to reflect on worship in the light of the stories told. While this is designed for congregations who follow a contemporary worship style, it will also work for other congregations who want to reflect on their services of worship.

### **Supplies:**

- “A Circle of Conversation,” Attachment: Activity 6
- song such as “Draw the Circle Wide” or “Sanctuary”
- worship center with candles or natural objects or a piece of art

This is an appropriate worship experience to try four times a year. The insights gained in this community circle of conversation will gently shape the contemporary worship service. The pastor or worship leader and musical team members need to participate, responding to questions from their own worship experience, not from the leadership perspective. This can be done with ten people or fifty people.

Invite the group to sit in a circle and explain the circle-of-conversation format with its simple sharing of one story with each person. Do not tell the group in advance that each one will tell a story already shared with them as the last conversation, because they will listen differently to one another. At the beginning and the end and between each instruction after people have switched seats, reclarify the worship aspect of this gathering by singing the song you selected. Use these four instructions:

1. Share with this first partner a time of emotion in worship. It could be a time of great joy, a time when you were able to let go some sadness, or a



- time when you got an idea for your life (inspiration). This could be a recent experience, but perhaps one from long ago pops into your mind. Tell the story that first comes to you.
2. Describe to your partner a part of worship that is enriching your life right now. This changes for each person throughout life. At different times in our lives different aspects of worship are nurturing. What is that for you now, and can you reflect on the reason?
  3. Share with this partner a memory of a time you disconnected from worship. It could be recent or long ago. Nothing is right or wrong. What disconnects you may be something that gives another joy.
  4. Share with your partner a story of a life-changing worship moment. There are lots of times God speaks to us in worship. Let the first story that comes from your heart to your mind be the one you share.

The last movement of this circle is for the new partners to each share with one another someone else's story they have heard in this exercise, using listening, discerning, and witnessing gifts.

After singing the song, invite the group into three minutes of quiet meditation. Then ask for insights. Do not press toward any "evaluation" of the contemporary service. Express appreciation for every insight, and let the conversation flow. Close in prayer, inviting someone who is not in a leadership position in the congregation to pray.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Vespers for a Retreat (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** A church retreat is a wonderful occasion for church members to meet one another without a committee agenda! It is also a relaxed setting for newer and long-time members to learn more about one another, for generations to cross, and for visitors to be invited. If a church has a practice of retreats—adult, intergenerational, women's, deacons—there is often a need to melt the ice between those who have previously attended and those who may have some anxieties about fitting in or participating in physical activities. In addition, some may be anxious about leaving children, elders, or partners at home.

Provide a cell phone basket as people arrive to help keep them from being distracted by calls and messages. Establish times when people can retrieve their phones to check messages or make important calls. This invites people not to see these small vibrating devices as "body parts." Some may choose to have a "watch" basket as well, indicating that people are letting go of time!

#### **Supplies:**

- "Opening Worship for a Retreat," Attachment: Activity 7

A retreat is a time for sharing stories—words of witness to lives lived and faith shared. On the first evening provide an opportunity to tell one comfortable story and bless what may be an adventure in sharing, in order to set a tone for a weekend. Everyone talks and everyone listens.

This opening vespers allows people to tell a story at any level of vulnerability. It is short because many people are overwhelmed with exhaustion the moment they set aside familiar tasks. Before worship invite people to go to their bags and choose one object about which to tell a story. That can range from the photograph



of a fiancé to bifocals to a favorite pillow. Gather in a circle around a worship center or a semicircle with a fire or a view as focus—no “back row”! Because the story prompt is not something on a list of items “to bring,” no one begins on the wrong foot of having forgotten it.

After the vespers service, offer a choice between food and casual conversation or sleep.



### 8 Wedding Vows as Witness

**Leader preparation:** Society’s most commonly experienced practice of testimony is a wedding vow. It is the occasion when a couple speaks words of faith and covenant from their own mouths. Because clergy may have experienced couples writing their own wedding vows as a banquet of banality and cheap sentimentality, many no longer suggest the practice or may offer a choice of two vows. It is unfortunate that past experience limits this wonderful opportunity for two people to discover the depths of what they wish to say to one another and to God.

Read Genesis 24:34–67 and reflect on the role of Abraham’s servant who traveled far to find Rebekah as a wife for Isaac. This servant looked for compassion and courage and was amazed at God’s strange choosing of people to be together. Clergy ask questions, offer insights, and accompany many a wedding couple, but ultimately the couple must “slip from their camel” and walk veiled toward one another (Genesis 24:64–65).

#### Supplies:

- “Wedding Vows—Contemporary Choices,” Attachment: Activity 8
- traditional wedding services

The vows, chosen or created, are the emotional center of a wedding ceremony. This is an opportunity for a couple to let their personal interpretation of a vow become a witness. Whether the couple chooses among many vows that they have read, or writes their own based on the structure of traditional or contemporary vows, asking them to verbally express what each phrase in a vow means to them helps them to understand their covenant to one another. This first step is different from the final choosing of what will be included in the ceremony. Two people telling one another their true feelings and promises in the company of the officiate is worship. Begin with Matthew 18:20, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them,” and a prayer, and close with a prayer.

It is important that the couple realize that the vows are reciprocal and identical and are not an opportunity to toast one another, express gratitude, or reminisce. It is possible to have a “witness to tenderness” earlier in a service, a personalized preface to vows, or a time of compliments and memories at the reception, particularly if a couple has been together for a long time—as is often the case with same-gender loving couples when they have the opportunity to marry.

A selection of contemporary wedding vows on the attachment complements the two most traditional vow formats.





## 9 Preparing for Prison Ministry

**Leader preparation:** Some prison ministries involve volunteer visitors on-site in correctional institutions, and others involve writing letters or preparing food, Christmas gifts, or family assistance. Some ministries focus on advocating against the death penalty or lifting up immigration concerns. In addition, congregations include members who have been incarcerated at some time, who have family members who have been imprisoned, who have been the victims of crime, who may work in corrections. All these issues generate intense feelings. Popular culture raises the emotional stakes by presenting, in film form, savage prison scenarios, brutal guards, demonic criminals, or saintly individuals who have been falsely accused. These stereotypes feed confusion, fear, and misinformation. It may be wise to remind people that our correctional facilities house people of many faiths and no faith, but our ministry in Christ's mercy and compassion is to all of them.

### Supplies:

- suggested songs with musician or CD accompaniment: "Siyahamb' ekukhanyen' kwenkhos'" (tune: Siyahambra, irr. South African song) [www.tinyurl.com/fp-siyhamb](http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-siyhamb); "Gather Us In" (tune: Gather Us In) <http://tinyurl.com/3elvht>; "There Is a Balm in Gilead" (African American spiritual) <http://tinyurl.com/3vht4py>; "Sent Forth by God's Blessing" (tune: The Ash Grove) <http://tinyurl.com/3v6rdp5>
- worship center with seven votive lights, a green plant or flowers, and any objects to be blessed
- "Worship Service for Prison Ministry," Attachment: Activity 9

A brief worship service before engaging in prison ministry helps to dispel stereotypes and provides a forum for sharing regarding these issues. Volunteers may have had special training in the protocols of a particular facility, but others may join to bless their ministry or to bless letters, board games, Bibles in many languages, or petitions on a particular case or issue.

## Following the Church Year

Discovering an ongoing practice of testimony and giving witness throughout the church year may be as simple as naming and claiming the fact that we are people of many stories. There are stories in which our lives intersect with God's obvious presence, and there are stories in which we retrospectively recognize grace mediated through the compassion or challenge of a friend, the wonder of natural beauty, or the fragility of health, hope, or well-being. The stories of ordinary days may be as full of divine love as the dramatic moments of revelation. This needs to be said again and again in worship because people are much more likely to experience hymns, prayers, scripture, sermons, and even votive candles and altar flowers as holy. They need to be invited, as Jesus invited others, to express the blessings of their lives as holy. Provide regular and frequent opportunities for this. Many people will need to listen to other people's stories before beginning to share one of their own.

An invitational Call to Worship is one way to gather people in with their lived stories. A few will share their stories aloud, most will name their own stories in their hearts, and all the congregation will develop the mirror practice to giving witness that is listening to witness.



Shape a concluding prayer to the season, or use this one: *God, thank you for the stories in my life and the library of love that is this congregation. Help us to recognize the ways in which we have encountered you, and to begin to share them with one another. Amen.*

### **Calls to Worship**

Begin each Call to Worship with this statement: *We come to worship filled with many stories. We gather ourselves not just as bodies in pews/chairs, but as the children of God who have been touched by God whether or not we recognized that holy hand at the time.*

### **Advent**

Advent is the season of waiting, waiting for the birth of Emmanuel. When have you waited for something: a child to be born, a mortgage to be approved, a diagnosis, a college acceptance, a job offer, even a phone call? Remember the stories of waiting in your life as we emotionally enter this season together. Will some of you be willing to speak out as we call to worship a time that you remember waiting?

### **Christmas**

Christmas is the season of wonder at the birth of a child. Shepherds and magi, people who would never be found in the same place, met at this strange baby shower. Recall a time when you were touched by or learned something from a child—your own child or grandchild, a teenager on a mission project or a ten year old on a news report . . . even something from looking back at how you understood when you were a child and then “lost it”! As we each think of these children, will some of you be willing as our call to worship to name such a child?

### **Epiphany**

Epiphany is the season of joy, as Christ is revealed again and again in lives long ago and today. I invite you to remember times of great joy. It doesn't have to be what we might call “religious joy,” but true deep joy. Take just a moment to shift your mind from “happy times” to at least one that you can name as joy. That is what the season of Epiphany feels like! Will some of you be willing to name or tell the story of that remembered joy?

### **Lent**

Lent is a quiet time, a time of reflection, self-evaluation, and renewal of faith. All of us can remember times in our lives when we “came through,” as Jesus came through his long forty days in the wilderness. You may not have expected you'd make it, but you did. It may have been chemo treatments or quitting drinking or smoking; it may have been a year of unemployment or the process of a divorce. It may have been one long night waiting for a teenager to come home. Think of these times and realize that you know how Lent feels. Would a few of you be willing to say in a few words what some of those coming through times have been?

### **Eastertide**

Easter is the time of resurrection and renewal. Christ is risen! Let us affirm the resurrection! Let us each think of some people we have loved who have died, and let us affirm the resurrection—not just as a one-day holiday with lilies and new shoes—but as dramatically true for them! Please call out some names to which we all give witness—there is a resurrection!



### **Pentecost**

Pentecost is the day of Spirit and power and, by the way, the birthday of the church. I invite you to remember the church today. Happy Birthday! What comes to mind may be this church or another church, a church you entered once or many times. Think of your third-grade Sunday school teacher, or Christmas Eve candles, a youth group lock-in, or your favorite stained glass window. Remember the churches and wish them a birthday blessing. Will some of you be willing to name some of those churches and the pictures that came into your mind?

### **Ordinary Time**

This is the long beautiful season we call Ordinary Time. Isn't that a wonderful name? Brother Lawrence used to say that he felt God's presence when he was doing the dishes. Consider something ordinary and repeated in your life and how it connects you to God—maybe it's a hot shower, your first cup of coffee, a dog walk, an Internet devotion, or moonrise. Will some of you be willing to speak out as our call to worship some ordinary blessings?



**Attachment: Activity 1**

**Gathering Words that Invite Testimony**

**Gathering words with actions matching words:**

**One:** God is the music, but we sing the songs.

*Soloist sings one verse of song or hymn.*

**One:** God is the listening, but we pray the prayers.

**All:** Say *the Prayer of our Savior*.

**One:** God is the wonder, and we stretch our imaginations.

*Dancers or children run down the aisles with streamers or balloons.*

**One:** God is the compassion and we offer someone a hug.

*All turn and greet one another.*

**One:** God is the morning and the evening and the night.

**All:** And we give this one hour to be present as best we can to God's incredible love.

**Gathering words from a traditional reading of scripture: Psalm 66**

**One:** Come and hear what God has done.

**All:** God has listened to all our prayers.

**One:** When we pass through the torrent of deep troubles,

**All:** God turns the sea to dry land.

**One:** When we are tangled in the nets of life,

**All:** God does not let our feet slip.

**One:** When we are tested as silver is tried,

**All:** God keeps us in the land of the living.

**One:** When we go through fire and water,

**All:** God brings us to a spacious place.

**One:** Come and hear what God has done.

*All are invited to stand and name a blessing of the week that has passed.*

**One:** Come and hear what God has done.

**All:** God surrounds us with steadfast love.

**Gathering words with an improvisational reading of scripture: Psalm 150**

**One:** Praise God with piano and percussion,  
with flute and kazoo, with descant and download.

**All:** Praise God with iPod and live journal . . .



### Attachment: Activity 1 (*continued*)

the One who knows when every sparrow falls . . . with Twitter,  
the Cel-estial One—with cell phone.

**One:** Praise God with the tambourine of traffic,  
the tympani of lift-off at airport,  
trumpet of motorcycle, autoharp of skateboard . . .  
praise with GPS the One who positioned the globe.

**All:** Praise God with the dance of television—  
the chorus line of reality shows, tap-dance of news,  
ballet of the weather channel, two-step of sitcom,  
Macarena of “Makeover.”

**One:** Praise God with dish and DVD, bells and blog,  
with text and text message,  
with the Google of teen and the giggle of child.

**One:** You are invited to share your praises—

**All:** Praise God with . . .  
Praise God with . . .  
Praise God with . . .  
Praise God with . . .

**One:** Let every music, every message,  
every muscle, every minute praise God.

**All:** Let everything that has breath—praise God!

#### **Gathering words with remembrance of a secular holiday:**

**One:** God’s love is as individual as a snowflake and as welcome as a thaw.

**All:** Let us love God with our hearts, souls, minds, and all our strength.

**One:** All around us are people who need love—lonely, crabby, hurting, hoping people.

**All:** Let us love our neighbors with a true depth of Spirit.

**One:** Often the last person we send a Valentine to is ourselves.

**All:** Yet God loves us without reservation and calls us to love ourselves as well as our neighbors.

**One:** Please turn to your neighbor and say, “God loves you!”

**All:** (*individually*) God loves you.

#### **Gathering words with physical response:** (*Please “do” the “All” rather than saying it.*)

**One:** Rise up!

**All:** *Stand or straighten in seats.*

**One:** Take a deep breath!

**All:** *Breathe.*

**One:** Take another deep breath.

**All:** *Breathe.*



### Attachment: Activity 1 (continued)

**One:** Breathe in the Spirit of God

**All:** *Breath again . . . in the Spirit of God.*

**One:** Raise your arms to praise God.

**All:** *Raise arms.*

**One:** Let us sing "Precious Lord, Take My Hand."

**Gathering words for naming saints:** (All Saints Day or Memorial Day)

**One:** We come like Abraham and Sarah, Peter and Mary.

**All:** We remember the saints of the Bible.

**One:** We come like Francis and Mother Teresa.

**All:** We remember the saints of the church.

**One:** We come like Martin Luther and Martin Luther King Jr.

**All:** We remember the saints who stirred the status quo.

**One:** We come to worship like the people  
who have guided and taught us,  
who have healed and helped us,  
who have loved us and taught us your good news.

**One:** You are invited to name those people who are saints to you—maybe the Sunday school teacher or the band leader, the first employer, or the teacher who wrote you a reference, a grandparent or a famous person after whom you have tried to model yourself.

**All:** We remember that there are saints today and we come to be among them!

**Gathering words with prepared witness:** (cites Matthew 20, the parable of the laborers in the vineyard)

**One:** Come to receive grace—  
all who have been Christians since youngest childhood.

**All:** Come to receive grace—  
all who were converted in adolescence to the gospel's call.

**One:** Come to receive grace—  
all who discovered God's hope in the midst of middle-years' brokenness.

**All:** Come to receive grace—  
all who knew nothing of church when you were younger,  
all who have returned to the church after years of skepticism,  
and you who are still skeptical but here.

**One:** Come to receive grace—  
all who seek God when death is a personal horizon.

**All:** Come to receive grace—  
all who are deciding today whether to trust God's offer of love.



### Attachment: Activity 1 (continued)

**One:** God is not partial. God does not watch the clock or the calendar.  
God blesses everyone who seeks new life.

*Prepared testimony of one or two people who identify themselves as being in one of those categories and who tell a little of their stories. For example, "I was one of those people who have always been a Christian . . ." or "I got away from church . . ." or "I was never raised in a church, but in my twenties . . ."*

**One:** Come and join together in worship.

**All:** We come with our very different stories to God's amazing grace

#### **Gathering words for a service focused on Holy Communion:**

**One:** As we come to Christ's table, we remember.

**All:** We remember tables shared with the unsavory and the insignificant,  
with friends and strangers—the tables of the Good News.

**One:** We remember the wedding made brighter  
and we pray for every human relationship.  
Please name couples or parents and children who need a blessing today.

*Congregants call out names needing blessing.*

**One:** We remember the loaves and fish,  
and we pray for places where there is no food.  
Please name places where there is hunger and lack of fresh water.

*Congregants call out those place names.*

**One:** We remember the Passover meal, when Jesus washed students' feet,  
shared gravy with a betrayer and sang a hymn,  
and we pray for all who need to learn to serve or be served,  
to turn away from temptation or open up to a song.  
We remember all the tables—from cathedrals to campgrounds—  
where your children have gathered  
to eat bread or tortilla, rice cake or cassava,  
and we lift into your love our five-star churches  
and our down-on-their-luck holy diners.  
Please name church communities that are precious to you.

*Congregants name those church communities.*

**One:** We remember the communion of the saints in all times and places  
and lift before God the names of those we hold in intercession now.  
Please name those who are not here with whom you wish to share this table.

*Congregants call out those names.*

**One:** As we come to Christ's table we remember.

**All:** We remember that we are not alone. Thanks be to God!



**Attachment: Activity 2-1**

**Words of Invitation for Passing the Peace**

**Advent**

The prophet Isaiah is often cited as having poetry for the coming Messiah that resonated with the spirits of those who were waiting and identified for them the truth about the One who would be Emmanuel. Isaiah named the One who would come as “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). How different that was from so many expectations, and how different peace is from how we as contemporary Christians often experience in the season of Advent, the month of December.

As a way of sharing “peace” with one another, turn to someone near you . . .

**Christmas**

We often sing what the angels sang, “Peace on Earth! Good Will to All!” (Luke 2:14). Chances are all this angelic blessing meant more than greeting card scribble or grocery store muzak. It was the climax of good tidings, the essential truth of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem as Emmanuel for the world. It was meant to be repeated but not “lost in the repetition.” As a way of sharing “peace” with one another, turn to someone near you . . .

**Epiphany**

Epiphany is the season of gifts and revelations! Jesus said to his disciples, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid” (John 14:27). We need no gift receipt to return that present. We have had too much of gifts that do not last; we long for peace. As a way of sharing “peace” with one another, turn to someone near you . . .

**Lent**

In the last moments of Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem, he wept at its prospect and wished that it had “recognized the things that make for peace” (Luke 19:42). In this season of Lent we mourn for the peacelessness of our lives and our cities and pray for a renewed recognition of just what those essential things are—the things that make for peace. As a way of sharing “peace” with one another, turn to someone near you . . .

**Easter**

On Easter evening and again a week later, because Thomas wasn’t there the first time, Jesus came through the walls, just as he had come out of the tomb, and said to his disciples, “Peace be with you” (John 20:19, 26). Just like those fearful followers, we need peace; and just like Thomas, we need it better than secondhand. Jesus still walks through closed doors and thick walls to reach us. As a way of sharing “peace” with one another, turn to someone near you . . .





### Attachment: Activity 2-1 (continued)

#### **Pentecost**

Talking so that everyone could listen—that’s what Pentecost was all about. And we still need it. In our lives and our communities, in our nation, our world, and the very ecosystem that surrounds us, we need to receive the Spirit and pass it on, as witnesses. And so we do. We tell the story, and in the story we find our peace. As a way of sharing “peace” with one another, turn to someone near you . . .

#### **Ordinary Time**

We do not know if it was on a mount or on a plain that Jesus preached his longest sermon, but this we do know—there were long “ordinary” days of healing and the telling of parables. When storms came up, Jesus spoke to the winds and waves and said, “Peace, be still” (Mark 4:39). And even after all that drama, he could fix the disciples with a you-are-on-the-spot stare and say, “Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the children of God” (Matthew 5:9). As a way of sharing “peace” with one another, turn to someone near you . . .

#### **Prayer of Thanksgiving**

**One:** The peace of Christ be with us.

**All:** And also with the world.

**One:** We give you thanks, gracious God, for all the ways we receive peace—

**All:** the surprising ones and the carefully prepared ones,

**One:** the lasting ones, and the patched-together-to-take-a-breath ones,

**All:** the peace within a person and between people in relationship,

**One:** the peace in communities and between communities,

**All:** the peace that encircles the globe

**One:** and the peace that flows through the oceans, the air, the deep lines of earth itself.

**All:** We give you thanks that in sharing our stories of peace,

**One:** our very words of witness become peace-making and peace-keeping,

**All:** a blessing of speaking and a blessing of listening.

**One:** Christ is our peace.

**All:** And also the peace of the world!



Attachment: Activity 2-2

**Global Prayers for Peace**

**I Pray Shalom for You**

I Pray Shalom for you  
That you wake each day eager to meet whatever comes,  
That you look in the mirror and are pleased with what you see,  
That you accept with courage any limitations on your abilities,  
That you accept with humility, but develop creatively, your special talents,  
That you know which things take priority,  
That you are not stressed by having to set some things aside,  
That what you do illuminates who you are,  
and that you find joy in all you do.

I Pray Shalom for you  
That your face is turned towards God,  
That you are secure in the forgiveness of Christ,  
That your life is infused with the presence of the Holy Spirit,  
That your whole being is daily transformed and integrated into oneness with Christ,  
and hence wholeness and wellness,  
That in having died to self you are alive to your true self,  
That love is your prime motivation.

I Pray Shalom for you  
That you have a soul-friend to walk life's journey with you,  
That you are surrounded by a community of support,  
That you are a builder of community,  
That you are able to transform difficult or destructive relationships through love,  
That you may live in a society of justice, peace, and harmony,  
But if not, that you may be able to absorb whatever suffering comes your way,  
and transform it, for yourself and for society.

I Pray Shalom for you  
That the beauty of God's creation enralls you,  
That your love and way of life enhance that beauty  
and do not deplete the resources of the earth,  
That the rhythm of your life may be in harmony  
with the rhythm of others' lives and of all creation,  
to be part of God's plan of restoration and renewal.

I Pray Shalom for you  
That your faith may grow,  
That you be filled with love,  
And that hope never dies.

—by Isobel de Gruchy (South Africa)\*



### Attachment: Activity 2-2 (continued)

#### **Shalom, Salaam, La Paz, Her-ping, Peace**

*This is a prayer for peace that reflects my experience of Christ in my life and in the lives of many people I have been privileged to meet around the world. The title contains the words for peace in Hebrew, Arabic, Spanish, Chinese, and English. This can be read by several readers or as a meditation by one person.*

My peace I give to you.

Pieces of my heart—  
Shattered on the barbed wire of the West Bank,  
Blasted into bits in Iraq,  
Broken in the barrios,  
Sentenced to hard labor for telling the truth,  
Dying of frostbite in the streets.

Pieces of my mind—  
Despairing in the death camps,  
Despairing in the refugee camps,  
Despairing with the campesinos,  
Struggling to stay alive in the work brigades,  
Hopeless at the welfare office.

Pieces of my soul—  
Scattered by a suicide bomber,  
Hungering for a land to call our own,  
Working to death so that others can buy cheap clothes,  
Worshiping in fear,  
Waiting on death row.

This is my body broken with you.  
Shalom, Salaam, La Paz, Her-ping, Peace.  
Will you help me mend the shattered world?  
Heal my broken body?  
Treat the wounds and stop the violence?  
Share the bread of life from your plate so that all may live?

In a world gone mad,  
will you choose to be a peacemaker  
even if it leads to death on a cross?

Shalom, Salaam, La Paz, Her-ping, Peace.

—Frances A. Bogle (U.S.A.)\*

*\*From *Gifts in Open Hands—More Worship Resources for a Global Community* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2011). Used by permission.*



## Attachment: Activity 4-1

**Reverse Tenebrae (Service of Lighting)**

*One model and seven prompts for writing short testimonies*

**Cleopas:** I heard Jesus preach in the Emmaus area. I even went over to Bethany. In fact, I was there when . . . well, you know, when Lazarus . . . wasn't dead anymore. It was incredible. I wasn't important in the ministry. I was one of the Seventy, sure, and did a little teaching of the simpler concepts, but this is my story... (Model from Luke 24:13–32.)

Samuel and I went to see Jesus' really close friends in Jerusalem after he died to tell them how sorry we were. We were coming back from the condolence visit and scratching our heads a little at the wild story Mary told about Jesus' tomb being empty when we met this traveler who started walking with us. He was clueless about what had happened over Passover, and we told him about Jesus—how amazing he was and what a tragedy that his ministry was cut short. Miserable Romans—wouldn't know a holy man if they tripped over him!

This traveler started with the old prophets and Moses and explained how the Messiah had to suffer before there could be any glory. And while he was talking, I felt this strange glowing in my heart.

Well, we got to Emmaus town limits at nightfall, and the traveler looked like he was going further, so we convinced him to stay for dinner. Now, this is the really remarkable part of my testimony. When we asked him to say the blessing and break the bread, we suddenly knew that the man was Jesus himself.

*Light one candle.*

**Tabitha:** I can't say I ever encountered Jesus of Nazareth himself. To be honest, if he had come to Joppa, I probably would have been too busy to notice. I'm Tabitha. The Greeks call me Dorcas and this is my story . . . (Continue story based on Acts 9:36–43.)

*Light one candle.  
Sing a song.*

**Ananias:** When God gives you a vision with Jesus in it—well, of course it is comforting, supportive, beautiful, inspiring—Right? Wrong! This is my scary story . . . (Continue story based on Acts 9:1–23.)

*Light one candle.*

**Lydia:** I have a big house and a lucrative business of selling purple, that rare and expensive dye. This is my story . . . (Continue story based on Acts 16:11–15.)

*Light one candle.  
Sing a song.*

**Philip:** People are different. Their stories are different. This is the way I learned that truth . . . (Continue story based on Acts 8:26–40.)

*Light one candle.*

**Paul:** You've got my letters. I can't add much here. But maybe you'd like to hear my side of what Ananias told you . . . (Continue story based on Acts 9:1–23.)

*Light one candle.  
Sing a song.*

**Damaris (a slave girl):** Crazy? Yes, everyone thought I was crazy . . . (Continue story based on Acts 16:16–24.)

*Light one candle.*

**Hector (a jailer):** Do you know what happens to a warden if his prisoners escape? Death! This is my story . . . (Continue story based on Acts 16:19–34.)

*Light one candle.  
Sing a song.*



**Attachment: Activity 4-2**

**Order of Service**

**Gathering Words and Welcome**

**Opening prayer:** Gracious God, thank you for your presence with us in worship in this season of resurrection. Help us not only to hear the stories of long ago, but to respond with our own lives to your risen presence in our midst. Amen.

**Invitation to the Service of Lighting:** You may have participated in a Tenebrae Service on Maundy Thursday when the shadows grow as candles are extinguished and Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion are remembered. This is a "Reverse Tenebrae"—a service of lighting—when we remember all the witnesses to Jesus' resurrected presence.

**Scripture:** Hebrews 11:1-3, 12:1-2

*Cleopas speaks. Light one candle.  
Tabitha speaks. Light one candle.*

**Hymn:** *(sung to the tune of "Breathe on me, Breath of God," Trentham)*

Breathe on me, Breath of God;  
Light me within, without.  
Wake up the dead;  
speak through the bread  
till hope replaces doubt.

Breathe on me, Breath of God;  
teach me to be a friend  
to even those who reach for me,  
and be at my journey's end.

Breathe on me, Breath of God  
and let this candle burn,  
so any wanderer day or night  
can meet you and then return.

*Ananias speaks. Light one candle.  
Lydia speaks. Light one candle.*

**Hymn:** *(sung to the tune of "Jesus Calls us O'er the Tumult," Galilee)*

Jesus calls us, when the tumult comes from  
somewhere deep inside,  
calls us forth to share the gospel, helps us  
leave the place we hide.

We can learn to heal each other, open  
doors to the unknown.

We can risk and we can nurture sanctuary  
in our homes.

Jesus calls us and we listen; Jesus asks, we  
take a chance,  
Jesus lights us and we glimmer; Jesus meets  
us and we dance.

*Philip speaks. Light one candle.  
Paul speaks. Light one candle.*

**Hymn:** *(sung to the tune of "Lord, I Want to be a Christian," Smith)*

God, I want to be like Philip,  
in my heart, in my heart.  
God, I want to be like Philip, in my heart.  
Share the sto-ry, . . . share the water,  
too!

God, I want to be a Christian, just like him.

God, I want to be like Pa-ul,  
with my mind, with my mind.  
God, I want to be like Pa-ul, with my mind.  
On the road . . . and the temple mount!  
God, I want to be a Christian, just like him.

God, I want to be the Christian  
that you need, in my time.  
God, I want to be a Christian in my time!  
Give me faith, . . . hope, and love that's  
free!

God, I want to be a Christian, just like me.

*Damaris (a slave girl) speaks. Light one candle.  
Hector (a jailer) speaks. Light one candle.*

**Hymn:** *Choose a congregational favorite.*

**Invitation to the congregation:** Philippians 1: 3-11

**Closing prayer:** Risen Christ, live in us. Help us to tell our own stories of witness to your love; help us to shine a light always in our world. Amen.



## Attachment: Activity 6

### A Circle of Conversation

The group sits in a circle and counts off by twos. A #1 and a #2 speak with each other, responding to a single question. Then a bell is rung and each #1 moves counterclockwise to sit with the next #2, and so on, so that everyone has a new partner. The #2s do not move. If a pair is in deep conversation, a #1 can move past that pair to the next available #2, and the conversing pair will not move till the next round (*sharing the next question as well*). No pair should stay together for more than two rounds.

Give about four minutes—two minutes for each person to answer. Ask four questions. With the fifth partner, share a story that someone else has shared. Remind participants at that time to think about confidentiality and consider which of the stories they have heard are appropriate to share. This can be hard to do, but it helps people seriously consider how we talk about one another in other contexts. At the conclusion, spend time collecting insights from the experience. The whole process takes about forty minutes. (*The shortened version, two minutes per question, takes twenty minutes.*)

This is a serious time of sharing stories. The pattern helps those who hate the chaos of finding someone in a large room and/or being the last chosen. In that form of game, sometimes people are more concerned about plotting their next switch than listening to the current partner. In the circle of conversation each participant has an opportunity to learn something very interesting about several people—not just the ones with whom he or she would normally sit. There is great comfort in anticipating the next partner and deciding on the level of vulnerability.

From *God in My Life—Faith Stories and How and Why We Share Them*, edited by Maren C. Tirabassi and Maria I. Tirabassi (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2008). Used by permission.



Attachment: Activity 7

**Opening Worship for a Retreat**

**Singing** *(based on "For the Beauty of the Earth," tune: DIX)*

For the beauty of the earth, for the beauty of the sky,  
for the love which from our birth—over and around us lies,  
God of all, to you we raise, this our hymn of grateful praise.

For the balance in our lives, fears we tame and joy we give;  
for the lonely paths we walk, and the faith we try to live—  
God of all, to you we raise, this our hymn of grateful praise.

For the folks we leave behind and the quiet of retreat,  
autumn\* wonder, evening peace, friends we see and strangers meet.  
God of all, to you we raise, this our hymn of grateful praise.  
*(\* or winter, springtime, summer)*

**Call to Worship** *(One voice reads the light text, and the group reads the bold.)*

We gather as a people of prayer and song.

**Prayer eases our hearts and song lifts our spirits.**

We gather as a people of scripture and commitment,

**and also of potluck supper and prayer chain.**

Some of us are new to this congregation or visitors for this retreat,

**while some of us are long-time members.**

The way we live is changed by our faith

**and we give and receive support in community.**

This weekend our community is here.

**We gather from different weeks—happy or sad, busy or lonely.**

Some of us left home reluctantly, missing our own beds tonight.

**Some of us left home rejoicing, wishing we were getting away more nights (or a month!).**

We are different ages, and we have different concerns and hopes,

**different backgrounds and expectations.**

We are Christians together.

**God works through our differences to bless us all.**

**Opening Prayer**

God who speaks and names us, who knows our being, thank you for making space within us and making space in this place for silence and gentleness, for unraveling and celebration. Here we will laugh and maybe weep; we will walk and learn and sleep. Bless us in each of these, and bless to each of us some small and wonderful surprise. We pray in the name of the unexpected Christ who gives us the prayer of community . . .

**Prayer of our Savior**



## Attachment: Activity 7 (continued)

### **A Time of Reconciliation**

God, we confess our ordinary faults—the friend we did not call, the smile withheld, the road rage—real even if not verbal—the gossip spread, the unnecessary critical word, the time wasted, the promises broken that we made to ourselves and you. Please forgive us, and make us sensitive, aware, and caring, in Christ’s name. Amen.

### **Words of Assurance**

God forgives our great failings and our small infractions against ourselves and others. God guides us into repentance and a change of heart.

**Scripture:** Mark 4:30–32

### **Tell Stories**

Jesus noticed details, little things about everyone around him: a widow’s two copper coins, a little boy’s lunch, the touch on his coat of a woman in the crowd, a conversation his disciples had when he wasn’t even there. We will tell one another many stories in this weekend together: serious stories and funny stories, long stories and short stories, stories for the past, and stories—as they say on television—“to be continued.”

I invited you to bring something here from your packing, something with a story—a photo you brought to kiss good-night, or the pill bottle, or the hearing aid you can’t be without, a new drivers license, or the slippers that make anywhere “home,” the toothpaste you had to buy on the way here because you forgot it, or the ring on your finger.

Let’s tell one another some of these beginning stories. Anyone may go first. If you like, please place your object on our worship center.

### **Prayer of Dedication**

Gracious God, we ask your blessing on these mustard-seed-sized pieces of home, the stories we have shared with one another, and our offering of the gift of time to you, to one another, and to ourselves—the most precious spending we have. Bless our awareness of moments, our generosity of hours given to those who need us, and these priceless days of community and story, for we pray in the name of Christ Jesus, who always has time for us and whose stories we love to tell. Amen.

### **Benediction**

To some of us is given the gift of much needed sleep, to others the gift of midnight laughter, to some dreams that open the heart, to others waking up to walk at dawn.  
May we receive our nighttime blessings rejoicing in the light of friendship and relaxing into rest and the love of God.  
Amen.





## Attachment: Activity 8

## Wedding Vows—Contemporary Choices

\_\_\_\_\_, I join my life with yours, believing that, together, we can learn love's lessons well. In you I have found a friend, a partner, a lover. And now you become my (*wife/husband, spouse*) As we (*marry, join in union*) in body and soul, I bring to you respect for the person you are, support for the person you are becoming, and hope for all our days ahead. In times of joy or sorrow, may our life be a sign of God's enduring love, a blessing to us and beyond us. —*Ann. B. Day*

To you I give my heart, I give my soul, I give my very self;  
Into your hands I place my hopes and dreams, my strength and weakness.  
To you I give my trust, my highest and my best.  
To you and only you will I be forever true. —*Jonathan Blake*

You are my home. No matter where we are, you give me a hug, and I am home.  
I promise to be home for you.  
You are the source of my fun and my laughter. I promise to be fun for you.  
I know I can trust you with everything I am. I promise to be trustworthy.  
You are strong for me when I fall apart. I will be strong for you.  
You are tender toward me. I promise to be tender toward you.  
You are calm for me. I promise to be calm for you.  
You are passionate about me. I promise to be passionate about you.  
You are my friend, always. I promise to always be your friend.  
You are my Beloved. I am your Beloved. —*Nancy McKay*

\_\_\_\_\_, I marry you this day, freely and joyfully joining my life with yours. Blessed by the Spirit, may the love of our tomorrows be as the love we share today—wondrous as the stars' light, strong as an oak, faithful as the sun's rising, enduring as the sea. Wherever we go, whatever life brings, I promise to do all in my power to live this love with you. —*Ann. B. Day*

No one has touched my life as you have.  
No one can compare with you,  
No one has made my heart leap and my soul dance,  
nor set my mind alight with joy.  
In your presence I have found my rest, my home, my self.  
In your arms I have known such peace.  
Today I give myself to you.  
I am yours and ever shall it be. —*Jonathan Blake*



### Attachment: Activity 8 (continued)

\_\_\_\_\_, in the presence of (*God/our friends/family*) I receive the gift of your love and offer you mine, as we are (*married/joined in civil union*). I promise to honor your individuality, even as I cherish our togetherness. I promise to be with you in joy and in struggle, even as I give you room to keep your own company. Grateful for your presence in my life, I will be attentive to our love, remembering the promises I have made this day.  
—*Ann B. Day*

On this momentous day,  
it is my choice, my will, and my delight,  
to wed you, my beloved.  
Our love has changed my life; no more the search.  
I have found you, my heart's desire,  
and nothing will ever take me from your side,  
You are my all and my only,  
and with you shall I travel to my rest. —*Jonathan Blake*

(*Vow for a couple together for years prior to a ceremony*)  
\_\_\_\_\_, as (*number of years together*) years ago,  
I quietly joined my life with yours,  
with God as our witness,  
I do so happily today in this ceremony of (*marriage/civil union*),  
before (*God/our family/friends*).

With gratitude for what has been, and hope for what will be,  
as your life partner and legally wedded spouse,  
I promise to continue to love and respect you,  
to support you, and to learn with you  
the deepening lessons of trust, forgiveness, and joy  
in the covenant of marriage—  
in sickness and in health, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow.  
I make this promise with true intention to keep it  
for as long as we both shall live.  
With God's grace, may we grow in love  
for ourselves and each other, our family and world. —*Ann. B. Day*

All wedding vows from *All Whom God Has Joined—Resources for Clergy and Same-Gender Loving Couples* by Leanne McCall Tigert and Maren C. Tirabassi (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2010). Used by permission.



## Attachment: Activity 9

### Worship Service for Prison Ministry

#### Welcome

#### Gathering song

#### Opening Prayer

Gracious God, open our voices in song, our hearts in prayer, and our ears in listening—that like Paul and Silas in jail so long ago, we may be released from all that chains us and rejoice in the freedom of God’s love. Amen.

**Scripture:** Acts 16:23–33

#### Prayer of Confession

God of the prisoner and God of the jailer, we confess that we allow stereotypes to cloud our understanding of prisons and prisoners, of sheriffs and wardens, of convicted criminals and their families. We confess that we fear incarceration or glamorize it, we believe more in recidivism than redemption, and we are often locked down into our own opinions. Forgive, redeem, unbind, and set us free, in the name of Jesus who was arrested and tried, tortured and executed. Amen.

#### Assurance of Grace

God gives grace to jailer and jailed who learn to care for one another and are in relationship through Christ. God gives grace to us and unfastens all our chains. Thanks be to God.

#### Song

#### Invitation to Prayers

We will pray bidding prayers for those whose lives are affected by the criminal justice and correctional system. Between each prayer we will light a candle and reflect for several moments. Perhaps you have a name to be lifted up or a story about yourself or someone dear to you that you would like to share. Perhaps you would just like to add your own prayer, such as “I feel so confused about . . .” “I want us all to pray particularly for . . .” Perhaps this prayer unintentionally leaves out someone. Your witness adds to our prayers and brings healing and hope to this ministry.

Let us pray.

God, we pray for all who are incarcerated this day, those who are guilty and those who are not guilty, those who are Christian and those of other faiths or no faith, who are your children, that they may feel your love surround them with patience and courage.

*Light one candle and respond with names or stories or moments of silence.*



### Attachment: Activity 9 (continued)

We pray for all of those who work in the correctional system—guards and wardens, administrators, teachers, translators, counselors, chaplains, and probation officers—that they may be wise and careful, committed to justice and compassion.

*Light one candle and respond with names or stories or moments of silence.*

We pray for all family members of those who are incarcerated—mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, spouses and partners, and especially for all children—that they may live each day in hope.

*Light one candle and respond with names or stories or moments of silence.*

We pray for the victims of crime whose lives have been changed forever, those who fear, those who forgive, and those who grieve, that they may find your comfort.

*Light one candle and respond with names or stories or moments of silence.*

We pray for undocumented immigrants and political detainees who are imprisoned through an independent and often confusing system that decides their future and the futures of their families near and far away, that they may hear your peace translated into their hearts.

*Light one candle and respond with names or stories or moments of silence.*

We pray for those on death row this day, that they may remember that you have preceded them in life and in death and that many work for the abolition of capital punishment.

*Light one candle and respond with names or stories or moments of silence.*

God, no door can lock you out of any place your children pray; no chains can lock you in to any church or court. You are the earthquake of the Good News; you are the foundation shaker of salvation. Amen.

### **Blessings of people or gifts**

Bless these people/gifts that they may open love, unlock kindness, release hope, and be visitors in our place to those we call brother and sister, and in whom we recognize the face of Christ. Help us to receive with open hands the gifts, even the surprising ones, that will return to us and rejoice in them as light in the shadows, good time earned, and the parole—or Word—of God. Amen.

### **Song**

### **Benediction**

# Giving Testimony and Witness



## Exploration: Scripture

### About this Setting

Scripture introduces the worshipping congregation not to invulnerable superheroes, but to real heroes who lived through their hopes and struggles in relationship with God and told their story. Without their narration of the good, bad, and ugly details, the writers and collectors of the history, prophecy, biography, psalm, and apocalyptic poetry we call the Bible would have been empty handed. The giving of testimony and witness that we discover in scripture is a model for our sharing of ourselves. Many times these scripture stories involve healing. People witness to healing they have received, and the story-telling itself is a healing experience for both speaker and listener.

The three Exploring and Engaging activities that follow are shaped for weekly congregational worship and can be adapted to contemporary, traditional, and blended services. The three Discerning and Deciding activities suggest worship planning that invites testimony. The three Sending and Serving activities take this faith practice to specific contexts in the community and worship contexts beyond the local church.

### About this Exploration

Our lives are part of the tapestry of God's larger story in the world. Scripture contains testimonies of people who aren't perfect, which invites us to tell our stories in response. In John's account of Jesus and the blind man, the man's witness sparked



a process that touched on people's relationships, different understandings of God, the role of religious authority, and viewpoints within the community. The healed man's testimony inspired dialogue and, ultimately, transformation. Similarly, our stories may shape other people's response to scripture and draw out their testimonies. The experience of hearing scripture varies according to our experiences, situations, traditions, and settings.

## BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**John 9:1-41**  
**Psalms 116**

## Leader Preparation

Jesus famously suggested to his upwardly mobile disciples that they should emulate a small child if they wanted to enter God's realm. Every day for a week sing to yourself the children's song "Jesus Loves Me": "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." Each day reflect on one biblical witness who loved God and was loved by God, and affirm your connection to that love.

People like Hannah and Jeremiah, the woman at the well, and the man born blind come to worship every week. People like these may have never come to worship, but next week may be the first time.

*Prayer: God, thank you for the holy memoir of scripture, my own holy memories, and the memories wrapped in skin and hope that you call to our church door. Amen.*

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 You Have Called Me by Name (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** "My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and . . ." is one of the most easily identifiable forms of contemporary witness. This way of introduction has been made familiar by the recovery movement, beginning with Alcoholics Anonymous and its many siblings in mutual care. In meetings throughout the world people are invited to give their first name and then tell their story. That story sometimes is the full narrative of the path that took them from "hitting bottom" to "one day at a time," or simply a brief word about how they are doing that week. Honoring this modern healing tradition, but basing our practice of testimony far more deeply rooted in Christian tradition, this activity introduces witness as a response to the scripture of the healing of the blind person and our assurance that God knows everyone's names.

#### Supplies:

- "Script for John 9:1-41," Attachment: Activity 1-1
- "Morning Worship," Attachment: Activity 1-2

Use the worship service on the attachment to lead your faith community in experiencing the story from John 9:1-41.



### 2 Witness to the Word

**Leader preparation:** Offer a "Bible Sunday" to celebrate the scriptures. A number of ecumenical and denominational groups identify a Sunday in the autumn as a special time to focus on the stories and translations of the Bible, along with opportunities to share it with others. About three weeks before the service, invite people to bring Bibles that are personally meaningful to them. See the attachment for a sample publicity announcement.

Remember that individuals may witness to biblical harm, such as cruel ways of teaching the Bible, punishments for drawing in it, failing to memorize verses, or experience with texts that have been used as weapons.

#### Supplies:

- "Sample Publicity Announcement for a 'Bible Sunday,'" Attachment: Activity 2-1
- display tables covered with lovely cloth
- one copy each of several Bible translations in book form, CD, DVD, and smart-phone text versions, a Hebrew Bible in Hebrew, and a New Covenant in Greek
- (optional) Bibles to give away
- "Worship Service for 'Bible Sunday,'" Attachment: Activity 2-2
- (optional) song: "Thy Word Is a Lamp unto My Feet"

<http://tinyurl.com/dlyfrk>

The focus of this worship service is to witness to people's experience with the Bible.



Invite participants to bring forward Bibles that are meaningful to them, because of personal or family history, because they belonged to a friend, or because they are a special translation or format—such as electronic. Participants can give background in a few words or a whole anecdote about their Bible. Request that they leave these Bibles on a display table with an index card identifying the story, for example “Grandmother Utta’s Norwegian Bible.” Proceed with the service of worship on the second attachment.

People may bring Bibles to give away to people who don’t have one. People hate to throw away Bibles, but often have Bibles from relatives they would like to gracefully discard. Assign a place where these may be received and blessed.

(Optional) Play the video clip of the song “Thy Word Is a Lamp unto My Feet,” or sing the song.



### ③ A Toast to God—Sharing Thanks, Based on Psalm 116

**Leader preparation:** Plan a time to express thanksgiving in the community in the spirit of Psalm 116. In some congregations a new format for witnessing to the remarkable up-from-trouble moments in our lives can happen without preparation. Give an explanation just before the scripture and litany, and invite people to just speak up. For other congregations, an e-mail or newsletter announcement previous to the selected Sunday will generate ideas, and people will come prepared. Another option is to invite five people to model the testimony. Or offer a sign-up sheet for volunteers.

#### Supplies:

- a visual display of chalices, wine glasses, coffee mugs, and glasses of every kind covering the communion table and perhaps window ledges
- small communion glasses filled with water or apple juice
- Psalm 116 in *The Message* <http://tinyurl.com/3d8uewa>
- “Litany Based on Psalm 116,” Attachment: Activity 3

Psalm 116 invites us to celebrate the amazing grace of God’s blessing in our lives, particularly when we, or others, considered a situation near hopeless. These situations may be related to health, relationships, employment, or emotional or spiritual significance. People of all ages understand a feeling of relief after affliction. While many joys are birthdays, anniversaries, graduations—the wonderful moments of human transition—the thanksgivings as related to Psalm 116 are some of the deepest joys that a life can have. The psalmist celebrates the unexpected mercies of life.

Invite people to reflect on these occasions in their lives—in recent days or times long ago. This is a powerful witness in the midst of community. The writer of the psalm recognizes that telling these stories is a way to thank God and to remind others of their reasons for gratitude.

This prayer practice invites testimony for a month or four weekly worship services. Each Sunday give an explanation of the process:

- a leader reads five selections of Psalm 116 from *The Message*
- an individual responds after each selection by sharing a thanksgiving
- a leader and congregation offer an affirmation

On the first Sunday read the full text of Psalm 116 in *The Message* as well as the explanation.



During the explanation, ushers or deacons pass out small cups, either communion cups or 3-ounce paper cups, and everyone toasts God at the conclusion of the fifth story and response.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4. Lay Readers' Workshop (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times." Charles Dickens's writing about the French Revolution? No. Someone describing the reading of scripture in a modern congregation. It is wonderful to have lay people read the scripture. But when it cannot be heard or understood, or when an interpretation contrary to the upcoming sermon precedes the reading, it can be like a black hole in the worship service. A lay readers' workshop may get everyone engaged in a community of sharing. They may realize that reading scripture is a witness to God's love

#### **Supplies:**

- Bible
- "Script for John 9:1–41," Attachment: Activity 1-1

Offer a one-hour lay readers' workshop to provide some simple aspects of preparation for reading scripture. Holding the workshop in the autumn may encourage people to attend who will read Christmas Eve lessons as well as at weekly worship and even a Maundy Thursday Tenebrae service. Meet in a comfortable and open room that allows for people to move around, but at some point take the group into the sanctuary to experience the lectern and the microphone.

Begin with a little humor, singing together and exaggerating:

I Love to TELL the story . . . in accents crisp and clear,  
about the love of Jesus in words that folks can HEAR!  
I tell of housewife sweeping and shepherd seeking sheep.  
I'm hoping to inspire you—and not put you to SLEEP.

I'm signed up for the lesson, I hope it will be blessing—  
to read the scripture lesson and share the Savior's love.

Read together Luke 1:1–4 and John 20:30. Pose these or similar questions:

- Why did people write the gospels?
- What does that mean about how we read them?

Read Luke 4:16–17, 20. Jesus followed the synagogue practice of standing to read the text and sitting down to interpret it. In what way do we honor the reading of the text?

Describe the following four aspects of preparing to read scripture.

- *Physical warmup.* In order to speak from the whole body you "wake up" the largest parts of the body and work in to the lips. Lead the group in gentle stretching. Choir members may offer some tips.





- *Verbal preparation.* This involves breath control, phrasing, and checking pronunciation of names. Personal knowledge of context informs a reading, but remind the group never to verbalize background without asking the preacher. Introduce the microphone as extension and friend. Some participants may not know that people with hearing loss need the kind of amplification it provides.
- *Spiritual preparation.* We are called to offer the best of our gifts, not some innate skill, but time and preparation. Invite the group to care about the subject matter and those to whom it is said. They should always assume that the scripture is speaking to at least one person in a very particular way. They will want to pray before preparing and pray before reading!
- *Sanctuary or worship space preparation.* Encourage the readers to be comfortable with space, props such as a lectern, font size, light, and stairs.

Offer this mantra: *Speak with your body, not your head. Settle your feet, loosen your knees, breathe with your belly, unlock your jaw, lower your voice, make eye contact, and expect God!*

Finally, invite the group to read John 9:1–41 with its many parts as a way to practice. Read it at least three times, with different people taking different roles each time. Make sure that each participant experiences being both a lead speaker and a supporting speaker. Discuss their feelings about this experience, and encourage them to always practice a reading for themselves and with a family member or friend before worship.

## 5 A Story of Belonging—New Members

**Leader preparation:** New Members' preparation varies from church to church. In some places it is deep and personally moving; in others it is information-stuffed. In most places the ceremony or ritual itself is cursory, perhaps signing a membership book. The "story" of the person who joins is sometimes told in a newsletter article or added to a picture on a bulletin board, and the introduction may be more of a "bio" than a witness. This activity adds an opportunity to plan the ceremony itself. There may be people joining this session that took membership preparation earlier and chose not to join at that time. There may be people who have been a part of the current preparation who are postponing a decision and are not present, so community building for the new group is important.

### **Supplies:**

- Bibles
- whiteboard, newsprint, or laptop for note taking

Gather in a casual setting the group who will join the church. Take time for intercessory prayer, asking if anyone has a friend, neighbor, relative, work colleague, or personal concern or joy to share. Make notes, if necessary, and pray for all of these and for the new members gathering. Invite the group to pray the Prayer of Our Savior in a call and response form where they repeat each phrase after the leader.

Joining this community of faith means that we pray for one another and extend the community to others. Name this as a spiritual truth whether or not the congregation uses the liturgical practice of sharing concerns aloud or on paper. This mutual prayer support is the first underpinning of the congregation, but is not always obvious. The second underpinning is our connection to the tradition and our learning to share from the strength and grace of tradition. The Prayer of Our Savior is the most familiar and vital part of the common tradition. The call and response lifts up the way that it, like all the stories of scripture and all the words



of tradition, is passed down. It also supports those who do not know this prayer, which is true of many new members coming from unchurched backgrounds.

Base community building on one or more of these questions. This may involve the whole group sharing together or different pairs sharing stories, depending on the size of the group.

- At some time in your life you belonged to something that was important to you: a team, a workplace, a gang, another church, a club, a treehouse group. Why was that important? How did you join, or how were you included?
- When are you most connected and engaged in the worship of this community of faith: in music, in prayer, in meditation, in the sacraments, when the children are involved?
- What one story would you tell about God's presence in your life?

Divide into pairs (or more) to look at three scriptures about church membership: 1 Corinthians 12:12–20, Ephesians 2:19–22, or Acts 8:26–40. After about 10 minutes, come back together and talk about what these passages say about membership. What was the group's responses to them?

Invite the participants to describe in short phrases or ideas what they think is important to include in their new members' service: music, prayer, personal stories, communion, renewal of baptism? Most services include an introduction that gives thanks for all the places a person has been spiritually, scripture, questions of commitment, words of congregational welcome, and prayer. Invite the group to adapt, add, or personalized these elements. If the congregation is comfortable with the new members group offering a testimony by reshaping the service in which they will join, encourage them to craft a service on the structure offered by the more common one. If the formal service needs to remain constant, let this conversation enrich the individuals' understanding of the covenant they are making.

### 6 They Are of Age—Ask Them!

**Leader preparation:** Confirmation and preparation for baptism are about the individuals. But these rituals are also about the parents. Young people prepare to witness to faith by individual affirmations, or to witness to personal integrity by choosing not to confirm at this time. Their parents, some of whom have made baptismal promises for them and some of whom have not, also experience an opportunity to reflect on independence and support and the mutuality of those two experiences in their parenting and in the culture. The parents in the story told in John 9 are certainly not "helicopter parents," nor are they angry that they can no longer hover.

This activity describes a gathering of parents to honor their emotions and feelings and to involve them in the confirmation or preparation for baptism classes.

Be particularly sensitive to situations where parents are divorced and possibly remarried, or when there are other parent concerns, such as an absent parent, a foster parent, a grandparent who raised the child. Take care with young people for whom one or both parents do not attend. In some situations both parents and mentors should be invited, and the group will be large enough that the discussion will focus on broader issues.



### Supplies:

- whiteboard, newsprint, or laptop for note taking
- paper and pens or pencils
- Bibles
- liturgy for confirmation or believer's baptism

Near the beginning of the program, offer a time for a gathering of parents of members of a confirmation class or class preparing for believers' baptism. This gathering is to be separate from a joint gathering with the youth, or near its conclusion. On both of these occasions focus on what is happening emotionally and spiritually with the parents. They have an opportunity to witness to their experience as their daughters and sons move toward independence. Although the focus is on the faith context, the richest conversations will include social issues, ranging from peer pressure and bullying to easy access to alcohol, issues of sexuality, competitiveness in college applications, and sexual activity, and how faith impacts these situations for the young people.

Read John 9:13–23 and spend time discussing the passage from the parents' point of view. Discuss how many possible motivations and fears could be expressed by the expression "He is of age; ask him." Reflect on the most welcome and least welcome aspects of this independence for young people. What about the contemporary world and what about a particular young person make it hard to let that youth go? What do people feel about "helicopter parenting"? ("Helicopter parents" stay overinvolved with their children's successes and failures even when they are in college.) Share emotions, celebrations, and anxieties, and be clear that situations are very different (even between different children in the same family) and that parents will have many different experiences.

If this is an occasion early in the confirmation/baptism preparation program, invite the group to shape a parents' covenant that they could sign and present in the context of weekly worship. It can be a combination of both practical and theoretical aspects of the parents' relationship to this process of becoming an adult in the context of the church. It might include a commitment to preventing family occasions that conflict with confirmation responsibilities, responding honestly to parent interviews (even if that is honestly agnostic or honestly from a different faith tradition), and willingness to support the young person in a final decision either to be confirmed/get baptized or not to do so.

An occasion closer to the time of confirmation could include a group decision on the parents' part in the ceremony. In some churches parents come forward with each young person at the time of laying on of hands, and in others they stand in their places in the pews. Some take photographs after church, some give presents, some celebrate with a party for extended family. Parents find it very helpful to share these plans and sometimes to join together to plan some festive aspect such as a rehearsal breakfast.

More significant is having each person (not couple) write a witness about the young person in the light of this faith journey. These could be a sentence or two that will be read in the ceremony or delivered to each young person after the occasion. These could be combined into a group affirmation. They could be paired with faith statements the young people write. They can simply be tools of self-understanding.



The following writing prompts may help:

- I believe that \_\_\_\_\_ is ready: for adulthood in the church/a driver's license/more responsibility. I affirm his/her growing independence, even when it hurts her/him and me. I trust him/her with successes and mistakes and won't try to take credit for one or to fix the other.
- Dear \_\_\_\_\_, I am proud of you today for taking this step/having the courage not to be part of the group. You have taught me many things. I wish for you . . .

Have the parents share these statements, discuss them, and combine them, if desired.

Close with prayer.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Health Justice Vigil (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Responses to the health care crisis are wide and varying. Scripture is filled with stories, such as the one told in John 9 of the healing of the person born blind, where authorities, far from being happy with Jesus for healing people, are angry because the healing did not take place through the correct process or on the right day. Control of access to healing is a dangerous power. People continue to respond to situations in their communities concerning a lack of affordable health care or the bankruptcy of those who have received health care. This service of healing prayer can take place at the kind of vigil created by people standing outside of a hospital or insurance company or at a service of worship in a church. Musical interludes can be provided by a musician, a vocal soloist, or a CD player.

#### Supplies:

- "Prayer for Pastoral Voice and Murmuring" Attachment: Activity 7
- baskets of Band-Aids
- Bible
- suggested music: "Amazing Grace" (tune: New Britain); "There Is a Balm in Gilead," (tune: African American spiritual); "Precious Lord, Take My Hand"; "Jesus' Hands Were Kind Hands," (tune: Au Clair De La Lune); "Christ the Healer, We Have Come" (Fred Pratt Green, Words and Music)

People gather to pray for health justice issues, and they are praying for healing for self, friends, and family, and for the system that treats people who are ill. Holding these two elements in creative tension prevents this event from being political showiness.

Gather people in a church, community room, or outdoor setting. Welcome them and give each one either the full text of the prayer or the response on a card and an adhesive strip.

Read Mark 1:29–32. Remember that whenever there are prayers of intercession, some of the prayer concerns touch the needs of your heart, some reflect the concerns of people dear to you, and others may be for the issues of strangers. Health care varies in different countries and in different communities. Yet, we share all together. In this passage from Mark, Jesus healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law, his hostess, the one whose illness most affected him, but he also continued to heal many others who were sick with diseases and burdened with demons.



The prayer leader will read a series of intercessions that will be followed by music. During this musical interlude invite the participants to speak out the names of those they want lifted up. Feel free to pray names simultaneously with others so that, indeed, they will hear a murmuring of those for whom we care. Conclude each section with a unison prayer. The prayer leader will then read the next series of intercessions.

Each person has a Band-Aid. The popular expression “It’s only a Band-Aid” means “It is not enough.” People fear this is often true of legislation related to health care justice issues. Yet, a Band-Aid is also a symbol of the kiss of a parent on a child’s hurt and the protection of vulnerable healing from the infection of discouragement and despair.

Instruct the participants: *Give your Band-Aid to someone for whom you pray and tell them about your prayer. Or put one in a letter to a government official. A letter with a physical object will receive more attention than a form letter or a prepackaged e-mail. Or write a name on a Band-Aid and keep it in a place where you pray. Remind yourself of God’s healing grace in your life by handing it to someone sitting near you so that he or she can put it on your hand or arm during our final musical interlude.* Participants may want to use a Band-Aid in several ways, so provide more in baskets around the room.

Use the “Prayer for Pastoral Voice and Murmuring” on the attachment. Close the service with a benediction, or continue with speakers or picketing in an ongoing public witness.



### 8 Agape Service

**Leader preparation:** An Agape service is not communion, nor does it end in communion. In this service we are reminded that we are called to share in the midst of our world more than liturgically and symbolically. In fact, this service always has a justice dimension. Request offerings for a food pantry to connect worship with a very local need. Clergy leadership is not necessary for this service, and youth members of the congregation or youth groups may host.

In preparation for the service, invite people to be musicians and to bring offerings for a food pantry. If a meal will follow the service, invite people to bring food.

#### **Supplies:**

- “Agape Service Liturgy,” Attachment: Activity 8
- fruit and water to share
- (optional) food for a meal to follow the service

An Agape service is based in love that attempts to reflect God’s unconditional love. It is based on the witness of those who come sharing responses to the scripture, their days, their justice concerns, and their food. The service on the attachment is an outline that will be different in every community. Appropriate scriptures for the interpretive time include: Isaiah 55, Isaiah 58:6–12, Amos 5:21–24, Micah 6:6–8, Matthew 25:31–46, Luke 10:25–37, or 1 Corinthians 13. Music may be planned or may be shaped by the gifts of congregational members from their love, their agape. If that holy jamming is anticipated, people will need advance invitations to bring their instruments.



## 9 Listening to Those Who Do Not See

**Leader preparation:** John 9, like many texts about healing of people with sensory losses, sometimes makes people who have disabilities uncomfortable. The modern implications are not usually the first century ones—that one’s parents or oneself sinned, though people who have fetal alcohol syndrome often live with the nastier versions of that prejudice. There are those who believe that a person who is blind does not have the “faith” to be healed, or that any person who is blind either has mental impairments (a recent student at Massachusetts Institute of Technology who was blind was told by a professor that “blind people are illiterate”) or has some kind of mystical endowments, such as the traditions of the blind bard. Finally, many people who do not have disabilities often avoid being with those who do because they think they will embarrass themselves by saying or doing something inappropriate.

The church often wages battles over the issue of disabilities with regard to hymn language (“blind” used as shorthand for “sinful” or “to see” as “to understand”), or access to liturgy, or regarding the full range of church activities. The language in the gospel of Matthew that accuses Pharisees of being “blind guides” (Matthew 15:14, 23:1) can make everyone uneasy.

### Supplies:

- resource person who has low or impaired vision
- “Prayer with People with Disabilities for John 9,” Attachment: Activity 9
- “Script for John 9:1–41” Attachment: Activity 1-1

A brief worship occasion or the message portion of a weekly service can be specifically shaped to listen to the witness of those without sight in light of John 9:1–41 (as well as other stories about blindness in the New Testament, such as in Matthew 9:27–31, Mark 8:22–26 and 10:46–52, Luke 18:35–43). Simply listening to this testimony empowers both speaker and listener.

Read the text, or use the script on the attachment. Invite a speaker to make a personal response. Invite those who have gathered to worship to respond with a thought, a prayer, or a question. If no one is available to be the speaker, read the text and the poem interpretation of this text, “Prayer with People with Disabilities,” from the attachment. Pause for quiet reflection, and then invite responses. There may be people in the group who have experienced low vision themselves or who have visually impaired family members, or who have experienced the impact of any of the disabilities named in this piece. Although they may not want to be considered an expert giving an informational speech, they may offer a testimony from life experience.

*Closing Prayer: God of amazing grace, we give you thanks for the sweetness and gentleness of your love that saves us no matter who we may be. Many of us were lost and now are found; we were bound by so many prejudices and now are beginning to be free. Amen.*



## Following the Church Year

An ongoing practice of testimony and giving witness as inspired, nudged, comforted, shocked, surprised, challenged, and shanghaied by scripture throughout the church year can be focused on the central practice of the reading of the weekly texts. Some churches follow the Revised Common Lectionary, and others do not. But all key their scripture to the rhythm of the year: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost, with Ordinary Time either only following Pentecost or including the weeks between Epiphany and Lent as well.

Invite a lay reader to read the scripture and introduce one of the texts with two or three sentences of testimony that connects the text to lived contemporary experience. In planning this as a regular part of worship, it is important to remind the reader that it is to be a personal witness inspired by this text. It is not a mini-sermon or textual background that might, unfortunately, differ from the preacher's approach. The pastor may wish to model the difference for several weeks.

Another way to shape testimony is to announce in the bulletin or aloud one text for the following week and to encourage people to read it each day of the week. This is not to be a Bible study, but a way to let the text illuminate their lives and their lives to illuminate the text. Some people may journal these reflections, and one or two could be invited to share after the reading of the text the following Sunday. This scripture may be the one that is most central to the sermon, or it may be a second text that is interpreted only by congregational stories.

A third way to express testimony on a text is to have a board on which people may leave cards with personal reflections or artistic representations from the weekly scripture. This holds a particularly intergenerational appeal.

For those congregations that share communion once a month, personal stories inspired by the text can form the morning's meditation, with the pastor or worship leader connecting these stories in conclusion. This models the table of the family of God—truly sharing the week's stories and sharing the bread and cup.



Attachment: Activity 1

Script for John 9:1–41

**Parts:**

Narrator

Disciple(s)

Jesus

Neighbors 1 and 2

Benjamin (a common name of the time—a person born blind)

Pharisees 1 and 2 (Pharisee 1 is more skeptical; Pharisee 2 is more sympathetic)

Parents (1 or 2)

*(Disciples/Pharisees can be shared parts and Neighbors/Parents can be shared parts. This takes some acting ability, so the rest can distinguish which part a person is playing.)*

**Narrator:** As Jesus walked along, he saw a person blind from birth. His disciples questioned him.

**Disciple:** Rabbi, who sinned, this person or his parents, that he was born blind?

**Jesus:** Neither this person nor his parents sinned. He was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of the One who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

**Narrator:** When Jesus had said this, he spat on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and spread the mud on the man's eyes.

**Jesus** *(to the one born blind):* Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.

**Narrator:** Siloam means "sent." The person went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask questions.

**Neighbor 1:** Is this not the person who used to sit and beg?

**Neighbor 2:** It is.

**Neighbor 1:** No, but it is someone like him.

**Benjamin:** I am the man.

**Neighbor 2:** Then how were your eyes opened?





### Attachment: Activity 1 (continued)

**Benjamin:** The person called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, "Go to Siloam and wash." Then I went and washed and received my sight.

**Neighbors 1 and 2:** Where is he?

**Benjamin:** I do not know.

**Narrator:** They brought to the Pharisees the person who had formerly been blind. Now, it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight.

**Benjamin:** He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.

**Pharisee 1:** This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.

**Pharisee 2:** How can a person who is a sinner perform such signs?

**Narrator:** The Pharisees were divided among themselves.

**Pharisee 1:** What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.

**Benjamin:** He is a prophet.

**Narrator:** The authorities did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called his parents and questioned them.

**Pharisee 2:** Is this your son, whom you say was born blind? How then does he now see?

**Parent/s:** We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.

**Narrator:** His parents said this because they were afraid of the authorities; for the authorities had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. So for the second time they called the person who had been blind.

**Pharisee 1:** Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.

**Benjamin:** I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.



### Attachment: Activity 1 (*continued*)

**Pharisee 2:** What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?

**Benjamin:** I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?

**Narrator:** Then they reviled him.

**Pharisee 1, 2:** You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this person, we do not know where he comes from.

**Benjamin:** Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but listens to one who worships and obeys. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.

**Pharisee 1:** You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?

**Narrator:** They drove him out. Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and he went to find him.

**Jesus:** Do you believe in the Son of Man?

**Benjamin:** And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.

**Jesus:** You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.

**Benjamin:** Lord, I believe.

**Narrator:** And he worshiped Jesus.

**Jesus:** I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.

**Pharisees 2:** Surely we are not blind, are we?

**Jesus:** If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, "We see," your sin remains.



**Attachment: Activity 1-2**

**Morning Worship**

Here the words of Isaiah as we come together: *(Read Isaiah 43:1-2.)*

This morning our scripture will be read by people taking parts in the story. The text has not been changed. This passage is mostly dialogue. The “he said . . . they said” has been removed. Let me introduce you to the cast. *(See the script for John 9:1-41 and introduce those who are reading the parts).*

In every biblical translation the person healed in this story, the person who witnesses to Jesus’ power with thanksgiving but also with the courage that has him thrown out of the synagogue, is simply called “the man born blind.” He is identified with his disability. Then he becomes the man formerly blind. We believe that everyone who meets Jesus has a name. So to read this scripture, we named this man—child, neighbor, object lesson for Pharisees and disciples, outcast—Benjamin, a name that means “son of my right hand,” for that is surely what he is!

*(Present the dramatization of the scripture.)*

Benjamin, the person born blind who was healed by Jesus, claimed his life and everything that had been true of it. He claimed the amazing thing that had happened to him, even at the earliest moment when he wasn’t quite sure what that was, even when that put him in danger, even when his parents tried to distance themselves from him. Benjamin gave his witness: “Lord, I believe.”

I invite you to claim your thanks or your needs, or share something from your week using this form: “My name is . . . and . . .” You could say something like, “My name is Rachel, and I’m thankful for the visit of family this week,” or “thankful for the bike ride I took,” or “thankful for the courage God’s given me to find a new job.” Or you could say, “My name is Jon, and I need prayer for the chemotherapy I begin this week,” or “prayer for my friend’s loss of her mother,” or “prayer for my brother’s struggle with addiction.” Or your statement could be, “My name is Anthon and this week I read a book that may change the way I eat,” or “this week I started to raise my hand in my history class and answered a couple questions,” or “this week I had a small traffic accident and it was my fault,” or “this week I started to read the gospel of Luke.” Nothing is too short or long, too insignificant or personal for the family of God.

The congregation will respond after each claim, “God has called you by name. You are God’s child.”

Closing: Thank you for sharing from your lives. This we do in the name of One who gave healing and hope, the One of whom was said “they shall name him Emmanuel, which means God is with us.” God is indeed with us. Amen.



### **Sample Publicity Announcement for a “Bible Sunday”**

On \_\_\_\_\_, we will celebrate a “Bible Sunday” as we witness to the Word.

Please bring in a Bible that means something to you, such as

- a family Bible
- a Bible given to you for a special occasion, such as baptism or confirmation, graduation, wedding, or before being deployed for military action
- one “borrowed” from a hotel room or found by a hospital bed
- a smart phone Bible
- a new translation you love
- a picture Bible from childhood days

Come ready to tell us why this Bible matters to you. There will be index cards for your one-sentence description. We hope to display these Bibles for several weeks, so be sure yours is marked with some form of identification for retrieval later.

Please think about a Bible passage you would like to share and why it matters to you. Always loved Jonah? Go to sleep with the Shepherd Psalm? Heard a sermon about Zaccheaus that knocked you out of your tree? Are you glad Martha stood up for dishwashers everywhere? Does “Do unto others as you would have them do to you” run through your mind when you face a cafeteria bully? Have a favorite proverb, prophecy, or parable?

We are also collecting Bibles to be given away. If you have a Bible that you no longer use, or if you would like to purchase a Bible for this ministry, please bring that Bible to this service. These will be kept separate from Bibles you want returned to you.

Let’s celebrate the variety of wonderful scriptures we know and the ways our lives connect with them. In many ways let’s Witness to the Word.



## Attachment: Activity 2-2

### Worship Service of “Bible Sunday”

#### **Invitation:**

Some of us have stories about Bibles that have touched our lives or the lives of family members or friends. As the Bible “shows” us hope and “tells” us good news, I invite you to “show and tell” the Bibles you brought today.

#### **Prayer of Blessing:**

God, we give thanks for the many little books we call the Bible. We give thanks for scribes in speech, calligraphy, illumination, stained glass, printing press, Braille, computer, and film. We give thanks for this morning’s stories and all the lives these books have touched. We pray your blessing upon them and ask that you bless us to be living witnesses to your living Word. Amen.

#### **Bible Passages:**

Invite participants to stand if they are able, or speak clearly if seated, to share a favorite text and why it is meaningful. This can be as simple as “I love 1 Corinthians 13 because it was read at my wedding,” or “I used to play Daniel in the lion’s den with my cats,” or a longer story about the assistance of a scripture in making a job or health decision. These will be mostly celebratory, but there may be painful stories for which a reconciliation prayer can be offered.

#### **Invitation:**

The Bible is both print and passion, verse and voice. Some of us have shared stories about Bibles. Now I invite you to share stories about your favorite scriptures or ones that have challenged or comforted you—from Noah’s Ark to the Good Samaritan, from a psalm verse you memorized to “you know the bit about . . . ?” Feel free to simply name the story but, if you will, please share with us how it touched your life.

#### **Prayer of Thanksgiving:**

Teller behind the stories, Music beyond the psalms, Breath of justice in the prophets, Living Word, thank you for scripture that awakens in our lives and blesses us alive. We ask that you renew in us words and ways, text and message to share your love with others. Amen.

#### **Prayer of Reconciliation:**

God, in the beginning was a good Word, but some of us have been confused, abused, excluded, or punished by a misuse of the Bible. We pray for healing and new hearing that the harm already done may recede. We pledge ourselves to claim the biblical witness as a testimony of life. We pray in the name of Jesus, who brought forth new and old and called it treasure for the realm of God. Amen. (*Matthew 13:52*)

#### **Closing:**

Conclude the service with the offer of Bibles or new translations for people to keep or give to friends and the receiving of new and used Bibles for the ministry of the congregation.



**Attachment: Activity 3**

**Litany Based on Psalm 116**

(Bible version: *The Message*)

- Leader:** God takes the side of the helpless;  
when I was at the end of my rope, he saved me.
- Individual:** When I was . . . then God . . .
- Leader:** What can we give back to God for all these blessings?
- People:** I'll lift high the cup of salvation—a toast to God!
- Leader:** I said to myself, "Relax and rest.  
God has showered you with blessings.  
Soul, you've been rescued from death;  
Eye, you've been rescued from tears;  
And you, Foot, were kept from stumbling."
- Individual:** When I was . . . then God . . .
- Leader:** What can we give back to God for all these blessings?
- People:** I'll lift high the cup of salvation—a toast to God!
- Leader:** I'm striding in the presence of God,  
alive in the land of the living!  
I stayed faithful, though bedeviled,  
and despite a ton of bad luck,  
despite giving up on the human race,  
saying, "They're all liars and cheats."
- Individual:** When I was . . . then God . . .
- Leader:** What can we give back to God for all these blessings?
- People:** I'll lift high the cup of salvation—a toast to God!
- Leader:** Up against it, I didn't know which way to turn;  
then I called out to God for help:  
"Please, God!" I cried out. "Save my life!"
- Individual:** When I was . . . then God . . .
- Leader:** What can we give back to God for all these blessings?
- People:** I'll lift high the cup of salvation—a toast to God!



Attachment: Activity 7

Prayer for Pastoral Voice and Murmuring

For those who live with cancer . . .  
For those who live with loneliness . . .  
For those who live with addictions . . .  
For those with colds, flus, urinary tract infections . . .  
For those who cannot afford medical assistance . . .

*Musical interlude. During soft music, invite people to offer names in prayer, not waiting for a pause, but allowing the names to be murmured over one another.*

For all these, your children,  
we pray for healing, hope, and peace  
through Christ our Savior. Amen.

For those with hearing and vision loss . . .  
For those who are HIV positive . . .  
For those who have attempted suicide or are close to those who have done so . . .  
For those who are on dialysis . . .  
For those who cannot get therapy or a second opinion because of the cost . . .

*Musical interlude. During soft music, invite people to offer names in prayer, not waiting for a pause, but allowing the names to be murmured over one another.*

For all these, your children,  
we pray for healing, hope, and peace  
through Christ our Savior. Amen.

For those who are recovering from strokes . . .  
For those who are recovering from heart attack and heart surgery . . .  
For those who are living with mental illness . . .  
For those who are living with malnutrition, domestic violence, incest . . .  
For those who are living with dementia . . .  
For those who are bankrupt because of medical bills . . .

*Musical interlude. During soft music, invite people to offer names in prayer, not waiting for a pause, but allowing the names to be murmured over one another.*

For all these, your children,  
we pray for healing, hope, and peace  
through Christ our Savior. Amen.

For those whose countries are torn apart by war . . .

For those whose education is inadequate or frightening . . .

For those who eat from garbage cans or sleep in their cars . . .

For those who inherit the damaged earth, air, sea . . .

For those whose nightmares are created by religious strife . . .

For all who live where health care is not equal and equally available . . .

*Musical interlude. During soft music, invite people to offer names in prayer, not waiting for a pause, but allowing the names to be murmured over one another.*

For all these, your children,  
we pray for healing, hope, and peace  
through Christ our Savior. Amen.

We reflect on Band-Aids as a sign of our care for one another, a "Band-Aid" as an inadequate response to a grave situation, and a Band-Aid as a small true symbol of a parent's care, even as this service is a small symbol of our care for this situation.

*Musical interlude*

The Prayer of Our Savior



**Attachment: Activity 8**

## **Agape Service Liturgy**

Agape meals were part of the worshiping life of the early church. They took up the banquet imagery present in a number of Jesus' parables and powerfully expressed some of the distinctive characteristics of the coming of God's realm. They were occasions of joy and festivity as the community celebrated the meaning of resurrection. They were boundary markers, enabling the community to affirm its identity as those who belonged to Christ. And they were places of economic justice, enabling a sharing and redistribution among the community. This liturgy takes up these themes.

### **Opening Sentences**

Come! If you are hungry, there is food to eat.  
Come! If you are thirsty, there is water to drink.  
It is food for those who hunger for justice,  
    and water for those who long for life in all its fullness.  
Come! Eat and drink to proclaim the feast of God's realm  
    where all are welcome and no one is left out.

### **Prayer Offering Praise**

God, our Mother and Father,  
You have given us this earth rich and vibrant.  
Its renewing life sustains us.  
Its unfailing goodness nourishes us.  
Blessed be your name.

Jesus, our Saviour and Healer,  
You ate with friends and enemies.  
At a meal you brought the gift of hope.  
At a meal you gave the word of life.  
Blessed be your name.

Spirit, our Comforter and Disturber,  
You do not leave us on our own.  
Here are companions to know our joy.  
Here are companions to share our sorrow.  
Blessed be your name.





### Attachment: Activity 8 (continued)

#### **Prayer Seeking Renewal**

**One:** As we gather together, around this table where all are welcome, we seek God's peace and renewal. From regret and fear,

**All:** Give us peace, loving God.

**One:** From anger and mistrust,

**All:** Give us peace, vulnerable God.

**One:** From pain and brokenness,

**All:** Give us peace, healing God.

**One:** From division and conflict,

**All:** Give us peace, reconciling God.

**One:** From violence and injustice,

**All:** Give us peace, gentle God.

**One:** Welcoming God, come and renew us

Name us as your people.

Name our world as yours.

And give us peace. Amen.

#### **Scripture**

Read a passage of scripture followed by simple comments or a period of silence for quiet reflection, or both, to witness together.

#### **Sharing the Day**

Provide an opportunity for those present to offer the day to God, whether it is naming what has already happened or what still lies ahead.

#### **Sharing Concerns**

**One:** Around a table of feasting and festivity, where we are all invited to find life-giving gifts, we hold in love the struggle and the pain of the world. Where a child experiences abuse and neglect,

**All:** Come, Holy Spirit, make us impatient for change.

**One:** Where the hungry cry out for food,

**All:** Come, Holy Spirit, make us impatient for change.

**One:** Where people live with advancing sickness and disease,

**All:** Come, Holy Spirit, make us impatient for change.

**One:** Where communities fail to care for the weak and ignore the stranger in their midst,

**All:** Come, Holy Spirit, make us impatient for change.

**One:** Where those in power listen to the demands of the rich and ignore the needs of the poor,

**All:** Come, Holy Spirit, make us impatient for change.

**One:** Where the church is preoccupied with its own rightness and ceases to be the hope of good news,

**All:** Come, Holy Spirit, make us impatient for change.

**One:** Create in us and all people a holy discontent with the way things are, and a holy desire for the ways of peace and justice.



## Attachment: Activity 8 (continued)

**Words of Hope:** Read Isaiah 25:6–9.

### **Sharing**

Eat this fruit.

It is the wonder of creation held in our hands;  
the gift of sun and soil, wind and rain.

It speaks to us of the work of human labor,  
of the longing of the poor,  
of the promise that in God's realm  
we will all share in the feast of life.

Eat this fruit.

For it is the sweet taste of liberation.

*(Fruit is distributed and eaten.)*

Drink this water.

It is the wonder of creation held in our hands;  
the gift of cloud and rain, river and spring.

It speaks to us of cleansing,  
of the longing of all creation for its renewing,  
of the promise that in baptism  
we are all invited to a new and living hope.

Drink this water.

For it is the refreshing taste of life.

*(Water is distributed and drunk.)*

### **Offering**

*(Join hands for the offering of one another to God.)*

We are God's people.

Shaped and formed by water and Word.

Sustained and nourished by the fruit of love.

Together we will live as God's people.

### **Closing Sentences**

We must not stay here.

Our purpose is among those who cry out for peace.

Our place is alongside those who search for justice.

Let us go with trembling hearts and joyful spirits,  
to sow the seeds of God's realm. Amen.

*A meal may follow this service.*

Liturgical resource adapted from Graham Sparkes and Anthea Cox (England), in *Gifts in Open Hands—More Resources for the Global Community*, ed. Maren C. Tirabassi and Kathy Wonson Eddy (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2011). Used by permission.



## Attachment: Activity 9

### Prayer with People with Disabilities for John 9

We are people with disabilities—  
our eyes do not see for us;  
our ears do not hear for us;  
our tongues do not speak for us;  
our limbs do not move as others' do.  
Some of us have holes in our hearts;  
others take insulin or Lithium or Prozac.  
Some of us can name a disease and  
others can remember an accident.  
Some of us have a lifetime of being in this body,  
others are learning difficult new skills.  
Some of us are bitter . . . some of us are grateful . . .  
some of us are angry with God.

We are people with abilities—  
we speak with our hands,  
we read with our fingers and computers,  
we paint with our feet,  
we spin the wheels of wheelchairs,  
and have dogs more trustworthy than people.

We understand the pain of others;  
we listen to stories longer;  
we are skilled at waiting;  
we are inventive in overcoming barriers—indeed,  
we are wildly creative in everyday life.

We love God,  
but we are wary of the scriptures,  
bruised by generations of preachers,  
and hesitant of the community called church,  
that so often defines healing and  
leaves us on the outside.

Precious God, God who embraces  
our rage and pain, our pride and joy,  
we claim this story—radically, fiercely claim—  
wheelchair and white cane,  
ASL, bells-on-stoplight, feeding tubes and braces.  
We claim this story as our passionate prayer.

We praise you, God, that you declare us  
guilt-free of our disabilities and  
we thank you that we are chosen  
for your works to be revealed in us—  
as we name those works.  
We rejoice, God, that we encounter you,  
and we need never beg again.

We love you, God, for breaking the Sabbath—  
for touching us against the law.

We acknowledge to you, God,  
that our disabilities tear our families apart  
and that parents, spouses, and friends  
often do not want us to be independent.

We cry out to you, God, because many people  
secretly believe we caused our disability—  
we are responsible, we are embarrassing,  
we are perhaps contagious.

We pause in wonder, God,  
that Jesus comes to those driven out,  
those kept out, those who are not welcome.  
Jesus comes down the stairs and  
outside the too narrow doors to invite us into faith.

We affirm, O God, that Jesus reverses expectations:  
blind is not sin—those who say they see are sinners;  
deaf is not sin—those who say they hear are  
sinners;  
mentally ill and lame and mute and dyslexic are  
not sin—  
only people who judge others  
by body-law, barrier, and begging  
lock themselves inside a truly inaccessible place,  
which is no sanctuary.

We are people with disabilities and abilities,  
hurt and laughter, memory and hope.  
We know healing beyond definitions.  
We know the glory of God that looks like mud.  
We are not afraid to be driven out and  
we are not afraid to believe.

Amen.

From Maren C. Tirabassi and Joan Jordan Grant,  
*An Improbable Gift of Blessing* (Cleveland: United  
Church Press, 1998). Used by permission.

# Giving Testimony and Witness



## Exploration: Discipleship

### About this Setting

Discipleship is learning. We learn from those who are old, from those who are young, from those of diverse cultures, from those who have been called and trained as teachers, from one another. Unfortunately, for some people their biggest learning about worship is “Shush. Be quiet,” and they have the candy wrappers and Bible puzzles to prove it. To fully experience the faith practice of Giving Testimony and Witness in worship, we must learn to speak and share, and we must learn to listen and share.

The three Exploring and Engaging activities that follow are shaped for weekly congregational worship and can be adapted to contemporary, traditional, and blended services. The three Discerning and Deciding activities suggest worship planning that invites testimony. The three Sending and Serving activities take this faith practice to specific contexts in the community and worship contexts beyond the local church.

### About this Exploration

When giving testimony and witness, a disciple becomes both learner and leader. In response to God’s prompting, disciples serve the community through speaking and acting faithfully.



**Mark 8:27–38**  
**Psalm 25:1–10**

## Leader Preparation

Flex your less used “testimony muscle” this week. If you are often a speaker, practice listening in your variety of daily settings—home, work, mall, or meeting. If you are often a listener, practice offering your perspective, your opinion, your witness. At the end of each day consider what you have learned from this experience and how that might apply to worship participation.

*Prayer: Spirit, wrap around my ear as a hearing aid that I may listen well and hear clearly the stories of all your people. Spirit, kiss my lips like a wireless headset microphone that the honesty and hopefulness of my witness may be amplified by your power. Bend my hands into Sign, touch my fingertips with Braille, and JavaScript my Ethernet with your Pentecost. Amen.*

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### ① Remembrance of Baptism (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** The distinction between “Remembrance of Baptism” and “Renewal of Baptism” is that the remembrance does not involve repeating vows. Renewal is never something that should “happen” to an entire congregation. It is inappropriate to impose this ritual on guests of other faiths and no faith present in a service of worship. Renewal is also a profound commitment that should involve personal or group preparation.

Remembrance of Baptism can take place on the First Sunday after Epiphany with the lectionary reading for Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan by his cousin John. It can also happen on a day where there is a baptism, confirmation, or any occasion when the scripture lifts up water. For a conversation about the scripture that involves brief and simple sharings, this service uses the story of Lydia’s baptism and opening her home to become the church in Philippi.

#### **Supplies:**

- artwork: “Baptism” by Hullis Mavruk [www.tinyurl.com/fp-aphm](http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-aphm)
- baptismal font with water
- evergreen branches
- suggested hymns: “Come, O Fount of Every Blessing” (tune: Nettleton); “I Was There to Hear Your Borne Cry” (tune: Waterlife); “Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me” (verses 1, 2) (tune: Pilot); “My Shepherd Is the Living God” (tune: Consolation)
- “Worship Guide,” Attachment: Activity 1

Celebrate the Remembrance of Baptism with Visual Focus, Conversation about the Scripture, and a Sharing of Water.

Visual Focus: Display Hullis Mavruk’s “Baptism” on a projected screen or as the cover of the bulletin. Use these gathering words: *Reflect on this picture—baptism . . . down by the riverside . . . commitment . . . community . . . solemnity . . . joy . . . Reflect on this picture.* Continue with the attached Worship Guide.



### ② Sharing Our Holy Ground

**Leader preparation:** At the end of the summer there is enthusiasm about celebrating outdoor ministries and other kinds of camping. The experiences that people have with God in outdoor settings and the connections they make with other people in the free-form community that a camping environment generates are some of the most spiritually profound of many people’s lives. To foster inclusion, name experiences of our whole lives rather than just those of the summer. Broaden the definition of outdoor “ministry” to make sure that everyone can witness.

Cover a long table with white paper. Invite people to bring photographs of their camping experiences. If some people do not have pictures, or forgot to bring their pictures, have them draw on the paper. This display offers a nonverbal witness. Organize the photos according to groups such as church camping experiences (of any kind, any church); Vacation Bible School (anywhere—some children attend while visiting grandparents); Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts together; 4-H camps together; all sports camps together; music, theatre, and dance camps together. Provide identifiable space for outdoor fun experiences for people of all ages. If some people are willing to bring their pictures early, scan them and project them during



the singing of a familiar hymn such as “For the Beauty of the Earth” (tune: Dix) or a praise song such as “Holy Ground” (tune: Holy Ground).

Sharing testimony about outdoor ministry may be a brief time or may expand to be a service-long focus. Remember that some people may come with uncomfortable or painful memories from camping experiences as well as happy ones.

**Supplies:**

- 8-foot tables covered with white paper in sanctuary, narthex, or reception hall
- tape and crayons
- “Liturgy Suggestions,” Attachment: Activity 2-1
- “Story Starters,” Attachment: Activity 2-2

The liturgy suggestions for Call to Worship and Opening Prayer emphasize the inclusiveness of this celebration and offer an additional welcome to a wide range of outdoor sacred times. Everyone can make a witness to Holy Ground. Invite people to tell their story (to witness) to a person sitting next to them. Invite a few people to share their stories.

Invitation to witness (Passing the Peace or during the Message/Sermon): *When Jacob was “camping” he used a rock for a pillow and dreamed about a ladder of angels. In the morning he woke up and said, “Surely God was in this place, and I didn’t know it” (Genesis 28:10–17). During a similar “camping” experience, Moses was told by God, “Take off your shoes; you’re standing on holy ground” (Exodus 3:1–6). What is a holy outdoor place for you? You may have many, but choose one and share it with your neighbor.* Invite a few people to share their stories aloud.

As long as people can speak loudly and clearly from their seats, many people will be willing to name their holy places, and some will be willing to tell a story. If you want a longer sermon, consider reading aloud one of the two story starters on the attachment.

After a time of quiet meditation, invite participants to name worship experiences in outdoor settings that touched them. What relationships in the community formed by sharing outdoor time together have impacted their lives?



### 3 Blessing of Responsibilities

**Leader preparation:** Many occasions of transition are marked by ritual in the faith community: confirmation or baptism, church membership, installation into diaconates or church committees, and ordination into ministry. Some congregations also celebrate achievements such as graduations or honors such as Eagle Scout, National Honor Society, or commitment to AmeriCorps or the Peace Corps.

These occasions witness to individual commitment and to the community’s willingness to seek God’s blessing. They affirm the individual being honored and inspire others. They are a testimony to ongoing human discipleship.

Many transitions that happen outside of the church setting call for prayer and some form of laying on of hands. The three on the attachment are individual blessings that occur at different times during the year.

**Supplies:**

- “Prayers for Life Transitions,” Attachment: Activity 3

You know the life transitions of the people in your faith community. Choose from any on the attachment, or create your own to acknowledge special times in people’s lives.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Youth Sunday Preparation (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Set an early planning date to help youth experience the creation of worship and reflect on the meaning of it, rather than fall back on a last minute leader-driven event. Taking time to remember effective worship experiences and including everyone in the sermon (witness) may have an ongoing impact in the lives of the youth.

**Supplies:**

- construction paper “bugs”
- way to take notes—laptop, newsprint, or whiteboard
- index cards—two for each person
- “Youth Sunday Preparation,” Attachment: Activity 4

A planning time for a Youth Sunday takes a deliberative, nonfrantic pace. The planning guide on the attachment works well with seven to fifteen young people. The plan is in three half-hour segments. Once you complete the three segments, share a closing prayer.

### 5 Becoming the Body of Christ

**Leader preparation:** When using body movement, avoid mandated touching that can be painful for those who are survivors of unwanted violent or sexual touch. Also be mindful of movements that are difficult for those with mobility issues. Movements that take skill make some people feel very awkward.

Gather volunteers, deacons, worship committee members, or others to discuss “incarnation”—becoming more embodied in worship. Provide a circle of chairs for a comfortable setting.

**Supplies:** None

Welcome from leader: *We sit, we stand, we kneel, we clap, we greet with hands or hugs, we dance, we pass plates of money and bread. We look down at hymnals, up at screens; we bow our heads, shut our eyes, fold our hands in prayer; we hold babies, little cups, and little candles; unfortunately, some preachers point fingers or shake fists, while some parishioners frown twice as often as they smile. We all come to church having eaten too much or too little. We fail to exercise, stay awake long hours, ignore or avoid doctors. We are the people of slouch . . . and benediction!*

*Thank you so much for gathering together to consider using our bodies more or in different ways in worship. Please let me model this simple prayer that can be prayed by people of all ages.*



(Finger to lips) *God, teach us to sing,*  
 (Prayer-hands) *teach us to pray,*  
 (Hands on heart) *teach us to love,*  
 (Hands spread wide) *and give love away.*

Offer this brief meditation that invites reflection on four different ways of understanding a connection between faith and prayer: *Focus on your hand. Look at it, feel the physical sensations in it, or touch it with your other hand. Continue to look at your hand or shut your eyes.*

*Pray, focus, concentrate on the weakest, neediest part of your body . . .*  
*Pray, focus, concentrate on the physical needs of your neighbor . . .*  
*Pray, focus, concentrate on a particular body of a person in this world who needs prayer*  
 . . .  
*Consider what it is to treat your body as a temple . . . and what you need to do about that.*  
*Amen.*

Invite each person to respond verbally to this meditation. This may include personal experiences with cancer or vision loss, issues of aging family members, global starvation or environmental disease, or commitments to change eating, drinking, or exercise patterns.

Reflect on scripture and worship: *The Hebrew people considered a person a totality, an animated body, never a spirit trapped in a corpse. Genesis is clear that the human body—male and female—is in the image of God and is not a punishment after the fall from grace. Not only are human bodies good in Genesis, they are good in the stories of the patriarchs and matriarchs of Israel, in the psalms, in the Song of Solomon . . . and they are good when Jesus heals them, saves them from storms, feeds them sardines and musht fish, and raises them—his friend Lazarus, a twelve year old girl, a widow’s only son—from the grave.*

*The body is good that Jesus offers as he breaks the bread and pours the cup, as he sweats and bleeds on the cross, as he, body and spirit, is raised from the all too real tomb. And so it is that the apostle Paul, in trying to help people understand the nature of the church, suggested the metaphor of the body of Christ.*

#### Discussion Questions:

- What is body-affirming or body-denying in our culture and how have you experienced that?
- How does our worship engage us as embodied people?
- How we can be more physically engaged in worship in ways that include choices for people with mobility limitations?
- In weekly worship?
- In intergenerational worship?
- In a special worship service?

Plan a small or large worship event—from a physical call to worship to a costumed procession.

Read the following closing benediction around the circle with a different person reading each line. Pause after the phrase “Alzheimer’s smile” for people to add lines. Read the closing in unison.

#### **Benediction**

*On creation’s sixth day God, ready to rest,*  
*looked at human beings and declared them good.*  
*Can we do less?*  
*Let us look at one another—noses and whiskers,*





*fallen arches and spreading hips,  
 beautiful hair and beautiful baldness,  
 brown eyes, green eyes, near-sighted eyes,  
 implanted eyes and tear-filled eyes,  
 white skin, brown skin, wrinkled and freckled skin,  
 football player shoulders and tired shoulders,  
 stiff necks and double chins,  
 dentures and braces and hearing aids and wheels,  
 ribs, spines and new knees,  
 Parkinson's quiver, chemo brain, Alzheimer's smile, . . .  
 faces of sorrow, faces of love, faces of bodies  
 for whom Christ lived and broke bread  
 and died and lived again—  
 and let us say . . . we are very good. Amen.*



## 6 Art and Story as We Pass on Our Faith

**Leader preparation:** Children's sermons in weekly worship can be the best of times or the worst of times. Professional educators often speak effectively with young people, and clergy are often successful simply because they are willing to be in relationship with the youngest of parishioners. However, many others are anxious about being asked to relate to children in front of an adult "audience" so they settle for eliciting cute remarks that will entertain the audience or giving the kids candy or small gifts.

This two-hour gathering of adults who would like to prepare messages for children as part of weekly worship uses visual imagery and personal story to begin to consider mutual discipleship across ages.

### Supplies:

- artwork: "Hopi Virgin Mother and Child" by John Giuliani  
[www.tinyurl.com/fp-uccr](http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-uccr)
- artwork: "The Blind Pedlar" by Robert McGregor  
[www.tinyurl.com/fp-aprm](http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-aprm)

Welcome the group as they gather and thank them for their gift of time. By the end of the session each person will have an idea for a children's message for a worship setting. Instead of beginning by generating specific ideas, the group will use art and story—important media for young people—to reflect on relationships between generations and the ways in which being mentor and disciple goes in both directions—younger to older and older to younger.

Divide the group into pairs. Ask the participants to share a short story with their partners about a time when an older person taught them something important or supported them in a difficult situation. This could be a teacher, coach, neighbor, camp counselor, church school teacher, parent, grandparent. Every life is filled with mentors such as these.

Invite the participants to turn to another person and tell a story about a time when they learned something from a younger person. This could be a child or grandchild, student or young patient in a hospital, kid in the park or the church, teenager in the local high school or sitting at a table at a homeless supper.

After each person has exchanged two stories, gather the group and ask if any would like to share their insights.



Display “The Blind Pedlar” and invite people to describe what they see in this picture. They may suggest that there is a generation missing, that the body language is tender, that the girl seems to be helping the man. Some may see it as overly sentimental, others as moving. Ask if someone would like to narrate a story he or she imagines from this painting. In what ways does this remind anyone of the stories they shared with one another? How might a child respond to this picture?

Next show “Hopi Virgin Mother and Child.” Ask for one-word responses to this picture. Invite the participants to respond to the setting of Mary and Jesus of Nazareth in Hopi culture, to the body language, to the interaction or lack of interaction between the two figures and between the figures and the observer. *Which do you think has a greater personal impact: the mother or the child? In what ways does this remind anyone of the stories they shared? How might a child respond to this picture?*

Both pictures illustrate a relationship between people of different generations. Invite the group to discuss how the pictures are complementary and what emotions and spiritual understandings each draws forth.

Finally, with both pictures available, invite the group into a three-minute silent meditation, after which they will be invited to name a thought, idea, or experience they would like to share with younger people in the church.

For the second hour divide into groups of three or four. Each small group will spend 30 minutes planning a children’s message based on the ideas expressed after the silent meditation. Let the art and story of the first hour inform the conversations. Bring the group back together to hear the ideas from each small group. Invite a volunteer to lead a closing prayer.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 A Different Way to Begin a Meeting (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Pause before a meeting to have a moment of worship that sets stewardship or mission, education or hospitality in a larger context. A reading, which is a passive form of centering, doesn’t pull people away from the pre-occupations of the day in the way that active participation does. Sharing the briefest of thoughts—witnessing—refocuses the spirit. As a regular practice, these brief, simple times may change the spiritual dimension of the committee life of a congregation.

**Supplies:**

- “God’s Highways,” Attachment: Activity 7
- (optional props) a GPS (global positioning system) or maps and toy vehicles, such as match box cars or toy trains

In any church activity we take a journey together. As we do, we seek to follow in God’s path. Read Psalm 25:1–10. Invite everyone to tell a brief story about a journey that he or she has taken using the seasonal introductions on the “God’s Highways” attachment. Some stories will raise a chuckle and some a sigh of sympathy, but discourage any conversation.



Thank everyone for their stories and read the contemporary reflection on Psalm 25 found on the attachment. Then continue with the meeting.

### 8 A Fish Bowl Testimony

**Leader preparation:** This is an opportunity for mutual discipleship across ages. Recruit liturgical leaders to lead the brief service portions and five people whose on-the-spot testimony forms the sermon. An ideal mix would be two youth (adolescents prefer to have company), a parent of young children, an adult without children, and a well-respected church elder. They will be prepared to answer anonymous questions about their faith and their experience of life. They may choose to answer any question—even those that may seem to be addressed to a different age group. There may be questions that are not answered.

#### Supplies:

- a “fish bowl” or a large glass globe
- index cards and pencils—one or more for everyone present
- piano, CD player, or computer to play music
- song: “God of the Sparrow” (tune: Roeder)
- (optional) video: “God of the Sparrow” <http://tinyurl.com/3ktx4nv>
- (optional) refreshments for an opportunity to continue the conversation informally

Younger people and older people often wonder about one another and wonder about themselves. This is a suggestion for an informal or contemporary evening worship service or an after-church occasion in which a “Fish Bowl Conversation” forms the sermon.

*Leader: Welcome. Thank you for coming to a time of questions and witness—not questions and answers, though that may be what it sounds like, but we will listen to one another.*

*Listen first to scripture. Read Mark 8:7–30. Jesus’ course in discipleship had less to do with testing and examination and more to do with questions—true/false, multiple choice, and short answer. Most of the time the Pharisees, Thomas, Mary, and the other disciples asked Jesus questions. But on this occasion Jesus questioned them: Who do people think I am? Who do you think I am? All the responses were right, and all the responses were incomplete. Please pray with me a very familiar prayer, but this time we will pray in questions.*

*The Prayer of Our Savior in Questions (in unison): O God, where are you—in heaven, or here with us? How can we make your name holy or make it holy again when it has been abused? Why don’t we recognize your will? How do we bring the peace of your realm to places where we live? Can we trust you with our daily needs? Can we trust ourselves to know them? Will you forgive us and teach us to be forgiving? How do we walk away from temptation, and will you really preserve us from evil? What is the future? Can you really help us? How can we reflect your glory? When is . . . forever and what do you want us to do with our lives now? Amen.*

*Leader: We bring a lot of questions to church: ethical questions such as “What should I think about abortion or war or stem cell research?”; theological questions such as “What happens when we pray?” “Do people who die by suicide go to heaven?” “Did God shape the world through evolution?”; and even personal questions such as “Why did my marriage fail?” “Does God love my body shape?” “Should I eat meat since modern-day meat production is so cruel?”*



Present a wide range of sample questions, tailoring them to the group and making sure that some are particularly important to people at different ages.

Sing a song: Each line of this song could be a question, and each line could be a statement. The song writer lets you make up your mind. Sing “God of the Sparrow.” If possible, show the YouTube video clip. During the video clip invite the participants to write their questions.

While the music plays, instruct participants to write a question on their index card, but not their name. Collect the cards in the fish bowl. Those who volunteered to respond to the questions—notice this is a response, not an answer—will witness, responding to the question from his or her experience. Instruct the group not to ask questions that can be answered with only one word.

*Leader: You have heard of preaching. You have heard of teaching. You have heard of speeching—well, maybe! This is “reaching”—from mind to mind, from heart to heart, from spirit to spirit. There are no right or wrong questions, and there are no right or wrong responses.*

Moderate the testimony of the five responders. Responses should be no more than two minutes, and no more than two people should respond to any question so that many can be shared.

*Closing Prayer: God, grant us the serenity to live with questions that may never be answered—questions about ourselves, about people we know, even about life itself. God, grant us the courage to ask profound and foolish questions, personal and global questions, questions that show that we really want to understand someone else, and questions that admit that we do not know everything. God, grant us the wisdom to open our hearts to people we trust, to avoid people who give easy answers, and to know the difference. Grant us the wisdom to ask you who you are, and to listen within ourselves to the answers that are forming there, but always to know that there is a difference. Amen.*



## 9 Create an Oral History

**Leader preparation:** Plan a time for young people to interview elders in the congregation or in a nearby assisted living facility or and nursing home to learn about worship in previous generations. Young people have a wide range of experiences with older people. Some have close relationships with elders in their own families or work at part-time jobs in care facilities. Others have little experience and are uneasy around dementia or other physical disabilities. Support this experience of learning about worship in a previous generation by having the young people visit in pairs, or by inviting the young people to visit the grandparents of other people in the group. This gives an immediate point of context—and something to start a conversation. For this activity young people should not visit their own family members. Be sure that a leader is available to share any fearfulness, sadness, or embarrassment. Be aware that relationships may develop and that in some cases they may continue on a personal basis. This is a blessing, but it also opens both parties to the sadness of death.

### Supplies:

- artwork: “The Blind Pedlar” by Robert Mcgregor  
[www.tinyurl.com/fp-aprm](http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-aprm)
- “Hints for Writing an Oral History,” Attachment: Activity 9

Gather the group in a circle and pass around the picture of “The Blind Pedlar” as a focusing device. Ask them what they see in the picture. Take as much time as



necessary, and encourage them to share personal stories about elders.

Describe the idea of creating an oral history about worship with older congregational members or residents in nearby elder housing. Remind the young people that in the care facility and even in the congregation there will be many different faith backgrounds. Look together at the attachment “Hints for Writing an Oral History.” Talk about where they would like to go, a time frame, and what they would like to do with the stories they experience. Some possibilities are to reconvene as a group on a particular date and share stories and photographs; create a bulletin board, PowerPoint presentation, or scrapbook; tell one brief anecdote every Sunday for a month or two in weekly worship as an Oral History Moment; or have a tea or dinner and invite those who have been interviewed to watch a play shaped out of the stories. Once the goal is chosen, walk through the steps of finding, meeting, interviewing, and treasuring the stories that they will hear. It’s okay if the goal changes once they have completed their interviews.

## Following the Church Year

An ongoing practice of giving testimony and witness throughout the church year nurtures discipleship and allows many opportunities for learners to be guides and for guides to be learners. Enrich special services with seasonal themes, but without the expectations of Christmas Eve or Easter Sunrise, by having the message come from individuals sharing a response to the scripture chosen for the event and to Mark 8:29.

A possible pattern to follow is to read the scripture; read some verses from Mark 8; and then pose the question: “Given what you have heard and your own experience of Jesus Christ, how would you answer the question, ‘Who do you say that I am?’”

If several of these special services occur in one year with different people sharing testimony, the cumulative effect will be powerful.

### Advent

World AIDS Day (December 1)—Isaiah 53:1–5; Mark 8:29–33

St. Nicholas Feast Day (December 6)—John 2:1–11; Mark 8:29

### Christmastide

New Year’s Day—Psalm 8; Mark 8:27–33

### Epiphany

Martin Luther King Jr. Day—Luke 4:16–19; Mark 8:29

Transfiguration—Matthew 17:1–8 (or parallels); Mark 8:27–30

### Lent

Ash Wednesday—Matthew 4:1–11 (or parallels); Mark 8:29–33

Maundy Thursday—John 13:3–15; Mark 8:29–33

### Eastertide

Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day—these passages are not appropriate for an Interfaith Service)—John 11:28–37; Mark 8:29

Ascension Day—Acts 1:1–11; Mark 8:29



### **Pentecost**

Pentecost Sunday—Acts 2:1–24; Mark 8:29

Trinity Sunday—John 14:15–27; Mark 8:29

### **Ordinary Time**

Labor Day—1 Corinthians 12:12–26; Mark 8:29

World Communion Sunday—Matthew 8:11 or Luke 13:29–30; Mark 8: 27–33



**Attachment: Activity 1**

**Worship Guide**

**Conversation about the Scripture**

Acts 16:13–16

“On the Sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.’ And she prevailed upon us.”

**Unison Prayer**

Gracious God, you call us to leave the familiar and go to a place of prayer, listening, and water. And then we are baptized. You return us to our homes, not so that we should be closed in them, but rather so that we should open them to strangers, even make churches of them, where those we love can hear the story that gives hope to their lives, even the story of Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Expanding the Prayer**

**Leader:** Gracious God, you call us to leave the familiar and go to a place of prayer . . .

Where have you found a place of prayer?

*(Sharing—single word or brief sentences)*

**Leader:** Listening and water . . .

I invite you to tell us a story of water—shore, lake, river—that has been important to you?

*(Sharing—single word or brief sentences)*

**Leader:** And then we are baptized . . .

What do you remember about baptism? your own, your children’s, someone else’s?

*(Sharing by several people)*

**Leader:** You return us to our homes . . .

**Hymn**

“My Shepherd Is the Living God”

**Leader:** . . . not so that we should be closed in them,

but rather so that we should open them to strangers,

make churches of them where those we love

can hear the story that gives hope to their lives . . .

What is the story about Jesus that has most meaning for you?

*(Sharing a name of a story or more)*



### Attachment: Activity 1 (continued)

**Leader:** . . . even the story of Jesus Christ. Amen.

#### Sharing of Water

##### Invitation

Let us remember baptisms.

We remember that Jesus of Nazareth came to

John at the Jordan

and was baptized there at the beginning  
of his ministry.

We remember that the apostle Paul understood baptism

as a washing into Christ's death,

a burying under waves,

that we might rise into resurrection and new  
life.

We remember that we were baptized.

Some of us can remember the day,

while others only remember the telling.

Some of us were held in the arms of those

who promised to raise us in faith,

while others of us made promises ourselves.

Some of us were touched by a fingertip of

water,

while others of us walked into water above

our heads.

We remember that we have been at baptisms.

Sometimes we were parents

longing to raise our children in grace.

Sometimes we were congregational

members,

praying for babies, young people,

and adults,

who were known and unknown to us.

Let us remember our baptisms.

#### Thanksgiving Litany for Water

**One:** Here is a pitcher of water, (*say name of community*) water, some faucet water, some water that reminds us of our world's need for clean wells. Here is a pitcher of water so often taken for granted so often desperately needed. Ordinary water.

**All:** We give you thanks, O God, for water.





### Attachment: Activity 1 *(continued)*

**One:** Over watery chaos your Spirit breathed a beginning. Between a flood and a rainbow you saved humans and all creatures. Through the Red Sea waves you rescued your children from slavery.

**All:** We give you thanks, O God, for water.

**One:** Jesus walked on water to save his drowning friends, and offered living water to a woman in Samaria. Jesus characterized true discipleship as giving one child a cup of water and, in a basin, washed his disciples feet, teaching them to serve one another.

**All:** We give you thanks, O God, for water.

**One:** In water disciples were commissioned to baptize all people. In water parents and godparents bless children. In water and Spirit people choose to claim faith as their own.

**All:** We give you thanks, O God, for water.

#### **Blessing Prayer**

God, pour your Holy Spirit upon this water filled with promise.

Splash us with your amazing grace.

Wet us with healing.

Wash us for truth.

Soak into our souls that we may live in faith,

hope for the resurrection,

and drench others with your powerful love.

Rain your blessing on all who seek you—

those who are here with us today,

and all others near and far

who call upon your holy name. Amen.

#### **Commitment in Water**

Receive the water sprinkled on you for the grace that you need in this day and for the remembering of the baptism of Jesus of Nazareth, his commissioning of the disciples to use this symbol of blessing, and your own baptism, if you have been baptized. Some of you have not been baptized—please experience this as a waterfall of blessing. Someone will pass among us, in a few minutes, shaking evergreen branches laden with water. If this symbolism is uncomfortable for you, please just raise your bulletin and the person will pass by. If you want a personal blessing of prayer or water, please come forward after the benediction.



Attachment: Activity 2-1

**Liturgy Suggestions**

*(for use with a focus on Testimony and Outdoor Ministry)*

**Call to Worship**

- Leader:** Please join every time the phrase applies to you.  
Let everyone who has been touched by God’s beautiful creation, say,  
“Thank you, God.”
- Response:** Thank you, God.
- Leader:** Everyone who went to church camp or Vacation Bible School—this summer or some other happy time in the past—or was part of summer Sunday “kid’s time” . . .
- Response:** Thank you, God.
- Leader:** Everyone who has a happy memory—this year or long ago—of Boy Scout camp, Girl Scout camp, Camp Fire Girls, Boys and Girls Club, YMCA, 4-H, or Grange camp . . .
- Response:** Thank you, God.
- Leader:** Everyone who has a happy memory—this year or long ago—of music camp, theatre camp, computer camp, summer arts and crafts camp, or sports camp . . .
- Response:** Thank you, God.
- Leader:** Everyone who has traveled this summer to a new place with family or friends . . .
- Response:** Thank you, God.
- Leader:** Everyone who went to a park, a lake, a beach, or a mountain . . .
- Response:** Thank you, God.
- Leader:** Everyone who played, sat, barbecued, or napped in your own backyard . . .
- Response:** Thank you, God.
- Leader:** Everyone who enjoyed the beauty of God’s creation . . . even through an open window . . .
- Response:** Thank you, God.

**Opening Prayer**

God, we have all been touched by the beauty of your creation. Sun has warmed us, and rain has lifted the green in our spirits. We give you thanks for the experiences of this summer past, and we remind ourselves of the laughing and the learning, the hiking, tenting, swimming, rock climbing, soccer kicking, flute playing—so that we can also remember how you have been present in special ways through new friends and blowing wind, amid bright exertion and deep rest. Amen.



## Attachment: Activity 2-2

## Story Starters

**Breaking New Ground**

Last summer when I was at church camp there was a kid in my group who was really depressed. He wasn't doing well in school, and he didn't feel like his friends had any confidence in him. His parents weren't supportive and they argued a lot. Every now and then, he had been mean to people because of things going on at home, and he felt guilty about that. He had dietary problems too. He didn't have anything or anyone he could depend on.

At first I was half in shock. You hear these stories about people whose lives are messed up, but they aren't willing to admit it. Yet here he was, saying, "I have all these problems and these two people I've just met are my only two friends." I wanted to help him, but since he didn't believe in God, that took away 75 percent of my arguments that I could have used to comfort him. Luckily, my friend from church was there too. We worked together to try to help this boy.

I can't remember many of the details, since most of the conversation took place past midnight! We talked until about 2:00 in the morning. I wasn't very eloquent because it was so late, but I don't think he noticed, because he was tired too. I felt like it was really important. I remember thinking, "Wow, maybe God led me to this person, so I have to at least try to make him feel better."

Later that summer, another friend and I watched the new Noah's Ark video and had a theological discussion afterwards. He thinks everyone has at least one chance to be the best they can be. It made me think about my conversation with the kid at camp. Maybe that was my chance to guide someone. I think I did about the best that I could. Still, I worry about him sometimes. I won't see him next summer, because I'll be in the high school group. I hope he comes to camp the year after that so I can see him again.

I feel like I personally have gained a measure of confidence in my relationship with God, because here was this atheistic kid and I was able to help him a little bit. That's made me feel like God really is able to affect some things.

—Henry Stone (8th grade at time of writing)

**Sacred Space**

It was my first time at Silver Lake Conference Center. I was in seventh grade and had been encouraged by my sister to go for a week of camp. I can still remember packing my foot locker full of clothes complete with my name tag sewn into the shirts just in case I lost one—compliments of my mother. First impressions are important for a seventh grader. I only remember one thing about that week but it was a critical remembrance that to this day impacts my understanding of God.

For the first time in my life I worshiped outdoors. We would worship each morning in Hubbell Chapel, a beautiful outdoor chapel that overlooked the lake from on high. I remember the first time I entered this sacred space and thought to myself, *Now this place is a lot different than the stained glass sanctuary I have worshiped in up to this moment.* My eyes were drawn skyward amidst those tall pine trees and I thought, *Surely God is in this sacred place!* Everything about worship seemed different now because of that space. The hymns were sung differently, the scriptures seemed to come alive, the prayers seemed more real to me for unexplained reasons. I would return to that chapel year after year and be reminded anew about my first glimpse of the Holy One's presence in worship.

—Kent J. Siladi, Conference Minister, Florida Conference of the United Church of Christ

Stories from *God in My Life—Faith Stories and How and Why We Share Them*, ed. Maren C. Tirabassi and Maria I. Tirabassi (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2008). Used by permission.



## Attachment: Activity 3

### Prayers for Life Transitions

#### **Prayer for Receiving a Driver's License**

This brief prayer may take place at the time of celebrating joys and concerns for prayer, or at the time of the dedication of offering. The person will come forward with (her or his) new license.

Leader: \_\_\_\_\_ has received one of society's symbols for maturity, a driver's license. As (she or he) comes forward for a time of blessing, let us celebrate with applause.

*(Taking the license and holding it)* Let us pray: God, we celebrate with \_\_\_\_\_ today (his or her) responsibility and new-found mobility. We pray for wisdom in difficult weather conditions, for the courage of convictions in the face of temptation to drive distracted or drive chemically impaired, for safety in skids, and for the excitement of going new places. This privilege is so easily taken away. Slow us all down, God. We acknowledge that, unlike this license, your unconditional love never needs to be renewed. Give a map to \_\_\_\_\_ for the journey into adulthood (*if this is a young person*). Offer patience for the unexpected flat tires of life, keys to your realm, and a fill-up of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

#### **Prayer for a Person Who Has Registered to Vote**

This prayer may take place individually or it may take place on a Sunday near a civic holiday such as the Fourth of July for all of those who have registered to vote during the year. It may also take place in Advent, or another season, preceded by the reading of Mary's Magnificat, Luke 1:46-55. These new voters will be of different ages. Some may be new Americans.

Leader: \_\_\_\_\_ has (*or "these people coming forward have"*) registered to vote in the elections of this city, state, and nation. They have (*he or she has*) accepted the responsibility to care for this country—its people, its land, its laws. Not everyone registers to vote and, of those who do, many do not exercise their right to vote at every opportunity, or vote with sufficient preparation. We give thanks for and invite \_\_\_\_\_ forward to pray for a blessing.

Let us pray: Gracious God, we give you thanks for the willingness of \_\_\_\_\_ to take responsibility for this country. We pray for discernment in the choice of elected officials and wisdom in deciding on ballot issues. Sometimes a single voter feels discouraged and small when faced with the overwhelming concerns of environment, health, economics, and justice. But voters are your Davids and their vote is your slingshot; these are your Esthers born for such a time as this. Guide and support them and recommit us all, so that your will is done—as we prayerfully understand it—on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.



### Attachment: Activity 3 (*continued*)

*(Shaking each person's hand with one of these statements)*

Thank you for changing the world.

Thank you for speaking up for justice.

Thank you for feeding the poor and clothing the naked.

Thank you for being a steward of the earth.

Thank you for refusing to hide from trouble.

Thank you for standing up for the least of these, God's children.

#### **Prayer for a Person Called to Jury Duty**

Leader: \_\_\_\_\_ has been chosen for jury duty and has accepted that responsibility, not making excuses, but caring for the welfare of all in spite of inconvenience or hardship.

*(Placing a hand on the person's shoulder or head or holding the person's hand)*

Let us pray: Holy God, we give you thanks for \_\_\_\_\_'s offering of time, discretion, and impartiality. Give \_\_\_\_\_ care in listening, wisdom in understanding, willingness to participate in community discernment, and the courage to speak out for justice. Many decisions are difficult. Give \_\_\_\_\_ the humility to ask questions, the patience to weigh testimony, and the perception to find the truth within the skilled words of arguments, in spite of incomplete evidence and through judicial instruction. May this be an opportunity of citizenship for which she or he is always proud. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, who was once a judge, once on trial for his life, and who always uncovered the deepest justice in every situation. Amen.

An earlier version of the "Prayer for a Driver's License" was collected in *Prayers and Patterns for Worship ("Youth Rites of Passage")*, within the *Worshipping into God's Future* initiative, Local Church Ministries, United Church of Christ, 2004.



## Attachment: Activity 4

## Youth Sunday Preparation

**Part 1** (*half hour*)

Go around the circle, letting each person briefly remember the best worship experience he or she has had (this might be Christmas Eve or camp). Why was it wonderful? Take notes on a laptop, newsprint, or whiteboard.

In “popcorn” fashion (not circling unless people are told that they can repeat) invite the youth to name what bothers them about worship. List boring or difficult aspects of worship on construction paper insect cut-outs (this “bugs” me). (This is less permanent than the computer).

Study the usual worship service. Distribute bulletins or an outline of paperless service of worship. Make sure everyone knows the purpose of each part of the service. For the service the group is planning, ask whether they would like to remove or add something.

Read and discuss Mark 8:27–31. Create a general biography of Jesus—who was he in the past? Born in Bethlehem, . . .

**Part 2** (*half hour*)

Divide the youth into four groups (at least pairs). Assign each group an aspect of the service and a few questions. Any one of these questions may spark some interest. They don’t need to answer everything. Anything not planned by them can just be quietly done as usual, so they do not become overwhelmed.

Group A will consider music. Will there be music before the service? If so, what will it be? What instruments will be included? What songs will the congregation, a small group, the regular choir, or a soloist sing?

Group B will focus on beginnings and endings. How and where will music begin? Will there be a procession? Will there be artistic elements—PowerPoint, balloons? Will the lights be on or off when the congregation arrives? Will there be a “passing of the peace”? Will there be a blessing, commissioning, or benediction at the end of the ser-

vice? How will people leave? Will people be given something to take away from the service?

Group C will focus on younger children. How will they be included? Was there a children’s sermon they loved when they were younger? Or one they thought would be great that never happened? Do they want younger friends and siblings to stay throughout worship (if this is not usually the practice)? What elements of the service will be included with young children in mind? Carefully read the language of any prayers, litanies, songs, and other parts of the service.

Group D will write prayers. An opening prayer can be a litany of thanksgiving and the confessional prayer a litany with “Forgive us, O God,” as the response. Let the group discuss prayer concerns. A good way to handle these is to follow each person’s sharing with, “Hear this prayer, O God.” Simple is best.

After twenty minutes bring the groups back to report on their pieces. It is most important to keep imaginations lively and not bog down in details.

**Part 3** (*half hour*)

A collaborative part of worship planning is shaping a proclamation. Pass out two index cards to each person. Ask each person to take five minutes and write “Who do you say Jesus is now?” on one and “What is your hope for the world?” on the other. Let three volunteers who like to do editing take the cards, and, choosing one from each person, organize these thoughts into a sermon. They will present a rough draft of the sermon when they have finished their editing task.

The rest of the group can discuss various issues: Who will assume verbal leadership of different parts of the service, including reading the sermon? Who will usher? Who will contact youth not present and give them a way to participate? How will we dress? Are we creating changes for church staff? How can we describe our service on the website, e-mail blast, or newsletter? Do we need a meeting to finalize and a rehearsal?



## God's Highways

### Introduction for the Spring

It is spring and the lightness of the air makes our feet restless—for a walk outdoors, the wheels of a bicycle, or taking off the snow tires. It is also the season when we remember Jesus' journey with his disciples to Jerusalem. I would like to invite everyone to share a brief story about a trip you've taken. It could be the longest trip or the most remarkable one, a trip with someone special, a flat tire, your first airplane, a honeymoon, a trip of deployment, a trip when maybe you learned something. Happy, sad, long, short—by just sharing what comes to you first, we should have some amazing trips among us.

### Introduction for the Summer

For some summer is a time for family road trips. For some summer is a time of resting at home. It is also the season when we remember the travels of the Hebrew people down to Egypt and the Exodus flight into exile and returning through a blooming wilderness. I would like to invite . . .

### Introduction for the Autumn

Autumn comes and days grow shorter. Kindergartners and college kids are traveling to new destinations, and the rest of us reflect on how going somewhere new teaches us something about ourselves. The apostle Paul took journeys throughout the ancient Middle East founding churches, and we reflect that all our churches are on journeys of their own. I would like to invite . . .

### Introduction for the Winter

Winter days come, and some of us dread to go out into blizzard and snow. Others rejoice that "snow birds" have come to visit us. In the midst of this season we remember the journeys of Mary and Joseph to Jerusalem and the magi who traveled far with only their star-quest directions to guide them. I would like to invite you . . .

### Psalm 25—A Contemporary Reflection

You, O God, are my global positioning system,  
you are the map in my hand.

Teach me your ways,  
lead me to ask directions from those  
who have gone before me.

Please forgive my wrong turnings and dead  
ends,  
and do not remember the times  
I have not let you be my designated driver,  
when I was distracted or tired.

You teach us through every journey we take,  
when we leave home and when we return  
and we trust you for guidance.

All the paths of God  
are steadfast love and faithfulness;  
and we go with God  
on each winding road we travel alone,  
and all the good highways  
of our covenant journey together.



Attachment: Activity 9

**Hints for Writing an Oral History**  
**Hearing, Treasuring, and Sharing the Stories of Others**

Choose your interviewee(s) and be clear about your project. Make an appointment to interview each person. A person may not remember the appointment, but you can tell them that it is pre-arranged.

Budget your time. Begin with general conversation or turn off your tape recorder and let the person talk an equal amount of time about something else. Time is valuable. For a lonely person your extra listening is both “payment” for the interview and an incredible gift.

Ask permission to record the interview.

*Test* your recording equipment beforehand.

Choose a *simple* question/issue/topic or a short time frame, such as church during wartime, or favorite hymns of childhood, or weddings and what they were like when you and your friends were married. This is great for fun details.

Do enough background research to divide your “question” into several questions. Don’t ask anything that can be answered with just one word. Keep them so that you can return to them, because the interview may go in wonderfully different ways.

Expect the unexpected. Don’t anticipate what you will hear. Don’t anticipate that you will hear “the same story” someone else hears.

Do immediate interviewer’s notes. You will discover that your memory is not everything it should be.

Use interview and photograph release forms. “I give my permission for \_\_\_\_\_ to use my story/ photograph in the \_\_\_\_\_ (*name of publication or format of presentation*).”

You may need to return or to expand your interview.

Create a product. Nothing is too simple! The person just needs to know that his or her story has been shared in some place such as at a worship service or in a scrapbook, or has been turned into a poem.



# Giving Testimony and Witness



## Exploration: Christian Tradition

### About this Setting

Christian tradition is a path, and the feet that have danced, rolled, marched, and followed the tap of a white cane upon it are beautiful and lead us faithfully. However, it is also true that the path has led to detours, dead ends, and the traps of “We’ve always done it, sung it, communed it, preached it, prayed it this way.” In the worship setting the practice of testimony is free to celebrate and critique the path.

The three Exploring and Engaging activities that follow are shaped for weekly congregational worship and can be adapted to contemporary, traditional, and blended services. The three Discerning and Deciding activities suggest worship planning that invites testimony. The three Sending and Serving activities take this faith practice to specific contexts in the community and worship contexts beyond the local church.

### About this Exploration

In addition to the witness of scripture, our faith story continues to be told through the holy and imperfect journey of the Christian church. From the day of Pentecost to the current day, people have testified to God’s work in our lives and in the world. In this Exploration, we will look at how the varied expressions of the Christian tradition over time and around the globe shape our testimony and witness today.



## BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

*Isaiah 52:7-10*  
*2 Peter 1:16-21*

## Leader Preparation

Each of us honors or dreads a personal subset of the Christian tradition. No one comes to worship without some expectations shaped by tradition. For some worshippers that tradition has a denominational slant, such as Episcopal, Southern Baptist, any of the Methodist groups, Latter Day Saint, Society of Friends, to name just a few. Others who are new to the faith community have perceptions of Christian tradition shaped by movies, television, news media, school history classes, and the stories told by friends. As you lead, remember this diversity, respect this, and refuse to let it restrict the Spirit.

*Prayer: God, we do have a thousand tongues to sing your praise. Help me to hear the dialects around me, always listening for the good tidings. Amen.*

## Exploring &amp; Engaging Activities



## ① Healing Service Claiming the Tradition (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** There are many forms of healing prayer. This one calls for a witness of coming forward and reaching out to touch symbols associated with Christian tradition. It is particularly unique in not asking people to identify whether the healing is for self or another or what kind of healing is desired, such as physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual, or relational. The lay reader and leader (if this is not the pastor) can be prepared in fifteen minutes. The directions need to be very clear, but they can be oral rather than written. The prayers can be in a single voice rather than a unison voice if desired. This can take place in the weekly time of regular worship or worship on another occasion.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- loaf of bread on a plate
- bowl of water
- red candle
- bowl of olive oil
- gathering scriptures printed on index cards and distributed
- "Liturgy for Healing," Attachment: Activity 1

Provide this service as part of another service or as a separate stand alone service of worship. Place five items on the communion table in a line in this order: Bible, loaf of bread, bowl of water, red candle, and bowl of oil. Follow the liturgy on the attachment.



## ② Sing It Like You Mean It

**Leader preparation:** People enjoy hymn sings, but they actually prefer the singing when it's not nonstop, when there are pauses to share meaning. Having people share with one another a piece of music and the reason that it is a particular favorite is nonthreatening interaction and an easy way to witness to faith.

Optional additions to this service make it more inclusive of those who may be self-conscious about singing or may have hearing loss. The week before the hymn sing invite people to bring a favorite contemporary Christian CD. Start the prelude 15 minutes early to play some of this music, and use more of this music as a postlude. Projecting photographs with one or two prechosen hymns, such as "Amazing Grace" gives visually oriented worshippers a welcome added experience.

**Supplies:**

- hymn books, praise song books, and any lyrics that may be projected
- simple rhythm instruments, including closed containers (pill bottles work well) filled with ice or dry beans and covered with foil. These work better if they look like only amateurs would use them.
- "Liturgy for a Service of Testimony and Singing," Attachment: Activity 2
- song: "Siyahamb' ekuhanyen' kwenkhos'" (tune: Siyahambra, irr. South African song) [www.tinyurl.com/fp-siyahamb](http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-siyahamb)

This worship service celebrates the testimony of the Christian tradition that is music and that uses music as a way to shape testimony. Some of the liturgy on



the attachment based on musical imagery may be used in the service, or a regular service can be interrupted three times by these opportunities for music and witness.

*Passing the Peace:* Invite the participants to turn to a neighbor and name a song that has meant a lot to them. This may be a hymn or a Christmas carol, but, in order to be open to seekers and younger members, examples should include popular songs.

*The Sermon/Message:* Invite the congregation to choose three hymns or praise songs to sing. After the singing, pause while the leader or a volunteer speaks extemporaneously about one of the songs. Choose three more and sing. Then pause for another reflection. Three or four clusters of hymns is an appropriate number. Sing just one or two verses of each song. The spontaneous testimonies should be no longer than five minutes. Sometimes the witness sparked by a song may involve historical background on the hymn; other times the speaker may reflect on the memory of an occasion of singing the hymn, the meaning of the lyrics in relation to the liturgical season, or a contrast or congruity in theme or theology between two songs. These are all forms of testimony.

*Offertory:* We offer witness because of music and about music, but music itself has always been a form of witness. Swedish-born U.S. labor organizer Joe Hill once said, “A pamphlet, no matter how good, is never read more than once, but a song is learned by heart and repeated over and over.” Examples include American spirituals, Civil Rights songs such as “We Shall Overcome,” war symphonies, working class songs such as “This Land Is Your Land,” the Estonian singing revolution, and most essentially the South African songs of resistance. “Siyamhamb’ ekuhanyen’ kwenknos,” originally written by Andries van Tonder in Afrikaans (1950), was translated into Zulu by Thabo Mkize (1978). In Zulu and English, “We Are Marching in the Light of God” is a perfect example of the music that changed South Africa.

A custom in sub-Saharan Africa is dancing the offering forward (often using small denominations of money so that one can dance around more often). Sing “Siyahamba” and invite anyone who wishes to march, walk, or dance their offering forward. Those more comfortable in their seats can play rhythm instruments and entrust their offerings to neighbors.



### ③ Finding Yourself by the Manger

**Leader preparation:** The best time to think about the amazing truth of the birth in Bethlehem of Jesus Christ the Son of God is anytime but Christmas when people are burdened by the cultural expectations of the season. Allow the painting to make room at the inn for a witness to faith.

In preparation for this service, invite people to loan their personal or family crèches. Try to find crèches that represent a variety of cultures, such as Hispanic, Asian, African, Indian.

#### **Supplies:**

- artwork: “The Adoration of the Kings” by Jan Brueghel, the Elder  
[www.tinyurl.com/fp-uccr](http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-uccr)
- crèches
- “Worship Guide,” Attachment: Activity 3



Invite silent reflection on “The Adoration of the Magi” by Jan Brueghel, the Elder, either at the very beginning of worship or during the sermon time. Project the work of art, or print it on bulletin covers. Invite people to discuss the picture by using the questions on the attachment. They may wish to speak with one another in “passing the peace” style or, in a small congregation, raise hands and call out their answers.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### ④ Planning a Testimony of Quiet (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** We live in a silence-starved world. Silence is rarely intentional, and accidental silence is quickly filled with sound or sound plus visual imagery. People become less and less comfortable not only with significant periods of silence, but even with “empty” brief pauses or margins between content-laden activities. This contributes to our frenetic pace of life. Occasionally, people seek silence while they are alone, letting the iPod drop out of the ear. The gift of being in silence while in community is very unfamiliar in our society. Worship with silence is often associated with meditation techniques of Asian religions or services in Society of Friends communities. But there is a long tradition throughout Western and Orthodox Christianity of vigil, of pauses in worship, and of listening intently for the “inner voice.”

This is a plan for a gathering of people—a random self-selected group or deacons or worship or spiritual life committee—to discuss offering more silence or quiet in weekly worship, or holding a service of quiet-based worship. This is an “easy preparation” activity because there is a complete sample of worship with quiet, if the group wishes to host such a service without additional planning meetings.

#### **Supplies:**

- “Order of Worship for a Quiet-based Service,” Attachment: Activity 4

Talking about silence is a path to silence. Providing a comfortable structure for settling into quiet relaxes the natural anxieties that such a countercultural experience creates.

Open the gathering with welcome and introductions.

*Invitation in scripture:* “Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him; do not fret over those who prosper in their way, over those who carry out evil devices” (Psalm 37:7) or “Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations; I am exalted in the earth” (Psalm 46:10).

*Leader:* Please take a few moments and in silence offer to God those people or situations that are on your hearts—the deep concerns and the petty distractions. Allow God to be in charge of these for the next hour.

*Silence* (one to two minutes)

*Leader:* Amen. The thoughts of our hearts in the presence of God become prayers. “For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall never be shaken.” (Psalm 62:1–2) “But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him!” (Habakkuk 2:20) “Be silent before the Lord God! For the day of the Lord is at hand;



the Lord has prepared a sacrifice, he has consecrated his guests.” (Zephaniah 1:7)

*Leader:* Please allow yourself to simply enjoy some silence. Think about whatever you want to think about, or nothing at all!

*Silence* (two to three minutes)

*Leader:* Because our spirits have been watered by silence, our voices can be lifted in conversation.

Suggest to the group that they have just experienced two common forms of worshipful silence: directed silence and open silence. Directed silence includes a pause at the beginning of worship when the worshiper is directed to let go the week’s distractions and prepare to meet God; a time in a pastoral prayer that worshipers are directed to fill with personal intercessions; reflective moments after the sermon when worshipers are directed to connect the message with personal experience; or a guided meditation. In each of these a liturgist assigns a task (or the task is understood) to the silence. In contrast, open silence is a generous invitation to the worshiper to fill the silence with emptiness or prayers, decision-making or dozing. It’s simply a gift that each unwraps alone, but in the midst of loving family.

Both directed and open silence are valuable; both directed and open silence nurture the spirit, both directed and open silence can be experienced as “textured” silence, that is, verbal quiet enhanced by soft musical background, artistic or natural imagery, dimming of lights or candlelight, the scents of flowers or incense (as long as no one has allergies).

Silence is a worship skill well worth learning, but it does need to be learned with gentle and very clear directions and usually with a verbal acknowledgment that it may feel uncomfortable for a while simply because it is so rare. In fact, the most profound testimony to our faith often comes from a time of silence.

Use these or similar discussion prompts.

- Remember and share a time when you have welcomed silence.
- Remember and share a time when you desperately needed silence and either received it or did not receive it.
- Remember and share a time or setting when silence made you nervous.
- Remember and share—with yourself and perhaps with us—a time when you received guidance in a personal decision when you were silent or quiet. Was this an inner urging, a voice, another form of clarity?
- Respond to this statement: “Our society is starved for silence.”
- Do you prefer directed or open silence in a worship service?
- Are there places in your worship service where you would like to experiment with some more silence?
- Would you like to consider a service in the weekly congregational context or an alternative service that offers experience with significant amounts of silence?

The group can continue with planning or be thanked for the discussion of silence in worship. Follow with this closing:

*Leader:* “Jesus woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.” (Mark 4:39)

*Silence* (one minute)



*Leader:* God, let these still moments remain a reservoir to draw upon whenever the noise of the week threatens to overwhelm us.

## 5 Valuing Worship

**Leader preparation:** Whenever doing anything that can be construed as evaluation of worship, start with what is wonderful, right, positive—never with a list of problems—even if you are short on time! Always remember the feelings of those who plan and prepare worship as a gift for others: clergy, choir, praise team, and deacons/elders/lay readers. However, it is important never to give false praise that will allow people to think that something that may be past its time is still as effective as it once was. It is important to think from four perspectives: familiar worshiper, first-time worshiper, worshiper who comes from a buoyant and happy week, worshiper who comes from a difficult week.

### Supplies:

- newsprint, whiteboard, or laptop for note taking

A time of valuing worship is far more important than “evaluating” worship. It is, more than anything else, a time for people to witness to the times that worship has touched their lives. This is an activity for a small group in hopes that they may take the process to a larger group—the congregation—or a number of other smaller groups. Its purpose is not to plan a new worship service or change parts of the most common worship service (for a trial period such as Lent or the summer months), although that might be one outcome. The goal is for people to become aware of how important this most basic unit of our Christian tradition—the weekly community worship—is in their own lives and the lives of others.

Welcome the group, divide them in pairs (perhaps counting off by “two’s”), and invite them to talk with their partner about a time when they were deeply moved in a service of worship. This can be at any age or any setting. They are telling a story about a worship moment. Remind them that worship is a community event.

After five minutes invite them to turn to the other side and describe a time in the last six months when they have been most inspired in worship, either an entire service or a part of worship. “Most inspired” is intentionally not as intense a concept as “deeply moved” and it is a relative term. They are telling a story about a worship moment in the recent past; don’t be rigid about six months. Invite those who are willing to share these stories.

Rather than launching into what worship “should do,” point to a worship bulletin or, if the service has no paper bulletin, list the sections of worship as experienced. For each part ask: *What is this, and what is it intended to do in the community that gathers?* Before having someone with liturgical expertise inform the group, allow them to describe what happens in each small part of worship.

For example: A prelude is a quiet kind of music, usually instrumental, and chosen by the musician to help people separate from the busy week and reflect. A praise band gathering fills the congregation with the oxygen of continued singing and the rhythmic presence of percussion. People will be awakened rather than reflective. Obviously, neither of these beginnings of worship is right or wrong, and both of these experiences will probably occur through some aspect of the worship service. This is a good time to remind the group that people come to worship from very different weeks—some full of sadness and some full of joy. All need a place and time (sanctuary and Sabbath) to share their feelings.



Write down these functional definitions, discovering what has been tacitly understood and those things that, in fact, may not have been understood. A gentle joke about “We’ve always done it this way” reminds people that there is nothing sacrosanct but God, but that a level of familiarity gives comfort. Invite participants to share stories—perhaps about parts of worship or even funny ones—about worship misunderstandings.

Invite people to name their very favorite part of worship. After each pray in unison, “God, we give you thanks.”

Closing prayer:

*God, we need peace—so we come to worship for quiet.*

*We need joy—so we come to worship for singing.*

*We need to let things go—so we come to worship for forgiveness.*

*We need hope—so we come to worship for scripture and community.*

*We celebrate and value the ways worship has changed our lives in the past.*

*We give thanks for those who shape worship,*

*and celebrate and value this precious, flexible, complicated experience.*

*We always come to worship with our own agendas—*

*help us to leave with the blessings we long for*

*and your unexpected gifts. Amen.*

Post Script: If the group wishes to share a bit of evaluation after much witness to the importance of worship, the following questions can be helpful:

- Is there any contemporary human need that is not fully met by this worship service?
- Is any part of worship not fulfilling its original intention?
- If not, should it be moved in the service?
- Should it be re-explained (orally or in writing . . . always or on occasion)?
- Should it be shorter or longer?
- Should it only happen occasionally?
- Should it be replaced for a trial period with something else?



### 6 Bless You—More Than a Sneeze Reflex!

**Leader preparation:** Blessing is a deeply significant part of Christian tradition and one that uses both spoken and tangible testimony. Baptism and communion involve blessings—the water is blessed before baptism, and the bread and cup are blessed before communion. Blessings are also included in weddings and funerals. Other kinds of blessing ceremonies are familiar, such as blessing the fleet in seaport towns, blessing the animals, house blessings, blessings of new church buildings or additions, blessing of church school teachers or mission trip participants. Every service has at least two specific blessings—the prayer of dedication over the offering and the benediction, a blessing offered to everyone.

In worship, a blessing can be a brief moment of prayer or a full service. It can happen for many or all at one time, such as renewal of baptism; a group at a time, such as people who are moving away from town; or single individuals, such as the blessing of a new driver’s license.

If there are any participants who are concerned that this involves “magical” thinking, remind them that a blessing is a prayer.



### Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pens or pencils
- newsprint or whiteboard for notes
- “Suggestions for Blessing Services,” Attachment: Activity 6

Discuss what blessings are. Use the material in the leader’s preparation to remind people of their experiences with blessings in church, as well as in secular occasions such as commencement ceremonies. Together look at some biblical benedictions, such as Numbers 6:24–26, Psalm 121:7–8, Philippians 4:7; Jude 1:24–25, and 2 Corinthians 13:14.

Some guidelines for blessings:

- Blessings are verbal and sacramental. They involve language (which usually begins either “May . . .” or “Bless this . . .” tangible object), and usually movement or a laying on of hands.
- Blessings name aloud an obvious purpose and claim it as sacred.
- We are surrounded by many beautiful traditions (for example Jewish, Roman Catholic, or Native American). We do not borrow from them directly, but learn from them and create our own rituals.
- Blessings may involve going somewhere (a home) or bringing an object to church (a spoon from every house to bless in advance of Thanksgiving dinner). Blessing may involve presenting something to be blessed (the spoon) or receiving something that has been blessed (extra spoons for guests or a decorated plastic spoon for everyone).
- Everyone needs a blessing. Make inclusion a central tenet.
- Blessings are usually short and often a lot of fun.
- A blessing is a single event. The dangers in repetition include creating a false sacrament or becoming dull.
- Remember the Beatitudes and that David was a scrawny little guy. Sometimes the blessings in the Bible reverse our expectations.

Invite the group to brainstorm ideas for a blessing event. You might use the attachment “Suggestions for Blessing Services” to prime the pump. Describe the occasion, the emphasis, the purpose. After the group agrees on an event, set a date for the event. Then create a publicity plan. Decide who will write the blessing words. Will this group develop the rest of the service, or will that be the responsibility of the pastor, the worship committee, or others?

In the planning, anticipate an intentional welcome for those who are visiting, those who did not hear about or forgot this event, people of different ages, and people with vision, hearing, and mobility concerns.

An important part of planning is evaluating. Encourage the group to set a date for reflection after the event.

Close the planning meeting with this or a similar benediction: *May you be blessed in the morning and the evening. May you be blessed in work and play and rest. May you be blessed in happiness and hardship. May you be blessed to share the blessings you have received and to witness the blessing you give others, reflecting like sunshine in their lives. Amen.*

Optional: Invite the group members to think of someone close to them or someone whose story they have learned from the news and write a “blessing” for that person based in the Celtic rhythm, “May the road rise to greet you, may the wind be ever at your back, and may you be in heaven half an hour before the devil knows you’re dead.” Assure them that it is acceptable to be slightly funny and





acceptable to be tender, but the blessing is a prayer. For example: *May you laugh in the face of adversity, may your tears wash away any grief, and when times are hard may you rely on your inner strength that comes from God.* Group members may want to work with a partner or alone. Invite those who are willing to share their writing.

## Sending & Serving Activities

### 7 Worship before a “Walk” (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** We walk our witness as well as we talk our witness. This is a simple congregational or ecumenical group worship service before participation in a charity walk, such as a CROP walk. It can also be adapted to a walking a labyrinth as a spiritual discipline. Some groups may like a half-sheet worship bulletin with prayers and scriptures on one side (highlighted for the readers) and the song printed on the other side. Other groups will prefer to be paperless, with the scriptures on index cards handed out randomly, with introductions in this fashion, “Will the person with Genesis 3 please read . . . Will the person with Exodus 14 please read . . .” An adaptation for an interfaith Christian/Jewish/Muslim group would use only the scriptures through Isaiah 9:2 and would change “Christ” to “God” in the opening prayer.

#### Supplies:

- half-sheet bulletin printed from this activity, if desired, or scriptures on index cards
- two star stickers for each person

#### Worship Service before a “Walk”

*Welcome to walkers:* Identify the different churches or groups that are participating, celebrate the range of ages of the participants, thank the planning committee, and give a brief outline of rest stops along the route and safety precautions.

*Prayer:* The prophet Isaiah said, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’” (Isaiah 52:7)

*All:* Christ, walk before us as a guide;  
 Christ walk behind us as protection;  
 Christ walk beside us as companion.  
 Even when we cannot see the journey’s destination,  
 we are certain you know the way. Amen.

#### *Song*

Suggestions:

- “Siyahamb’ ekukhanyen’ kwenkhos” (tune: Siyahamba, irr. South African song) [www.tinyurl.com/fp-siyahamb](http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-siyahamb)
- “I Want Jesus to Walk with Me” (tune: African American spiritual), lyrics at <http://tinyurl.com/3gnzp3m>
- “They’ll Know We Are Christians by Our Love”; see a video clip at <http://tinyurl.com/ykbh45p>
- “Just a Closer Walk”; lyrics and tune at <http://tinyurl.com/43gbu68>



*Scripture readings:* As we prepare to go forth this morning/afternoon, I invite you to listen to a series of “walking” scriptures. One of them may be your watchword for this day.

- Genesis 3:8: They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.
- Exodus 14:29: But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.
- 2 Chronicles 6:14: He said, “O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven or on earth, keeping covenant in steadfast love with your servants who walk before you with all their heart.”
- Psalm 23:4: Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
- Psalm 26:11: But as for me, I walk in my integrity; redeem me, and be gracious to me.
- Psalm 116:9: I walk before the Lord in the land of the living.
- Isaiah 9:2: The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.
- Mark 6:48a: When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came towards them early in the morning, walking on the lake.
- John 5:8–9: Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a Sabbath.
- Acts 14:10: [Paul] said in a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And the man sprang up and began to walk.
- Romans 6:4: Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

*Passing out stars:* We have all heard of the “footprints of the stars” in Hollywood. You will be going forth with God’s star on your footprints. Please stick one of your stars on your clothes, face, backpack. wherever you want it, but visible to others. Take the other one and stick it to the sole of your shoe, where it will stay put and only you will know that it is there.

*Prayer:* God we thank you for bringing us together and for our commitment to (name the cause for which people are walking). We ask you to bless this walk so that every step of the way we may feel your guidance, your companionship, and sometimes your push from behind when we are exhausted. Bless us this day of energy and activity and all the days of our life. Amen.



### 8 Carols and Cookies—All Year Long

**Leader preparation:** Carols (the term originates from round dances with singing) have long been associated with the Advent and/or Christmas season. The practice of caroling, sharing a song witness to our faith, is often restricted to those two seasons. It is an activity that welcomes the full spectrum of vocal training and quality! It is often an activity taken to nursing homes, rehabilitation centers, assisted living facilities, or the homes of congregational shut-ins or people on a local hospice list. In fact, these places are often inundated with requests for caroling in December from many different groups. They would welcome even one intergenerational, enthusiastic, spiritually talented chorus at any other time of the year.



There is no musical rehearsal needed, but announce the event for at least four weeks. Food donations and host settings will also take lead time.

**Supplies:**

- “Carols,” Attachment: Activity 8
- song book, camp book, or preselected songs of the season including songs with simple join-in refrains
- food to share

Caroling and cookies are a faith witness that say, “God loves you, and so do we.”

Contact one of the places suggested in the leader preparation, or another place in your community such as an adult day care or senior center that would welcome carolers for “Midwinter Carols,” “Spring Carols,” Summer Carols,” “Carols of our Ordinary Time,” or “Autumn Carols.” Ask for food contributions to be delivered along with the carols, including traditional Christmas cookies, but mixed with other shapes such as hearts for Valentine’s Day, tulips, bunnies, butterflies, pumpkins, and so forth. Always include some form of diabetic candy or treat. People who are not able to come caroling can donate the food (the “tasty testimony”). Attach a card or make a bookmark or other remembrance with the name of the church and the first names of those who have visited. (A group photograph of the carolers and their hosts can be sent later to the facility or home.)

Create large-print song sheets with a copyright licensing program for the songs that are “sung along,” or have a simple refrain for the sing-along portion.

An example of group contribution is the song “Pass It On.” The first line is “It only takes a spark to get a fire going.” Replace “spark with “smile” or “laugh” or “hug” and soon the host or host group will be making suggestions. Singing a single verse over again with a variety of substitutions is easier than multiple verses.

It is fun to come up with the simple seasonal carols. See the attachment for suggestions for a seasonal welcome and five starter songs. Always begin with “Joy to the World,” which was not written for the Christmas season, but as a setting for Psalm 98. That is a good introduction to multiseason caroling, as is the reminder that “incarnation” means God is Emmanuel, “God with us” all year long.

*Opening Worship Words* (at the church before going caroling): Read Isaiah 52:7–9.

*Introduction:* We will be caroling today, singing the good news that is Jesus’ birth and healing and words and life giving death and resurrection. It seems like a strange time of year—Christmas in April or August or October, but we will have a good time. We will sing some songs, ask our hosts what songs they might like to hear, and even get them singing. As we visit and pass out cookies, remember to share your first name. Some people will respond, and others may not. Don’t worry about what to say. The carols and cookies are a testimony to God’s grace, and, if someone says to you “Merry Christmas,” respond, “Merry Christmas to you all the year long!”

*Prayer:* Gracious God, always Emmanuel, bless our walking feet to be beautiful. Bless our singing voices to be full of good news, comfort and joy. Bless the music in our hearts to bring a message of peace into the lives of everyone we meet today. Amen.



## *Caroling and Cookies*

*Closing at the Church:* As people are relaxing after the caroling event, the following questions may engage people in reflection.

- What was most a blessing/most fun about your experience today?
- How do you experience singing and sharing food as a witness to your faith?
- How did it feel to be “caroling” when it isn’t Christmastime?
- Where does joy in the world come from (not just one, but many answers)?

*Join hands for the Benediction:* Bless us, O God, to recognize the good news we have received. Shine the star of every holy night upon those we met today, and give our feet and vocal chords a good rest, so we always can sing and dance your love. Amen.



## 9 Worship for a Church Annual Meeting

**Leader preparation:** Church annual meetings are often a less than favorite activity of the church year. In some cases they involve a boring recitation of facts and some verbal presentations that duplicate a written set of reports. In other cases there is conflict, and people in the family of God behave in ways toward one another less godly and more based on dysfunctional family models. Setting this event in worship calms the spirit, opens the heart, and invites God to this gathering.

Several weeks before the meeting issue an invitation for photographs of church activities or activities of people in the church, pictures of those who have died or been born (not just baptized) or married (not just in this church). No person or family can bring more than one photo so that the person who puts them together does not need to make choices, but only arrangements. Make the arrangement seasonal, thematic, or artistic.

### **Supplies:**

- ten small bags, each containing one of these objects: an onion, a spoon, an alarm clock, a star fish or shell, a flashlight, a bag of chocolate kisses, a ring of keys, a cell phone, a beautiful polished stone, a small package of tissues.
- PowerPoint presentation made from the photographs, with music track, if possible
- “Worship Resources for a Church Annual Meeting,” Attachment: Activity 9

This 15-minute worship at the beginning of a church annual meeting lifts up many of the traditional images of the church found in scripture. The testimony of the church in parable by random members of the congregation sharpens our focus on the contemporary meaning of church in people’s lives.

Welcome those who have gathered, and invite them to watch the photographs through PowerPoint, if available. Invite two volunteers to read scripture: Psalm 84:1–9 and Philippians 1:1–11.

Use the “Litany with Images from Scripture and Christian Tradition” found on the attachment.

Invite the people with paper bags to open them and create—on the spot—an extemporaneous parable. (Those who have a bag and would prefer not to do this



may pass it to someone near them who is willing.) Ask for volunteers to shape the parable in this format: “I celebrate our church. Our church is like a (item from the bag) because . . .” This should go quickly. If only seven or eight people share, do not push the others even though people around them will probably make suggestions.

Close with the “Prayer for an Annual Meeting” found on the attachment.

### Following the Church Year

The deepest and most central aspect of Christian tradition is the sacrament of Holy Communion. An ongoing practice of testimony and giving witness throughout the church year focused by the lens of tradition encourages us to bring our own stories to the table. Although many of the ways we develop this practice include inviting people to recognize and share their stories from the immediate inspiration of the heart, this is an appropriate time to invite one lay person each season to create an invitation to the table based on a witness from his or her own life, a spiritual autobiography. This could take place on the first communion service of each church season. For each of the seasonal times the suggested text is only a helpful prompt. Encourage each participant to tell the mealtime story that she or he can relate personally to communion. Do not let the scriptures become a distraction. The person who will share may want advice, support, or editing, or may immediately know what he or she wishes to tell.

Invitation to a person to give a spiritual autobiography: *As an invitation to communion, please tell a story about a meal time from your life—an ordinary meal or a holiday meal, a meal with family or strangers in a dining hall, a meal you served or ate at a homeless shelter, or a lonely meal in a restaurant—any story of a meal that somehow lifts up for you some of what we share together at Christ’s table.*

#### **Advent**

Luke 1:46–56, often known as the Magnificat, Mary sings that God’s reversal of the world’s priorities will result in the hungry being well-fed and the rich going on a diet.

#### **Christmas/Epiphany**

(The Communion Sunday is usually in one of these two seasons so they can be combined.)

Luke 2:8–14, the shepherds’ quiet evening is interrupted; or John 2: 1–11; Jesus’ first sign to make a good party even happier.

#### **Lent**

Luke 15:11–32, a story of a parent, two children and a party; or Matthew 26:17–30, Jesus’ last Passover with his disciples.

#### **Eastertide**

Luke 24: 13–35, in a hospitable home in Emmaus, the risen Christ is recognized in breaking the bread.

#### **Pentecost**

Luke 14:15–24, a parable of a great banquet where the expected guests don’t turn up but strangers are surprised by amazing hospitality.



### Ordinary Time

Mark 6:30–44, Jesus feeds a crowd and the leftovers are collected and feed even more; or Acts 27:27–38, in the middle of a shipwreck Paul suggests that people have a meal together to give them strength.



Attachment: Activity 1

Liturgy for Healing

**Leader:** Welcome to this time of healing.

**Lay reader:** 2 Peter 1:16–21

**Leader:** Men and women moved by the Holy Spirit assure us that healing is available to us all—a deep and true healing, deeper and truer than cure, but encompassing the sweet blessing of cure, the long working of medicine, the remarkable gifts of research, and the ineffable power of grace. We claim our healing tradition. Hear the words of scripture.

**Individuals throughout the congregation** (*in order*): Jeremiah 17:14, Malachi 4:2, Matthew 4:23, Luke 13:12–13, 1 Corinthians 12:9, 1 Peter 2:24, Revelation 22:2b.

**Lay reader:** Mark 5:25–34

**All:** Gracious God, we hear the witness of the scripture. And we claim it as our own. This is our lamp until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts. We claim for ourselves and all of your children this holy healing, for we, too have come to dwell in this tradition and seal our hopes with the covenant prayer Christ gave the disciples.

*Prayer of Our Savior.*

*(The leader will model what those who come forward will do, reminding people that this is exactly what the woman did when she reached out for Jesus' garment and took her healing into her own hands.)*

**Leader:** (*touching each item in turn*)

I reach out and touch God's gracious love.

I touch the Bible and my hand feels the healing.

I touch the bread, symbol of the body of Christ, and my hand feels the healing.

I touch the water, sign of my baptism, and my hand feels the healing.

I touch the red fire of Pentecost, sign of the Spirit, and my hand feels the healing.

*(touch the red candle, not the flame)*

I touch the oil, sign of anointing through all the ages,

I touch myself (*make a cross on the back of the other hand or the forehead*), rejoicing in God's healing love.

**Congregation:** Your faith has made you well. Go in peace.

*Invite those desire healing to form a line. Each comes forward and passes by, reaching out, silently but deliberately, to touch these five symbols of God's love and power, and crossing her or himself with oil.*

**Leader** (*to each person*): Your faith has made you well. Go in peace."

**Closing Prayer** (*All*):

Gracious Savior, we give you thanks that you fill all who touch you with healing and hope. With joy we receive the peace that you give us. We pledge to offer our healing hands to all we meet in our crowded journeys, even as you have accepted and blessed our reaching out to you. Amen.

**Benediction** (*Leader*):

May the Creator who loves us into being—  
body, soul, heart, and mind—  
and the Christ who loves us into grace—  
forgiveness and compassion, courage and cross—  
and the Spirit who loves us into blessings—  
prayer and healing, hope and new words—  
tenderly keep us all our days. Amen.



## Attachment: Activity 2

### Liturgy for a Service of Testimony and Singing

#### Call to Worship

**Leader:** Let us sing to God a new song.

**People:** Let us praise God with Bach and salsa and hip hop.

**Leader:** Let us sing to God a new song.

**People:** Let us praise God with rockabilly and Rachmaninov.

**Leader:** Let us sing to God a new song.

**People:** Let us praise God with perfect pitch, try-hard treble, and better-than-barking baritone.

**Leader:** Let us sing to God a new song.

**People:** Let us praise God with the song of our listening.

#### Call to Worship

Let us come because Christ dances  
wherever we may be;  
let us come because the organ  
reverberates in our bones;  
let us come because we are touched  
by cantata or Christian rock, spiritual or Sign.

Let us come ringing the bells  
of the old, old story.

Let us come singing the words  
of the new, new song.

#### Opening Prayer

Gracious God, bless the pure melody of our intention, and even our off-key and missed notes in life. We come this morning to practice our faith, rehearse your gracious deeds, learn again the music of our hearts and become the ensemble we call worship. Amen.

#### Prayer of Confession

○ God, forgive us. We forget to warm up our bodies, minds, hearts, and spirits.

○ God, forgive us. We “diva” through life and do not hear the parts of others.

○ God, forgive us. We ignore the accompa-

niment of friends and family,  
the symphony of the whole human community,  
the harmony of nature,  
the new music or ideas that rock our lives.

○ God, forgive us. We forget to sing how much we love you. Amen.

#### Words of Assurance

God is the tuning fork struck in our lives, the metronome that keeps us steady.

We are reconciled, forgiven, able to live again.

#### Scripture

Exodus 15 mentions Miriam’s song; David is often named a singer and songwriter. Psalms contain many invitations to music. Jesus and the disciples sang at the Last Supper; Paul and Silas sang in jail. Letters that mention singing include 1 Corinthians (14:26), Ephesians (5:18), Colossians (3:16), and James (5:13).

These words from Isaiah 52:8–9 call us all to sing!

Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices,  
together they sing for joy;  
for in plain sight they see  
the return of the Lord to Zion.

Break forth together into singing,  
you ruins of Jerusalem;  
for the Lord has comforted his people,  
he has redeemed Jerusalem.

#### Benediction

May our hearts sing and our spirits dance.  
May this community of faith have verses of energy,  
codas of inspiration, and many rests.

And for each of you—

May God play the full scales of you  
every day of your life.

Amen.





Attachment: Activity 3

## Worship Guide

**Leader:** The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem was portrayed by the gospel writers Matthew and Luke in unique ways, and artists and musicians and storytellers have portrayed the story each in her or his own way, each from a vision of the imagination, a vision of the heart, ever since this time. This is not just a reflection for the Advent season or Christmastide, but all year long we consider what the incarnation of God—Emmanuel—God really present in our lives can mean. In fact, it may be easier to think about the true miracle of Bethlehem when we are not busy with Christmas.

In the crèches we set up in sanctuary or the church lawn and in our own homes in cloth or wood, plaster or plastic, glass or stone, there are traditional figures— sometimes even shepherds and magi together as Matthew and Luke’s stories mingle. But Bruegel’s painting shows far more people than quite honestly would even be possible! In this is another truth. Take a few moments pondering the art. What people do you see? (*Pause for response.*)

Why do you think he added all these characters? Why did Bruegel paint characters dressed in the clothing of his own day, not in the garments of the time of Mary and Joseph? (*Pause for response.*)

Surrounding the Holy Family is us, the us of Jan Brueghel’s day—an artistic device and a theological truth. Find yourself around the crèche. Where would you be in this picture, close to the baby or in the distance? Concentrating on the birth, or busy with other things? (*Pause for response.*)

What do you take away from this picture this morning for the growing of your faith? (*Pause for response.*)

Close by singing a Christmas carol.



## Attachment: Activity 4

### Order of Worship for a Quiet-based Service

Provide insights about silence in newsletters and previous weeks' bulletins. To give "texture" to the "sermonic" quiet, invite worshipers to bring plants, wind chimes, and photographs of beautiful natural spaces.

**Welcome** (*Include an explanation of the service and some background.*)

#### Call to Worship

Be still before God, and wait patiently; do not fret over those who prosper in their way, over those who carry out evil devices. (Psalm 37:7)

Amen.

Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth. (Psalm 46:10)

Amen.

For God alone my soul waits in silence; from God comes my salvation. God alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall never be shaken. (Psalm 62:1–2)

Amen.

But God is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him! (Habakkuk 2:20)

Amen.

Be silent before the Lord God! For the day of the Lord is at hand; God has prepared a sacrifice and has consecrated his guests. (Zephaniah 1:7)

Amen.

He (Jesus) woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. (Mark 4:39)

Amen.

#### Opening Prayer

God, we come from the loud distractions and whining frustrations of our week. We can hardly hear ourselves think, much less pray. We seek your peace and serenity to make us whole, so we place ourselves in the blessed stillness of your love. Amen.

#### Opening Hymn

"Be Still My Soul" (tune: Finlandia) <http://tinyurl.com/3dcwy5c>

**Silence** (*about 3 minutes*)

#### Prayer of Confession

God, we contribute to the clamor. We keep the television on when it doesn't interest us. We use cell phones during every break from busyness. We talk too much, say too little, and listen to only a fraction of what others say. Even our prayers are one-way conversations, and we seem afraid of the self-knowledge that silence brings. Forgive our noisiness and calm us deeply. Amen.

**Silence** (*about 30 seconds*)



## Attachment: Activity 4 (continued)

### **Assurance of Grace**

Listen to your heart beat—so sure, so deep, so steady—just like God’s forgiveness. Receive it. Thanks be to God. Amen.

**Passing the Peace** (*in silence or as a release valve for the more extroverted*)

**First reading:** 1 Kings 19:11–12 or lectionary reading

**Silence** (*1 minute*)

### **Choir Anthem or Hymn**

“Tú has venido a la orilla” (tune: Pescador de Hombres, 8.10.10 with refrain)

[www.tinyurl.com/fp-orilla](http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-orilla)

**Gospel lesson:** Mark 4:35–41 or lectionary selection

**Silence** (*10 minutes, use power point images but do not change quickly*)

**Offering:** (*opportunity to offer thoughts; continue offering of financial gifts*)

### **Prayer of Dedication**

**Prayers of the People:** Use oral and written directions. Provide silence in which people can come forward to light a candle that symbolizes a particular prayer concern. For those who wish to remain in pews, have an usher/deacon circulate with candles for people to wrap their fingers around before the candle is brought forward.

### **Prayer of our Savior**

### **Closing Hymn**

“Jesus Calls Us, O’er the Tumult” (tune: Galilee)

**Silence** (*1 minute*)

### **Benediction**

May the blessed quietness of natural beauty ease your spirit.

May the blessed quietness of scripture warm your heart.

May you always hear through the listening mind

the still small voice of God,

and the peace of Jesus Christ.

Amen

### **Postlude**



## Attachment: Activity 6

### Suggestions for Blessing Services

**Tools for Labor Day:** Each person brings in a symbol of vocation, paid, volunteer, or hobby—hammer, computer mouse, Pampers, Depends.

**Advent or Lent:** Clocks, watches, maybe cell phones. Pray for the different ways we use our time, what we want in our time.

**Financial resources** (never on a Sunday when Stewardship for the church is the subject): Each person has a symbol for something financial, such as a credit or debit card, check book, wallet, dollar.

**“Blessing Nana’s Glasses”:** Each person brings in a small object, clothing or other, for someone else who needs a blessing, such as a layette of a baby yet to be born, a book bag of a student going off to college, a prayer shawl for a person who is ill, a box for someone who is moving, a candle for an anniversary. Ribbons can be blessed for additional people.

**Our homes** (in church): People bring in keys or one object from a room, naming why that room is important. Give everyone a key ring that has been blessed.

**Athletic equipment:** Sometimes the choice between sports and church tears apart young people. Use a beginning of the year occasion to bless a symbol of their sport—and for adults, golf balls, crossword puzzles, electronic games. Blessing involves fair play, care taken against injury, learning to win and lose.

**Easter dinner:** In the Byzantine Christian tradition, the entire Easter dinner is brought in a basket to church to be blessed. How could this be adapted?

**Sleep and dreams:** Insomnia is pervasive in our culture. Read stories about sleep and dreams in the Bible followed by blessing of ribbons. Everyone takes home a ribbon to lay on a pillow. This is an adaptation of Native American dream-catchers

**Calendar for the Sunday nearest New Year’s Day:** People may in their personal calendars, printed or electronic. The church may even provide calendars for everyone. Charge each of twelve committees or groups with writing a prayer for a month to attach to the calendars.

**Shoes and the places we go:** Most everyone wears a shoe. Perhaps a heart can be drawn on a “sole.” Invite people to bring “gently worn” shoes to donate to people who need shoes. Check out the program Soles4Souls at <http://tinyurl.com/c9bt6f>. Bless the shoes that will be given away.

**Hands:** “May your hand be open and not fisted.” Invite each person to come forward to have his or her hand held between another person’s for the prayer. The blessed person then turns to hold the next person’s hand. A winter variation would be to bless gloves or mittens, especially gloves and mittens to be given away.



## Attachment: Activity 8

## Carols

Always begin with "Joy to the World!" Isaac Watts wrote that song not as a Christmas carol, but as a celebration of God's presence with us and a Christian resetting of Psalm 98.

**Midwinter Carols**

We have come caroling and it is midwinter! We hope our songs will warm your chilliness, give some Super-soul to your Super Bowl, and remind you that the source of love isn't chocolate and pink paper hearts (hold one up), but God's love!

Joy to the World  
 Seek Ye First  
 Draw the Circle Wide  
 Ube Caritas et Amor/Where True Charity and  
 Love Abide  
 On Eagles' Wings

**Spring Carols**

We have come caroling and it is spring—Lent, which is an old English word for the daylight's lengthening as well as our annual remembrance of Jesus journey to Jerusalem, and, yes, the joy of Easter! Caroling and Easter (hold up an Eater egg)? Well, it's an eggs-cellent idea!

Pass It On (add on lyrics "takes a spark, smile,  
 laugh, hug")  
 Over My Head—I Hear Music in the Sky,  
 In the Garden (as Mary Magdalene's song  
 after she has met Jesus)  
 Halle, Halle, Hallelujah

**Summer Carols**

We have come caroling and it is summer. We celebrate Pentecost—the birthday of the church (hold up a birthday candle), the many ways we can be full of Spirit, and the beauty of God's earth. Not every day is a walk at the beach, but every day is "just a closer walk." God never "promised us a rose garden," but we've got a song about the trees clapping their hands!

Just a Closer Walk (add on lyrics "closer roll,  
 rock, laugh, day")  
 The Trees of the Fields  
 As the Deer  
 Tú has venido a la orilla/You Have Come  
 Down to The Lakeshore

**Carols for Ordinary Time**

We have come caroling and it is not Christmas. In fact, it's what the church calls "Ordinary Time," the time in between the major festivals. And ordinary things are just what Jesus blessed: a boy's lunch he was willing to share with a crowd, a mother's love for her child, faith the size of a mustard seed. In fact, didn't Jesus say somewhere that we are not supposed to worry about what we eat—the sparrows are fed without a barn—or worry about what we wear—the flowers are beautiful without going to the mall . . . and I think he might have said "Do not worry about your voices, because if God can make woodpeckers and whales sing, even you should give it a try."

For the Beauty of the Earth  
 This Is the Day  
 Thy Word Is a Lamp unto My Feet  
 Enter, Rejoice, and Come In

**Autumn Carols**

We have come caroling and it is autumn. The gold of leaves and the orange of pumpkins in northern climates and the green of rain in southern climes gives us a sense of joy. This is the season of All Saints Day—when we give thanks for those who are "saints" to us. It's the season of World Communion Sunday, when we remember that people in so many languages are praising God. It is the season of school bells, football cheers, soccer smiles that remind us that we are always God's children!

This Little Light of Mine (add on lyrics "little  
 love, hope")  
 We are Marching in the Light of God/Siyahamb' ekukhanyen' kwenkhos', (add on lyrics "we are rolling, dancing, hugging, smiling")  
 Let's sing unto the Lord (Cantemos al Señor)  
 I Woke Up this Morning (add on lyrics "woke up this morning with my heart, friends, feet")



## Attachment: Activity 9

### Worship Resources for a Church Annual Meeting

#### **Litany with Images from Scripture and Christian Tradition**

*(reflecting Psalm 84:1–9, Philippians 1:1–11)*

Grace to the church!

I thank God when I remember . . .  
that we are the home of sparrows, the nest of  
swallows,  
the shelter of singing, the dwelling of those who  
weep.

I thank God when I remember . . .  
that we are the beautiful and bizarre body of  
Christ—  
overweight and anorexic, radiated and radiant,  
sometimes all elbows and sometimes all heart.

I thank God when I remember . . .  
that we share the squabbles of Corinth, the con-  
fusion of Galatia,  
the courage of Jerusalem, the generosity of  
Philippi.

I thank God when I remember . . .  
that we have met in tents and temples,  
in cathedrals and campuses, at chapels and  
campgrounds.

I thank God when I remember . . .  
that we preach text and text message;  
we are good stewards and better at stewing;  
we study the Bible and let the Bible study us.

I thank God when I remember . . .  
that we have the sacraments of water and  
bread,  
of potluck and prayer chain, of justice march  
and hunger walk.

I thank God when I remember . . .  
that we are fossils and living stones,  
a congregation of Pentecost, a congregation  
that counts the cost,  
God's date for the wedding, and a cracked clay  
jar.

I thank God when I remember . . .

that we are the gifted people, the lifted people,  
the left-out people, and the people with baskets  
of leftover grace.

I thank God when I remember . . . that we are  
the church.

*(Written by Maren C. Tirabassi, Used by permission.)*

#### **Prayer for Annual Meeting**

God of yesterday, today, and tomorrow, we  
gather to plan for the year ahead and to reflect  
on the year past. In these twelve months we ex-  
perienced a variety of chapters from the book of  
life. We experienced the joy and hope of birth.  
Our lives were enriched by the noisy enthusiasm  
of our youth group and the exuberance of our  
Sunday school.

Our church family expanded as we welcomed  
new members. We have been touched by the  
dedicated service of our staff, committees, and  
volunteers. Music soothed our spirits and lifted  
our hearts. We comforted one another in times  
of sorrow. We lifted up our prayers in the face  
of great human tragedy across the globe. We  
came unto you, O God, with heavy burdens and  
received your rest and strength.

In our church family, as in every family, we en-  
countered both grief and joy. We received your  
words of grace that told us that we are loved,  
forgiven, and cherished. Now we stand poised  
to welcome in a new church year. Bless us once  
more that we may endeavor to share your light  
and promise, near and far. In Jesus' name we  
pray. Amen.

*(Susan J. Foster, Before the Amen: Creative Re-  
sources for Worship, ed. Maren C. Tirabassi and  
Maria I. Tirabassi (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2007).  
Used by permission.)*



# Giving Testimony and Witness



## Exploration: Context and Mission

### About this Setting

Witness in worship can be aloud or silent. A lay reader shares a personal story before the scripture lesson; an usher slips into the pew beside a grieving widower. Witness in worship can be present—like the teenager who shares a mission trip PowerPoint presentation—or absent—like the nursery caregiver who gives parents an hour away from their beloved but nonstop toddler. Witness in worship can be as unison as an affirmation or as individual as a prayer concern. However witness in worship is experienced, the context is always the heart and the mission—someone else's heart.

The three Exploring and Engaging activities that follow are shaped for weekly congregational worship and can be adapted to contemporary, traditional, and blended services. The three Discerning and Deciding activities suggest worship planning that invites testimony. The three Sending and Serving activities take this faith practice to specific contexts in the community and worship contexts beyond the local church.

### About this Exploration

We live in circles of context, one of the richest of which is the local church. This Exploration investigates webs of relationships that call us beyond family, workplace, congregation, or community out to a mission of sharing and listening with all people. Testimony can be a tool for building justice when we engage in dialogue beyond our usual circles. The body of Christ is strengthened when our witnessing is intertwined with those whose situations are vastly different from our own.



## BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**Matthew 5:13–20****Romans 8:31–39**

## Leader Preparation

Consider salt-like witnessing in worship, and list these hidden testimonies that contribute to every kind of worship: folding bulletin, preparing communion, counting the offering, baking for the reception after a funeral, sending cards or making phone calls. Next, list bushel-basket-defying witnessing: preaching a sermon, performing a solo, leading a youth group, or speaking to a new person after the postlude. As you think about your congregation, are there ample opportunities for various styles of witness in weekly services and other forms of worship? Strategize giving more people more ways to witness.

*Prayer: God, let nothing separate us from sharing your love—not shyness, or lack of practice; not the need to finish worship in an hour, or bad memories of childhood evangelism, or fear of criticism from church-stodgies. For we believe that neither laity status nor clergy job-fear, neither soft voices, nor Alzheimer memories, neither embarrassment, nor our significant others' embarrassment, neither the soft lisp of therapy for stroke, nor others' disbelief that we would get clean and sober, nor ten-year-old gum-chewing, nor squeaky walker-wheels, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from telling about the love of God in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

## Exploring &amp; Engaging Activities



## ① “Sharitage” Worship with Global Resources (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** We sometimes reserve using global worship resources for World Communion Sunday or Pentecost, special days celebrating our relationship with people of faith everywhere. Using these resources more frequently is heart-opening.

The “sharitage” (sharing heritage) concept engages members of the congregation in the global worship. For at least a month before the occasion, invite congregation members to find a small object or a photograph from another country such as a country of their heritage, a country they have visited, or a country they would like to visit. They can even cut pictures out of magazines. Everyone brings these objects or pictures to the service. There are two opportunities to share the object and a brief story. Everyone is connected to the community of God’s children throughout the world.

The attachment suggests several songs. Look through your hymnal to find these or other hymns from countries around the world.

**Supplies:**

- “‘Sharitage’ Service with Global Resources,” Attachment: Activity 1
- communion elements, perhaps brought by congregation members
- song “Siyahamb’ ekukhanyen’ kwenkhos” (tune: Siyahambra, irr. South African song) [www.tinyurl.com/fp-siyahamb](http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-siyahamb)

A “Sharitage” service of worship includes liturgical resources from countries around the world, global music easily found in most hymn books, and two opportunities for members of the congregation to share objects, clothing, and photographs from countries of their heritage, countries they have visited, or countries they wish to visit. If children usually leave the service after the opening part of worship, the first sharing should include items that may be interesting to them. Provide communion bread of several kinds, baked by members of the congregation from ethnic recipes.



## ② Blessing for Salt and Light

**Leader preparation:** Whenever there is a blessing ceremony for objects that come from home, it is important to make an early initial invitation and frequent reminders for people to bring, in this case, salt shakers. It’s also best to stock up with give-away objects for guests and those who have forgotten. The blessing of salt shakers can be backed up by grocery store cardboard salt shakers (in which case someone may end up with quite a bit of pepper) or by “dollar store” empty salt and pepper shakers—both filled with salt. Bags of scentless tea lights are easily available.

Using tangible objects meets the needs of those who learn best through hands rather than ears. Naming both salt and light celebrates those whose ministry “disappears” into the larger recipe, but is essential, and those whose ministry is on bright display. Teaching a hymn that some people will know and some will not is a form of welcome. Explaining a “familiar” text begs the question “Familiar to whom?” Context and mission are often interchangeable.





Invite each of three volunteers to shape a 2–3 minute witness: one on what invisible blessings are present in his or her home; one on the connection between faith and work, school, or retirement; and one on hidden blessings in the church.

**Supplies:**

- song: “You Are Salt for the Earth, O People” (tune: Bring Forth, irr. with refrain) [www.tinyurl.com/fp-salt](http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-salt)
- tea lights—enough to be distributed to the congregation
- extra salt shakers
- shakers with sea salt to become rhythm instruments
- flashlights for the procession
- “Blessing for Salt and Light,” Attachment: Activity 2

A blessing for context (home, secular activity, and church) and mission (places beyond the context where the good news can be heard) is empowering. This forms the central message or sermon in a weekly worship service. This is a helpful service for the beginning of the program year or the beginning of a season on the church year. It is a service that the youth group may want to share with the congregation.

Early in worship teach the song “You Are Salt for the Earth, O People,” which Marty Haugen wrote as a song for processing outdoors. Once it is familiar, have a procession around the church. This may be choir, children, volunteers, or everyone. Those who are processing sing only the refrain, since they will be shaking the salt rhythm instruments and waving flashlights while they walk. Those who do not process are responsible for the verses.

Continue with the blessing ceremony as described on the attachment.



### 3 Watch Night Service

**Leader preparation:** Whenever a custom or tradition associated with one context is planned for another context, there is a need for sensitivity. Watch Night services as New Year’s Eve services have been identified in the Moravian tradition in the 1700s and in Methodism in the 1800s. The most commonly known and deeply loved Watch Night Services come from the African American tradition. This activity can be part of weekly worship close to New Year’s Eve or a half hour service offered at 6:00 or 10:00 PM on New Year’s Eve. Alcoholics Anonymous groups that meet in churches may be enthusiastic resources for these services. It is also appropriate at other transition times, such as the beginning of the program year in the fall, the Sunday that falls between Thanksgiving and the first Sunday of Advent, or occasions that lift up civil rights, such as an evening before the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday. The early Methodist tradition was to have such a service on the evening of every full moon! God is always calling us to begin again.

**Supplies:**

- “Watch Night or Covenant Renewal Service,” Attachment: Activity 3

A half-hour service of singing, scripture, and testimony honors the various traditions of Watch Night, witnesses to times past and their sorrows, challenges, and joys. It renews our covenant with God in times to come, and, when used on New Year’s Eve, provides support for those who do not wish to drink on an evening that has become associated with alcohol.

Begin with singing from the choices listed at the bottom of the attachment, and continue with the suggested order of service.



## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### ④ Planning for Ecumenical or Interfaith Worship (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** A gathering of an ongoing ecumenical or interfaith group can be the location for this discussion of public prayer. If there is no such group, draw together lay and clergy from faith communities. This is an hour-and-a-half discussion leading to planning worship events. It may happen in the interest of reinvigorating an existing service such as a community Thanksgiving service, or may be in preparation for a response to a current situation. For a truly full conversation, it is helpful if there is no immediate upcoming worship event, although many ideas may be generated for future use.

#### **Supplies:**

- “Planning for Ecumenical or Interfaith Worship,” Attachment: Activity 4
- refreshments

After the opening hymn, invite those gathered to introduce themselves by name and faith community and to offer a witness to an exciting ecumenical, interfaith, or community worship experience each can remember. Remind them that college and military worship, weddings, funerals, and public dedications are all ecumenical or interfaith.

Give thanks for each person’s story. A conversation about ecumenical (usually defined as multiple Christian faith communities) and interfaith (usually defined as any group of faith communities that contains a variety of world religions) worship can be guided by these questions:

1. Why is ecumenism important? Why is interfaith community important?
2. What is each community willing to sacrifice for the sake of bridging gaps? Examples include hosting events in one’s own building, dress codes, limiting sacred texts to those that are accepted by all or deciding to include all texts and being willing to listen to unfamiliar ones, and even limitation of age or gender of leadership.
3. Who has what nonnegotiables?
4. Why should we worship together rather than only do mission, justice action, and compassionate care together?
5. Which is more meaningful to you—a woven worship, in which all parts are acceptable to all present, or a patchwork worship, in which each participant offers distinctive expression from his or her personal faith context, such as Indonesian dancing, reading from *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy, or offering a devotion to Mary, the mother of Jesus?
6. Does this kind of worship invite artistic creativity or should it be less experimental than other worship? Why?

There are two distinct kinds of ecumenical and interfaith public prayer:

1. An ongoing part of being in community. Invite the group to list what these occasions are or might be. Suggestions: Thanksgiving, longest night, Blue Christmas (usually ecumenical), Martin Luther King Jr., Lenten gathering, such as Ash Wednesday, Good Friday (ecumenical only), Easter Sunrise (ecumenical only), Memorial Day, July 4, or Veteran’s Day, civic occasions (sometimes funerals), prison ministry, assisted living/nursing home ministry, hospice worship.



2. A prophetic witness or response to crisis. Invite the group to list what these occasions are or might be. Suggestions of prophetic witness: Health Justice service, AIDS or other healing service, peace events, Earth Day events; possibilities of response to crisis such as a community natural disaster or a community tragedy (a murder, act of intolerance, funeral for a soldier, workplace or school shooting, or a completely untoward event like the Oklahoma City bombing or September 11, 2001).

Divide the group into smaller groups of four or five, and ask each small group to choose any one of these occasions and imagine themselves as a planning committee. After 15 minutes reconvene the group and share these hopes.

Allow this time to be a wonderful experience in mutual understanding. However, if there is energy, pursue ways to carry out the hopes and plans. Introduce the “Hospitality Issues for Ecumenical and Interfaith Events” (see attachment) if there is extra time, or if there is going to be an event in the near future. Close with the “Song of Thanks” from the attachment.



## 5 A Week of Revival Testimony

**Leader preparation:** This activity is a gathering to plan and prepare a “revival week.” Sunday night through Wednesday or Thursday is a traditional timeframe. As a theme, offer healing to people for just those things that often seem to be as powerful as principalities and powers. The worship would be half an hour followed by an equal amount of community time. The planning group could include deacons, elders, worship committee members, or a combined group from two churches. The actual services could alternate between the churches.

Two suggestions with liturgy are offered here. They may be included as parts of the revival week, or simply used as models. They could also, with adequate preparation for the congregation, be part of weekly worship.

Someone may suggest that there are so many concerns that there could be just one big healing and hope service. Discourage this. A blended service “acts” as if all issues are the same, while people experience them as very personal and particular. Weekly worship should regularly blend concerns while naming them.

### **Supplies:**

- “Sample Liturgies for a Revival Week,” Attachment: Activity 5
- laptop, newsprint, or whiteboard
- refreshments
- tissues

To begin the planning session read Romans 8:31–39 and pause for quiet reflection. Nothing, indeed, can separate us from God’s love in Christ Jesus, but many times it seems that some things are more separating than others. For example, an addiction or a suicide attempt often feel to the persons involved like a deeper rift from the church community than an illness such as cancer or multiple sclerosis. The four or five nights of a revival provide an opportunity for the church community and the neighborhood to witness to God’s inclusive love in these very kinds of situations.

A suggested pattern for each night of the revival is a half hour of music, a liturgy of blessing for the particular situation either for a person who is dealing with the situation or someone who wishes to come forward for personal intercession, and a time of informal community with food and conversation. This fellowship time should be equal in length to the worship time. Some people will choose to



attend on the evenings when issues close to their hearts are raised, whether or not they come forward. Others may come all week to participate in the cloud of witnesses that offers support. Still others may have uncomfortable memories of “revival” and “coming forward” and wish to contribute by providing the refreshments rather than participating in the service.

Invite the planning group to read the two sample liturgies on the attachment. These offer an idea of the kinds of issues that may be named in the congregation’s neighborhood. Invite the participants to name one or more ideas for services. Take notes of all these ideas on a laptop, newsprint, or whiteboard. Some may wish to tell why “addiction to Internet pornography” or “healing for those who cut themselves” or other ideas matter to them. As the leader, you may wish to pause frequently for prayer.

When all ideas have been gathered, read the entire list. Pause to pray for discernment of the ones to be chosen. Using the samples as models, invite pairs to write the brief liturgies. The full group can plan the music, perhaps alternating traditional hymnody, contemporary Christian rock, and classical music for different services.

Finally, create a publicity plan for letting people know about these evenings. Consider radio and Internet publicity; local newspaper notices; church newsletters, bulletins, and e-mail lists; and personal invitations to friends inside and beyond the congregation(s).



### 6 Putting Some Mary into the Martha of Church World Service

**Leader preparation:** Many congregations are invested in hands-on collecting and sending projects. Church World Service Kits are the model for this activity, but there are many other projects (gifts for prison ministries, Christmas “gift trees,” toiletries for homeless shelters, and so forth). Some congregations pile donated gifts around the communion table on the Sunday before they are shipped or delivered. This activity helps a group create a liturgy that blesses these projects. This planning deepens the mission experience and enables people to witness with words as well as their practical gifts.

Set chairs in a circle surrounding the items to be given set as individual objects on a beautiful cloth on a low table.

#### **Supplies:**

- a sample of each kit
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers
- paper and writing utensils for drafts
- link to church World Service <http://tinyurl.com/bdmhg5>
- “Planning Meeting Outline,” Attachment: Activity 6

Gather a group of about seven people to plan the dedication ceremony for the Church World Service kit(s) or other tangible gifts. This may be an ad hoc adult or intergenerational group, the mission or social action committee, the deacons or worship committee, or a youth group. Seven is a good maximum number because each person can shape one line of the final litany. If the church puts together more than one kind of kit, a second group can work on that litany.



A suggested format of the meeting is to read scripture, share personal stories around the circle, pray for the stories, create a common litany response, craft a line for each item in the kit, and then polish and practice the completed litany.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Acknowledging a Personal Call (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** A special service for setting aside one or more people to live out their call provides an opportunity for all who are present to listen for God's call in their own lives. This is a time for people to bring to consciousness the nagging whisper of God's urging. However, many of these services are liturgically top-heavy and sometimes uncomfortably long as many bring their gifts. This litany and musical reflection will take ten minutes. It is generous to include this or another such opportunity, but unwise if the service already clocks at more than an hour and fifteen minutes.

**Supplies:**

- song "Tú has venido a la orilla" (tune: Pescador de Hombres, 8.10.10 with refrain)  
[www.tinyurl.com/fp-orilla](http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-orilla)
- small pieces of paper shaped like boats
- pencils in the pews
- "Litany for a Dedication Service," Attachment: Activity 7

People come to special services of dedication, such as ordination or installation of clergy, commissioning of commissioned ministers, blessing of mission trip participants or church school teachers, even confirmation. The congregation is a witness and support and pledges ongoing prayer for the individuals so set aside. These are also times when the Holy Spirit is so present and electric that members of the congregation often experience a personal call to a new way of being for God.

The litany (which can be a call to worship), reflective hymn, and response can take place at the beginning of the service, at the offering time, or near the conclusion. See the attachment.



### 8 Earth Day Liturgy to Encourage Witness

**Leader preparation:** A celebration of the earth and its beauty may take place in April or may take place outdoors in the summer. It may be in an ecumenical context or at a different time than the weekly worship. A service of blessing of the animals may share some of the elements of Earth Day. The following liturgy invites participation in a service that celebrates creation.

**Supplies:**

- "Liturgy for a Celebration of the Earth," Attachment: Activity 8

Personal witness to "greening" can take place at different times in the liturgy. These times of testimony can be during a call to worship, an opening prayer, a time of reconciliation, or an open time of sharing.



## 9 The Hospitality of Visiting

**Leader preparation:** Testimony is an activity of feet as well as mouths! We witness to our inclusiveness and our desire to be hospitable to others. We work and pray and plan in both practical and spiritual dimensions to be more hospitable, more inclusive in our worship. We remind people about access issues; we train people to welcome, to seek out new faces, to follow through in helpful, but not invasive ways. We rejoice when people pass through our congregations on their journeys of faith; and we truly celebrate when they find a new worship home with us.

If that testimony to hospitality is true, then we must also learn the other side of being truly welcoming—to become good visitors, willing to worship with others and to learn from them, sitting or kneeling or singing in new ways.

### Supplies:

- background on all faith communities in a 30-mile radius, including times of worship and contact information for leaders
- food to share at both opening and closing events
- publicity for the program

A “Season of Visiting” is a period of time when people in a congregation are actively invited to visit other faith communities, learn from them, and come back to share what they have learned. This sometimes happens in confirmation years, but it is rarer as an adult activity. It teaches the true hospitality of the guest, silences prejudices—even ones formerly unrecognized—and enriches the worship palette of a congregation.

A limited time period for visiting can be Lent or a summer. Gather those interested in visiting other communities of faith to prepare them, and then conclude with a gathering of those who have participated in at least one visit and others who would like to learn from them.

The opening gathering includes a rationale for visiting others and some of the possibilities in the vicinity. Connecting visitor-partners helps because it is sometimes easier to go to a new place with a friend! This initial gathering is also a time when people may share some of their feelings or hesitations about different religious expressions. Some form of anonymous question box, which may be answered on the spot or may inspire further investigation, will allow people to ask the questions they are hesitant to claim, such as: Do women/men need to wear head covering? The organizers of this program can contact faith communities in advance and ask if someone is available to meet with guests before or after the worship service to prepare or explain what has taken place.

Some visits will be to churches whose worship is of a familiar style but different language. Others may be to a different branch of the Christian faith, such as Roman Catholic or Eastern or Western Orthodox, or a unique style of worship such as that practiced by the Society of Friends. Still other visits may be to worshiping communities that are Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, or Baha’i. Encourage each visitor to prepare by learning something about the worshiping experience either from website of that faith or from books, such as the series *How to be a Perfect Stranger: A Guide to Etiquette in Other People’s Religious Ceremonies*, edited by Arthur J. Magida and Stuart M. Matlins. During the visits, each person is invited to be courteous, curious, and open to the presence of God. This is not a field trip, but worship. It is opening the heart.

The closing gathering is the time for people to share about their experiences. It may be a dinner with group presentations and table conversations. This experi-



ence will be a powerful testimony to one's own faith, made more explicit by the comparison. There also may be a stationary display of a bulletin board of photographs and bulletins or a PowerPoint presentation.

Use this or a similar closing benediction:

*Let us pray for our friends at (name of place visited). May God's blessing rest upon them.*

Continue for as many places as were visited.

*Let us pray for ourselves, celebrating our community and our worship, and rejoicing that our hearts have been opened as we have been welcomed by others. May God's blessing rest upon us.*

## Following the Church Year

An ongoing practice of testimony and giving witness throughout the church year in our own context and the places of mission that may be halfway across the world helps us to understand both our own community of faith and the multitude of places where God, like the great holy clue-master in a scavenger hunt, leaves messages for us on the tongues and in the hands of others. This Faith Practices resource offers many ways to affirm our faith and tell our stories. Equally important is the practice of listening, not only to the stories shared in worship, but to all the ways God's breath breathes peace on us, and God's children whisper hope to us.

Throughout the church year, at least once in every climate season, offer a 2-week focus on listening shaped by litany and expanded litany. On the first week the litany is a commission to go forth into all the places of the week and listen. On the second week the litany is a prayer of thanksgiving for all that has been heard.

### **Week One:** Commission

**One:** God's breath stirs the natural world—pine tree and day lily, snowflake and autumn leaf, hailstone and microburst, rush of surf and singing silence of the midnight constellations.

**All:** Let everyone who has ears, listen.

**One:** This week listen to nature.

**All:** We have hearts, and we will listen.

**One:** God's creatures have stories to tell. Let us be still enough to feel the word of love in the warm fur of a dog or tight clutch of a cockatiel, the message of freedom in hawk or house cat, the earth-sharing of pelican and panther and wild pony, the echo of loss from all creatures now extinct.

**All:** Let everyone who has ears, listen.

**One:** This week listen to animals.

**All:** We have hearts, and we will listen.

**One:** God's children tell stories everywhere. We hear them in schoolyard and subway, over the back of a booth at a diner or across the kitchen table, from people who look very much like us and people who look very different.

**All:** Let everyone who has ears, listen.

**One:** This week let us listen to people.

**All:** We have hearts, and we will listen.



**One:** God speaks through American Sign Language and hearing aids. God whispers in dreams. God calls through movies and television, books and e-zines.

**All:** Let everyone who has ears, listen.

**One:** This week may we become listeners with our senses and our hearts.

**All:** May the God who calls us to pay attention to sparrows and field flowers, ocean waves, boys with lunch, and jostling women in the crowd open our senses and our hearts to listen to the witness of life all around us. Amen.

**Week Two:** Sha-yer (prayer of sharing) of Thanksgiving for all we have heard this week.

**One:** God's breath stirs the natural world—pine tree and day lily, snowflake and autumn leaf, hailstone and microburst, rush of surf and singing silence of the midnight constellations. This week we had senses and hearts to listen to nature. I invite anyone to share in one word or phrase what you heard.

Time for Sharing

**One:** God's creatures have stories to tell, if we are still enough to feel the word of love in the warm fur of a dog or tight clutch of a cockatiel, the message of freedom in hawk or house cat, the earth-sharing of pelican and panther and wild pony, the echo from loss of all creatures now extinct. This week we had senses and hearts to listen to animals. I invite anyone to share what they listened to or learned from an animal this week.

Time for Sharing

**One:** God's children are telling stories everywhere and we hear them in schoolyard and subway, over the back of a booth at a diner or across the kitchen table, from people who look very much like us and people who look very different. This week we listened with our senses and hearts to people all around us. I invite anyone to share an anecdote of someone they truly listened to this week.

Time for Sharing

**One:** God speaks through American Sign Language and hearing aid. God whispers in dreams. God calls through movies and television, books and e-zines. If there is one thing we can be sure of it's that God is always surprising us with sweet and holy ventriloquism! Does anyone have something to share that doesn't fit into any logical category and, yet, when you went out to listen this week, you were still and knew that God was God?

Time for Sharing

*Prayer: Gracious God, who teaches us to pay attention to all your wondrous world, thank you for all these stories of your presence in the world—those we have each experienced and those we have listened to this morning. In the weeks to come, God, open our hearts and our senses. Amen.*

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**Attachment: Activity 1**

**“Sharitage” Service with Global Resources**

**1. Call to Worship**

*(Canada—by Richard Bott)*

Leader: Look to the east! What do you see?

People: A wall.

Leader: Sometimes you’re just too literal!

Look through the wall. What do you see?

People: Our communities—Maple Ridge, Vancouver,

\_\_\_\_\_, *(name of town for service)* children, women, men—living in this place.

Leader: Look farther.

People: Our country—provinces bound by land, provinces bordered by water.

Leader: Look farther!

People: A great ocean. People and places of all lands and races!

Leader: Look farther! If you look far enough, right around the globe, you see . . .

People: Ourselves! Christ’s people in this place, gathered to worship God.

Leader: All of creation—the high mountains, the deep waters, and beyond, joyfully singing, as God fills our lives.

People: Joyfully singing, as God touches our souls.

Leader: Joyfully singing—

People: as we worship God! Alleluia!

**2. Opening Hymn**

“Jesus We Are Here/Jesus Tawa Pano,”  
*(Zimbabwe—by Patrick Matsikenyiri)*

**3. Opening Prayer**

*(Korea—by Hyung Cho Jae )*

Dear God, open my heart,  
Fill me with your spirit,  
Holy Spirit, come upon me now!

Dear God, open my heart,  
Fill me with your wisdom,  
Holy Spirit, forgive me with your grace!  
Dear God, open my heart,  
Fill me with your love,  
Holy Spirit, transform me into wholeness! Amen

**4. Passing the peace**

*(As is customary in the congregation)*

**5. Sharitage—Part One**

*(This may include objects and photographs brought forward, the description of clothing that is worn, memories, and stories.)*

**6. Prayer of Confession**

*(South Africa—by Isabel de Gruchy )*

Lord, I pray—  
Give me compassion to help when help is needed,  
kindness to stand back when help is not wanted,  
and the wisdom to know the difference.

Give me openness to share something of my journey if helpful,  
humility to keep quiet if I’m only boasting,  
and the wisdom to know the difference.

Give me gentleness to ask concerned questions,



## Attachment: Activity 1 (continued)

reticence to probe intrudingly,  
and the wisdom to know the difference.

Give me willingness to organize and advise  
freely,  
patience to not interfere,  
and the wisdom to know the difference.

Give me courage to be honest in my response if  
that is called for,

Sensitivity to refrain from honesty  
if that would be more compassionate,  
and the wisdom to know the difference.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

### 7. Assurance of Grace

*(China—by huang yan jie, self-translated)*

Even though full of hurts,  
God's love heals them with peace.  
Even though my wandering steps lost the tar-  
gets,  
God's love calls us back to God's house.  
Even though we neglected God's love,  
God increased love and grace.

So many times we seek the true love,  
Christ's palms with the print of nails show me.  
So many times in hopelessness I almost forsake  
myself  
Christ shows me the way in the deserts.

### 8. Morning Prayers

*(As is customary in the congregation or . . .)*

*Sharing of Joys and Concerns*

*Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession*

*Silent Prayer*

*Prayer of Our Savior*

### 9 Invitation to Offertory

*(Aotearoa/New Zealand—by Erice Fairbrother)*

If there is a divine spark that is in me,  
Let it flame;  
That I might be consumed for peace.

If there is anything holy that is in me,  
Let it be as breath;  
That I might carry it lightly.

If there is any wisdom that is in me,  
Let it cry out;  
That justice be heard in my speaking.

If there is any love that is in me,  
Let it sing;  
That love might be the song of my heart.

If any of these gifts be found in me,  
Let them bring life;  
Fill all of me, and become my offering.

### 10. Prayer of Dedication

*(Turkey—by Turgai Ucal)*

Grant blessings, O God. Expand our limits.  
Grant blessings, O God. Widen our paths.  
May your Spirit be with us, May it shield us from  
evil. Amen

### 11. Scripture

Psalm 8; Matthew 25:31–40

### 12. Hymn

"Santo, Santo, Santo"  
*(Argentina—anon.)*

### 13. Sermon

### 14. Sharitage—Part Two



## Attachment: Activity 1 (continued)

### 15. Sacrament of Holy Communion

#### 16. Communion Hymn

“Una Espiga/Sheaves of Summer”  
(Spain—by Cesareo Gabarin)

#### 17. Invitation to Communion

(Germany—by Detlev Knoche)

Leader: We rejoice in the God of life,  
who gives us bread:  
the fruit of the earth worked with human hands.  
and who makes it into the bread of life.

People: We rejoice in the God of life  
who gives us wine:  
the fruit of the vine tended with daily care,  
and puts the flavour of the new world into it.

Leader: As the wheat and grapes are joined  
on this table in bread and wine—  
into a visual symbol for us—

People: May our church join together  
into a visual symbol for the entire world. Amen.

#### 18. Prayer of Consecration, Words of Remembrance, and Sharing the Elements

(As is customary in the congregation)

#### 19. Prayer of Thanksgiving

(Mexico—grace from orphanage in Colima,  
contributed by Lupita Muniz)

We give you thanks O Lord, for all food that has arrived at our table from your generosity. Bless the people who have made it possible, from the cultivation of the earth until it arrived to us. Give bread to those who are hungry, and to those who have bread give a hunger for you. Amen.

#### 20. Closing Hymn

“Siyahamb’ ekukhanyen’ kwenkhos”  
(South Africa—traditional)

#### 21. Benediction

(Argentina—by Gerardo Oberman)

Que el Dios de la Vida,  
sea tu guía en el camino de cada día,  
sea tu refugio en momentos de inseguridad  
y sea tu descanso en tiempos de fatiga.  
Que el Dios de la Vida,  
te fortalezca cuando te sientas débil,  
te consuele cuando estés triste  
y te abrace cuando te sientas sola.  
Que el Dios de la Vida,  
que te quiere y te conoce,  
te cubra con su ternura de Madre.  
Por siempre. Amén.



## Attachment: Activity 2

### Blessing for Salt and Light

Matthew 5:13–17

#### **Invitation:**

We have been called salt of the earth and light of the world. Salt is all about taste and, in Jesus' day, preservation. The blessing of salt is not really visible once it is in use. It flavors a whole dish, but usually when it is too obvious, we complain about the saltiness. We are called to be salt, a blessing in the contexts in which we live—our homes, our work or school or retirement, and our church. Often the blessing is not that obvious, but, like salt, would be much missed if it were gone.

Light, the kind that is outside of the bushel basket—or shall we say out of the box or pushing the envelope?—the kind that shines so that good works are seen and God is praised often includesthe bright-as-LED mission activities we do for the reign of justice and peace.

This morning we will bless the salt shakers that have come from your home or the narthex and that will return to your home. We will bless all the hidden tasty saltiness of your lives. We will also bless and give you a tea light as a symbol of your willingness to bring light to the world. We will name some of those places at that time.

Let us hear about salt in the home: *(Volunteer offers a brief planned witness about the blessings in his or her home.)*

Let us hear about salt in work/school/retirement activities: *(Volunteer offers a brief planned witness about the connections between faith and work or school or retirement and how being a Christian makes that context different.*

Let us hear about salt in the church: *(A volunteer brings and identifies a salt shaker from the church kitchen and gives a witness about all the hidden gifts that people offer the church. This can be a list of particular roles—not naming people, because someone will be left out—or a story about how one of the unpaid less definable ministries within the church made a difference, such as a funeral reception for a family that had a difficult and exhausting time before the death.*

Please exchange salt shakers with someone sitting near you so that no one has his or her own salt shaker. If several people brought one salt shaker together, make sure that everyone has at least a finger on a salt shaker.



### Attachment: Activity 2 (continued)

#### **Prayer:**

God, who shakes us up, spices our lives with challenge and excitement, preserves us when we feel our “sell-by” date is past, and feeds us with tenderness and love, bless each of us to be salt in our daily lives—not seeking praise or drawing attention to ourselves, but letting our blessing disappear but be always tasted! Bless each table where these salt shakers sit. May you be present at every meal—breakfast, lunch, dinner, popcorn snack and late night ice cream—for you are the truest grace we will ever know. Amen.

Please turn to your neighbors and say, “May you be the salt of the earth.”

Please return the blessed salt shakers to one another. Just as we sit in our pews to bless the salt that is God’s grace in context, so we come forward to be the bold bushel-defying light! If you prefer to remain in your seat, we will come to you.

Now please come forward for your tea lights and the exchange, “You are the light of the world.” “Let light shine in/on \_\_\_\_\_.” Fill the blank with phrases such as: Let the light shine on poverty, on those who do not have health care, on people in Zimbabwe, on endangered species, on firefighters risking their lives. Please name whatever seems most appropriate to you. You do not have to come up with something new. If someone has already named the mission that touches you most, please repeat it. For example, we want a lot of God’s light to shine for people who are homeless and hungry today!

*If the service is held in a small space, everyone can listen to the individual testimonies to mission. In a larger space, begin a soft medley of “light” songs such as “You are the Salt of the Earth, O People” or “This Little Light of Mine.”*

#### **Closing Prayer:**

Thank you, God, for quiet witness and jubilant witness, for the tasty blessings and the brilliant ones, for the hidden hopefulness among us, and the courage to change the world. Send us forth, we pray, salty and bright for you at home and away from home, in our waking and our sleeping, in our joys and in our sorrows, in our most familiar recipes of kindness and our struggles to ignite new faith, for we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, whose Sermon on the Mount will amount to something in our lives. Amen.



## Attachment: Activity 2

### Watch Night or Covenant Renewal Service

#### Welcome

Thank you for coming this evening (morning) to watch and wait in this last evening of remembering and commitment. This is an occasion to honor the Watch Night traditions that have gone before us: the Moravian people who watched in anticipation of the sudden coming of God, and early Methodists who held such covenant renewal service on full moon nights throughout the year.

Most significantly we remember the waiting and watching of people of African American descent who waited on the night of December 31, 1862, for the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, that released from slavery all those who were held as slaves in states rebelling against the Union. We remember the tradition of hope and freedom and faith that has passed down through all these years, and recommit ourselves not only to waiting and watching, but to witnessing to freedom in our midst.

#### Litany of Scripture

**One:** Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert (Isaiah 43:18-19).

**All:** We watch this night for God's new thing.

**One:** The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people (Jeremiah 31:31-33).

**All:** We watch this night for God's new covenant.

**One:** The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you

by day, nor the moon by night (Psalm 121:5-6).

**All:** We watch this night because God is always watching over us.

**One:** But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father (Mark 13:32).

**All:** We watch this night to remind ourselves that no one knows God's coming.

**One:** Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers (Romans 13:11).

**All:** We watch this night because salvation is near.

**One:** I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. God will dwell with them; and they will be God's peoples. God will be with them and wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new" (Revelation 21: 3-5a).

**All:** We watch this night for God's new thing.

#### We Pray as a Community

Invite prayer concerns and celebrations. Either collect these and pray extemporaneously, or invite the congregation to respond to each situation when it is offered with "We pray for a blessing in the New Year," or "We pray for a blessing in the times to come."

#### Invitation to Bear Witness

We invite you to share stories. Some of us have had moments of joy in the past year that we wish to lift up in celebration. Some of us have had challenging times that pushed us to the limits, and yet we are here. The stories that we tell to one another are full of healing and hope because they say, "We have come through."



### Attachment: Activity 2 (continued)

Some of us may wish to name those who have been gathered into God's arms. The newspapers are filled with celebrity obituaries, but we name the saints of God.

Some of us may wish to name in this community of support those things we wish to renew, promises to God we wish to make and even resolutions for new beginnings.

Whether you would like to share this past year, honor a blessed child of God, or pledge your faith anew, we invite you to stand and speak. We will respond as we did in our prayers, "We pray for a blessing for you in the New Year," or "We pray for a blessing for you in the time to come."

Close with one of the additional prayers that follow or with singing.

#### **Some New Year's, Watch Night Prayers**

(From *Before the Amen—Creative Resources for Worship*, ed. Maren C. Tirabassi and Maria I. Tirabassi (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2007). Used by permission.)

*These prayers may be helpful for those who like to have a printed prayer in a bulletin rather than a more spoken service.*

God, you have delivered a new beginning to me. A door that I wasn't looking for has now been opened. Keep my eyes focused on your perfect plan as I venture through this portal. Help me to use this opportunity to glorify you and grow in faith as your child. Your glory shines in beginnings. Amen —*Arlene L. Drennan*

God of grace, lead us in this New Year to build new bridges. When discussion fails, help us to connect in other ways. Guide us to write a poem or a story, sing a lullaby or a love song, paint a picture, build an altar, plant a flower, create a dance, pray out loud, prepare a meal, or start with flour and yeast and bake the perfect loaf of bread. Grant us health, strong hearts, and clear minds. Amen. —*Susan Hodge-Parker*

A new year is upon us! In these dark days, we struggle to make light with new resolutions. We warm ourselves by a fire stoked with possibility. We are half afraid of it, of how hot we can burn when we are ignited by fresh hope. We are dazzled by how bright our lives could be, so much so that we often turn away too soon. God, be with us as we find a way to make these possibilities our own. Help us to walk forward with confidence that we are capable. God, remind us that our potential may become a reality.—*Maria I. Tirabassi*

Gentle God, as we contemplate the dizzying contrasts of the past year, guide us to concentrate on the golden moments that illuminated our lives: the challenging hikes through your awe-inspiring wilderness, glimpses of exhilarating wild-life, quiet conversations, shared laughter, shared tears, warm embraces, and fish tacos. Thank you for including us in your crazy creation. Amen. —*Susan Hodge-Parker*

#### **Suggested hymns**

Over My Head (African American spiritual, words and music)

I'll Fly Away (Albert E. Brumley, words and music)

Lift Every Voice and Sing (James Weldon Johnson, LIFT EVERY VOICE, J. Rosamond Johnson)

Glory, Glory, Hallelujah (African American spiritual, words and music)

God of Our Life (Hugh Kerr, SANDON, Charles Henry Purday)

This Is a Day of New Beginnings (Brian Wren, BEGINNINGS, Carlton R. Young)

God of our Days (Sue Strachan, GOD OF OUR DAYS, arr. Sonia Morales-Matos)

Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying (Philipp Nicolai, WATCHET AUF, Nicolai)



**Attachment: Activity 4**

**Planning for Ecumenical or Interfaith Worship**

**Opening Song**

For the beauty of the earth, for the water, wind, and sky,  
For the love secure from birth and the love that is surprise,  
God of all, to you we raise—this, our hymn of grateful praise.

For communities of faith, each unique and filled with grace,  
and the ways we join and share, lifting up compassion's face,  
God of all to you we raise—this, our hymn of grateful praise.

For this sharing of our gifts, for inclusion deep and wide,  
for our songs and prayers and dreams, offering hope on every side.  
God of all, to you we raise—this, our hymn of grateful praise.

Based on "For the Beauty of the Earth" (tune: Dix), new lyrics by Maren C. Tirabassi

**Song of Thanks**

Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices,  
for families of faith and our distinctive choices,  
for those who've gone before—in service, class or choir,  
on bench, pulpit, pew—to challenge and inspire.

All praise and thanks to God for all our separate churches  
their missions of the past, their future goals and searching –  
from legislative reach, to education's goal . . .  
the tolerance we teach, the unity of souls.

On all the paths we take, may holy words be spoken.  
Give courage for hard times and hope when life seems broken.  
We ask God's guidance wise—for families of faith,  
so precious each to us, so thankful for your grace.

*Alternative readings for verse 2*

All praise and thanks to God for synagogues and churches . . .

All praise to God for mosques and synagogues and churches . . .

Based on "Now Thank We All our God," (tune: Nun Danket Alle Gott)





## Attachment: Activity 4 (continued)

### **Hospitality Issues for Ecumenical and Interfaith Events**

#### **For communities of faith**

- Timely notice and sample of easy-to-use e-mail or newsletter announcement
- Publicity, including all sponsoring faith communities, not just host
- Full understanding of each community's specific needs, restrictions for day, time, diet
- Sensitivity to access issues, such as visual (large print), hearing (sound devices), mobility, unscented candles, and so forth

#### **For liturgical leaders**

*In advance:* What to wear, what "text" to use, when to arrive, guidelines about ecumenical/interfaith choices and language, reminder that people with no religious background may be present

*At the event:* Where to sit, what microphone to use, whether or not to process, bulletins with names on them, a place to leave purses and coats, gathering prayer led in other words by a guest leader-greeter who does not have another responsibility, a designated substitute for anyone who does not show up or gets lost.

*After the event:* Thank you notes

#### **For the public**

- Variety of news media
- Everything printed, including expectations around offerings
- More greeters than seems necessary, and the appropriate greeters
- Food for the real chance to be ecumenical

#### **Some phrases to learn**

We are doing this because . . .

Please come with us on this journey.

We eagerly seek your reflection.

This may be a little different from the wonderful services that have happened in past years ..(Never say that things have become boring, as that causes hurts feelings.)

#### **About clergy**

When possible, it is wonderful to have clergy as part of the planning team, as leaders in the service, and available for caring, as in the case of a healing service or Longest Night service. Planners should try not to "cast" themselves, and lay people should get used to clergy sitting in pews with them because they want to come, not because they have a role.



## Attachment: Activity 5

### Sample Liturgies for a Revival Week

—celebrating the fact that nothing separates us from the love of God in Christ Jesus—

#### Healing Prayer—Eating Disorders

##### **Invitation**

Many suffer from a wide range of eating disorders, such as eating too much or too little to care for the body as God's temple. This evening we pause to recognize those here who are struggling with issues of food, as well as those who pray for someone they love with these deep concerns. Please come forward as a group, or feel free to remain in your seat and know that you are spiritually part of the group.

*Pause to let some come forward. Invite them to take one another's hands around the communion table if possible. If touching one another seems too intimate, each could touch the table.*

During his time in the wilderness, Jesus was tempted and refused to turn stones into bread. On another occasion he likened God to one who would not give a stone to a child who asked for bread. Thus we are reminded that there is both a time for bread and a time for a word of God that keeps us in an appropriate stony fast.

##### **Prayer**

God, we lift before you all who have walked thorough the valley of eating disorders, which is full of dry bones and very plausible temptations. Bless the vulnerable. Give courage and patience. Sustain families that they may be supportive of one another, and bring all to the table of your love. For some a relationship with food threatens their very life. *(Pause; names may be mentioned here.)* But each finds in you a gentle yoke and heart's rest. Even the sparrows that you feed do not fall to earth beyond your knowing.

We ask your blessing on therapists and doctors, dieticians and counselors, and members of support groups that they may be strengthened in their reaching out. Give them words to speak in times of trial, for we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, who was always in control of what his culture called "demons." Amen.

Continue with communion

#### Healing—Job Loss or Financial Strain

##### **Embodiment**

Begin with an intentional time of "Passing the Peace" using three simple questions shared one at a time.

*Leader:* Please turn to your neighbor and describe the first job for which you ever earned money. Turn to another neighbor and describe the hardest job you ever had. Turn to a third neighbor and describe the most meaningful work (paid or unpaid) you have ever done.

At the conclusion of this time, invite the congregation to share a few responses in each category.

##### **Invitation**

The loss of a job is a wound to identity and self-confidence in our culture, which often values a person according to his or her career. The loss of a job is also a source of financial vulnerability, family friction, and danger to health and future through the loss of insurance and pension. We invite everyone who has ever been fired, laid off, displaced, or forced into a resignation or retirement to stand. Look around, particularly those of you who may be facing this situation now, and see what a cloud of witnesses there is that, with God's help, you can survive this difficult time.

##### **Prayer**

God, we seek your strength and healing for those who face job loss now. Help each person so affected to claim with assurance his or her precious value as God's child. Draw families together and knit around them support and care. Some of us are threatened by homelessness, uninsured medical bills, inability to provide for children. Confirm in our spirits your promise that for every empty bucket, there is living water; for every empty net, a miraculous catch; for every empty noontime, a lunch of loaves and fish. Amen.



## Attachment: Activity 6

### Planning Meeting Outline

*Leader:* In his letter to the Romans, Paul said, “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38–39).

Actually, in light of our commitment to Church World Service, I researched and found a long-lost translation of the same text that reads this way: “I am convinced that neither earthquake nor flood, lack of water nor famine, limited funds for education nor political turmoil, challenges caused by infant illnesses nor compromised delivery systems for assistance can ever separate us from the love of God, as long as our hands and feet and hearts and spirits are becoming the Body of Christ in our world!”

Before we work on our dedication litany for Church World Service kits, let’s take a few moments to get to know one another. I am going to pass around an item from a kit (*cloth diaper, bar of soap, box of crayons*), and I invite you to tell a story. Only the person holding the item will speak. Your story may be funny or touching, long or short, something that happened recently or long ago. Don’t worry about a perfect story. Just share what comes first to your mind.

#### **Question for School Kits**

Describe a memorable moment in elementary school. This could be a celebration moment when you won an award or understood multiplication. It could be when your clothes or backpack or lunch was embarrassing. Or it could be a story about someone in the school context who really took care of you, such as a teacher, a coach, the school nurse. With these three possibilities, we probably have lots of stories to tell. Take a moment to think of your story so you can listen to the others worry-free.

#### **Question for Hygiene Kits**

Describe a memorable moment about a blessing in the midst of a health concern. Maybe you were evacuated from a tornado or a blizzard; maybe you had a cast in the second grade and everybody signed it; maybe your roommate in the hospital, a stranger, stayed awake with you as you worried about surgery; maybe a hospice volunteer sat and listened to you when someone dear was dying. As you look at these emergency items, think about your own emergency, small or large, and the way someone cared for you. With these different possibilities we probably have lots of stories to tell. Take a moment to think of your story so you can listen to the others worry-free.



### Attachment: Activity 6 (continued)

#### Question for Baby Care Kit

Describe a memorable moment about a baby. Maybe it is a story that is told about your own birth or infancy, or one about a son or daughter, niece or nephew, grandchild or neighbor's child, a child you knew from church or one you saw on television. It could be an absolutely joyful story, or it could be a sad story in which there was love and care in the midst of sadness. With these different possibilities we probably have lots of stories to tell. Take a moment to think of your story so you can listen to the others worry-free.

#### Prayer

God who teaches us, heals us, calls us "beloved child," we give you thanks for each of these stories. We place our personal stories into the kits that will travel far away and bring God into someone else's story. All our human stories are different, and yet, remembering our own, we are open to learn from others. Bless each of us and bless all these washcloths and pencils and nail clippers to give hope and dignity and the realization that someone cares. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

#### Write a litany

First, write a "litany line," the unison response repeated by everyone after each sentence. It could be something such as:

- Bless this gift and the person who will use it.
- Be the love that sends our gift.
- We give these gifts as if to you, but the joy returns to us.

Next, write a line for each of the items in the kit. For instance, lines related to the cloth bag might be:

- God, this cloth bag will hold the hopes of a child and the promise of the future.
- God, we open this cloth bag to place our gifts inside, just as you open our lives and place your gifts inside.
- As we hold this one bag in our hands, O God, may you hold the child, the family, the school in your loving hands.

See a list of different kits at this website: <http://tinyurl.com/bdmhg5>

After all the lines are written, practice the litany together. What needs to be smoothed out? Does the ending need a unison prayer or the Prayer of Our Savior? What hymn or song might follow?

Conclude with thanks to everyone who participated in the planning.



Attachment: Activity 7

**Litany for a Dedication Service**

**Leader:** Friends, we are gathered for \_\_\_\_\_. We pause for a few minutes to consider God’s call in our own lives. Perhaps God has been nudging you for some time to go in a new direction, or to let go of something that has been holding you back from life. We are going to share in a litany and then sing “You Have Come Down to the Lakeshore.” Between each verse, we will play an instrumental verse, as you reflect on God’s message for you. There are boat-shaped pieces of paper in your bulletin, and pencils in the pews. If you wish, you may write a new commitment on this boat, or write something that you would like to leave on the shoreline behind you. The ushers will collect them during the last instrumental verse. Feel free to leave these anonymous. If you would someone to contact you next week for further conversation, please sign your name and provide contact information.

**Litany Call to Worship**

*(Each “One” stanza may be read by a different person.)*

**One:** God is calling you.

**All:** Here I am.

**One:** God in spring wind and weeds,  
 God in quickening soil under sun,  
 God in animals and ghosts of the extinct,  
 God in earth itchy with global warming—  
 God is calling you.

**All:** Here I am.

**One:** God in neighbor’s eyes or stranger’s smile,  
 God in enemy’s skin, jaw, shape of nose,  
 God who works, prays or loves in an unfamiliar way,  
 God in the mirror—  
 God is calling you.

**All:** Here I am.

**One:** God in text and text message . . .  
 in Bach and rock, high church and hip hop,  
 labyrinth and lock-in, potluck and prayer

shawl . . .  
 God in the hitchhiker thumbs and  
 kid-style sticky fingers of ordination hands—  
 God is calling you.

**All:** Here I am.

**One:** God we don’t recognize,  
 God we won’t authorize,  
 God we can’t analyze, euthanize, or idolize,  
 God who doesn’t patronize or apologize—  
 God is calling you.

**All:** Here I am.

**One:** God who welcomes the child  
 and all the welcomers of children,  
 God who welcomes all of us—  
 awkward Elijahs and scared Marys,  
 guilty Isaiahs and on-the-spot Esthers,  
 try-it-again Peters and laughing Sarahs  
 God is calling you.

**All:** Here I am. HERE WE ARE. Here I am listening.

The congregation remains seated while singing “You have Come Down to The Lakeshore/Tú has venido a la orilla” (tune: Pescador de Hombres, 8.10.10 with refrain).

[www.tinyurl.com/fp-orilla](http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-orilla)

After each verse play an instrumental verse for reflection. People may write on a boat either a new commitment or something to be left behind on the boat, signed or unsigned. During the final instrumental verse the ushers will collect these papers. The service continues. In the next week clergy will respond to any signed “boats.”



## Attachment: Activity 8

### Liturgy for a Celebration of the Earth

#### Call to Worship for a service outdoors

**One:** Lots of church words talk about the beauty of nature.

**All:** But today we are actually outdoors.

**One:** What do you see that praises God?  
*Individuals speak out things that they see.*

**One:** What do you hear that praises God?  
*Individuals speak out things that they hear.*

**One:** What do you smell or touch or taste that praises God?

*Individuals speak out things that they smell touch or taste.*

**One:** Let us praise God together!

**All:** Alleluia! Amen!

**One:** Let us come to worship the God of sunshine and rainbow, thunderstorm and fog.

*Individuals name weather that praises God.*

**One:** Let us come to worship the God of daylilies and tomatoes, fungus, purple loosestrife and multiflora rose.

*Individuals name plants that praise God.*

**One:** Let us come to worship the God of chipmunk and hawk, groundhog, Japanese beetle and mosquito.

*Individuals name animals that praise God.*

**One:** Let us come to worship God, whose creation is wide and gracious, including humanity in all our wondrous variation.

*Individuals name different kinds of people— young and old, different races, nationalities, abilities, orientations—that praise God.*

#### Opening Prayers

Gracious God, we come for a light breeze against our busyness. We come for a growing flower by our weariness. We experience you as a circling hawk, when we need to be inspired. We experience you as a lawn mower, when we

need our weedy wants pruned. We experience you as sunshine healing and cloudy day challenge.

*(Silence)* Please share any situations global or local and any individuals you would like to hold up prayerfully and gather into our community today.

Enter, Spirit of God into each life, and enliven us. Enter Spirit of God, into our community and make us a harvest, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

*Sing "Morning Has Broken" (tune: Bunessan)*

God, morning has broken and we have come to turn our faces toward you like new shoots, to sing like birds in the dawn, to prepare ourselves for the seed of your Easter good news, like our springtime gardens. For all these things we give you thanks.

*(Please name your personal thanksgivings for our beautiful creation or special blessings in your life while the hymn plays once more).*

God, thank you for your teachings of the scripture and your teachings of the sky. We wait before you with open hearts in Jesus' name. Amen

#### Reconciliation

##### 1. Confession

Gracious God, forgive us when we fail to notice the light of sunset, the trail of snail, the inch of hydrangea growth, the fur of puppy or kitten. Forgive us our creation culpability in six-pack rings, insecticide, exhaust, long showers, or plastic bags, and the times we are too busy, too frugal, or too-human-centered to be "green" activists.

*(Time of silence. Please feel free to add ways we damage creation.)*

Forgive us, O God, when we cut off body and spirit from your gracious gift of renewal by indoor-ing ourselves, for we pray in the name of Jesus who slept under the stars. Amen.



## Attachment: Activity 8 (continued)

### Assurance of Grace

Christ hunts us like lost sheep and reminds us of the priorities of songbirds. We are forgiven, inspired, and offered the most amazing responsibility—to make a difference. Amen.

### 2. Confession

*Sing "For the Beauty of the Earth," (tune: Dix)*

For the beauty of the earth—that we have not seen,

For the beauty of the earth—that we have not preserved,

For the beauty of the earth—that we have damaged

or been silent at its destruction . . .

*(Please name ways we do this.)*

Forgive us, God.

For the joy of human love—that we have ignored,

For the joy of human love—dying while we watch another channel,

For the joy of human love—that we damage by personal sins and far away complicities.

*(Please name ways we do this.)*

Forgive us, God. Amen.

### Assurance of Grace

God teaches us to raise a song of praise, not only with our lips open, but with wide-spread hearts and hands. We are forgiven and given responsibility again for the beautiful earth and all aspects of human love. Amen

### Invitations to Share

1. An Affirmation of Faith for God's creation may sound different from what we usually hear in church: Take a shower instead of a bath, fix faucet leaks, keep cold water in

your refrigerator so you don't have to run the tap, turn off unneeded lights, combine car trips, combine people in car trips, use air conditioning minimally, don't idle your car, use a bike, turn down your hot water thermostat, and the regular thermostat while you're at it, weather-strip air leaks, participate in recycling, donate your old eyeglasses and your old cars, wrap presents in recycled gift wrap or old comic papers, take your own bags to the grocery store, decrease your environmental footprint, enjoy the out of doors . . .

For the last few weeks we have suggested that we would take time for individuals to share particular concerns, organizations and ideas. Let us stop for a minute and do that. I invite you to share a personal experience.

2. Invite people to share between the verses of hymns (softly play music under the sharing). Sing "Touch the Earth Lightly" (tune: Tenderness).

Verse 1: What we want our children to experience on this earth

Verse 2: What creatures are extinct and endangered, or name general damage to the earth

Verse 3: What ideas would make a difference

*Sing "For Beauty of Meadows," (tune: St. Denio).*

Verse 1: What you find most beautiful in nature

Verse 2: Ways human beings have damaged creation

Verse 3: What we can do to take care of God's world

Verse 1: Sung again with deep feeling

# Giving Testimony and Witness



## Exploration: Future and Vision

### About this Setting

Many events that look a little like worship quickly become the past. Dance recitals, rock concerts, school plays, athletic games, even Christmas pageants involve preparation by active participants, appreciation by those who attend, and a good memory or even a DVD. But Sunday leads on to Sunday, and Sunday, and Sunday again. Worship is always benediction on the way to a call to worship. No one can rest on laurels or brood on bloopers. Testimony is ongoing and future oriented.

The three Exploring and Engaging activities that follow are shaped for weekly congregational worship and can be adapted to contemporary, traditional, and blended services. The three Discerning and Deciding activities suggest worship planning that invites testimony. The three Sending and Serving activities take this faith practice to specific contexts in the community and worship contexts beyond the local church.

### About this Exploration

A glimpse of God's realm becomes possible every time we practice testimony and witness. In this Exploration we move daily to express the presence of God through language, symbols, and rituals, as we increase our hope and vision for ourselves and future generations. By sharing our experiences of God's love day to day, we pass on the all-encompassing grace that sets a foundation for the church of tomorrow. Acknowledging that the practice of testimony and witness is an ongoing process, we focus our attention upon God's continuing revelation, as we move toward the future "kin-dom" (the realm of God where all are kin).





## BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16–18**  
**Philemon 1:1–25**

## Leader Preparation

Spend a week praying the worship service. If weekly worship involves a bulletin, use it. If worship is usually paperless, note all the various components. Consider each discreet, distinct aspect of the liturgy and reflect on how that part of worship encourages people to share their faith and/or listen to faith being shared. Pray for that to happen next week. (Beware, some judicious worship pruning may suggest itself.)

*Prayer: God, I celebrate the running, not the finish line; dancing with your stars, not the judges' scoring. I give thanks for the holy last Sunday, and pray for miracles and mercies in the Sunday to come. Amen.*

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Altar Calls (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** If an altar call is not a regular part of the worship tradition in your congregation, it takes careful preparation. It is a special opportunity for personal prayer that immediately follows the worship service. A decision must be made about how often to offer it. Once is never enough for people to become comfortable with the concept. Sundays with Holy Communion or baptism are good choices, as are first Sundays of each liturgical season. Provide information about the altar call in the newsletter and bulletin before the service that includes an altar call. If someone comes from a background where altar calls are only for conversion to Christian faith or follow deep remorse for sinfulness, that person would be unlikely to seek healing prayer for a newly diagnosed friend or a blessing for a long road trip. The invitation should also make clear that it is not an extension to the service, but an integral part of worship.

It is important to tell staff, choir members, and deacons that the sanctuary will continue to be used as sacred space after worship has formally ended, so that busyness, chit-chat, and cleanup does not begin.

Finally, it is important to prepare those who will meet with people who come forward, clarifying that this is not pastoral counseling, but a liturgical moment that may use laying on of hands or anointing in the case of healing. Some may wish to have a prayer model, while others will be comfortable with extemporaneous prayer. Confidentiality is absolute—even if the prayer seems to be about a “good” thing. Make pastoral appointments for follow-through at the conclusion.

#### **Supplies:**

- artwork: “Baptism” by Hullis Mavruk
- [www.tinyurl.com/fp-aphm](http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-aphm)
- song: “Tú has venido a la orilla (“You Have Come Down to the Lakeshore”) (tune: Pescador De Hombres 8.10.10 with refrain)  
[www.tinyurl.com/fp-orilla](http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-orilla)
- “Sample Prayers,” Attachment: Activity 1

An altar call, loosely defined, is the opportunity, immediately following the benediction, for individuals to come forward to share a personal realization that emerged from the worship context and to receive a blessing prayer for it. Examples include making a commitment to Christ through a prayer of conversion or repentance and renewal, seeking personal healing or special intercession for someone who is ill, witnessing to a vow or promise such as the decision to enter recovery from an addiction, seeking a blessing on a new engagement, a new job, or a trip to be taken.

#### **Altar Call Outline**

- Invitation to remain: In a church with PowerPoint projection, using Hullis Mavruk’s “Baptism” is worth many words. Invite people to remain for the reasons above and tell them that they will have a chance for personal conversation and prayer.
- Concluding hymn for worship service, such as “You Have Come Down to the Lakeshore” or a congregation favorite for commitment
- Benediction
- Postlude while people gather in the front pews



- Welcome to the postservice: *This is a day of blessing—blessing for God’s children. Someone needs a healing; someone needs a plan. Someone makes a decision; someone prays for another’s pain. We are together, giving support to one another, even though you do not need to know the prayer of the heart. You are also alone, receiving God’s undivided attention. This is a day of blessing—blessing for God’s children.*
- Individual prayers, based on brief conversation (see the attachment)
- Benediction for the postservice
- Plans for follow-through individual meetings
- Thanks to deacons or other lay leaders who shared this responsibility.
- Prayer: *God, we give you thanks for each of these who offered your grace through prayer and the laying on of hands to your children who gathered this morning/evening. So touch each one in their needs for healing or hope, for renewal or courage, for patience or tenderness, that the blessing they shared will return to them manyfold, for we pray through Jesus Christ, who sent out disciples filled with the Spirit, and welcomed them back to an easy yoke and a holy rest. Amen.*



## 2 Guided Meditation

**Leader preparation:** This visual, meditative, anonymous, written testimony is a model for one of the personally safest of witness formats. It can provide the comfort for introverts that will allow them to try testimony in other, riskier contexts. It is set here as a part of the time of community prayers but it could be done at other times, perhaps during congregational worship, as retreat worship, or as a small contemporary service. It could become a conversational sermon. However, even though it provides anonymity, it asks for what could be personally difficult reflection. Please be aware of the emotional and spiritual needs for healing that may emerge from this experience. Written testimony after a time of meditation encourages the heart to open.

### Supplies:

- index cards distributed or inserted into bulletins
- writing instruments
- baskets for collecting cards
- “Guided Meditation,” Attachment: Activity 2
- artwork: “Blind Feeling” by Diana Ong  
[www.tinyurl.com/fp-apdo](http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-apdo) (Project this art, or scan if for a bulletin cover.)

Before the time of community prayers, invite people to meditate on the image “Blind Feeling” by Diana Ong. Let the worshipers visually wander from face to face without direction for a moment. Then continue with the guided meditation provided on the attachment.

## 3 Naming God

**Leader preparation:** Using different imagery for God sometimes feels like a threat, and people will jump to the conclusion that “Father” is being taken away. A joyful experience with new metaphors for God can be eye and heart opening. It allows people to witness to a new vision. It does, however, cause the service to be turned a little bit upside down and calls for leadership with some improvisational skill!

### Supplies:

- legal pad to pass around
- pencils in the pews



Use a benediction as a call to worship. Beverley Osborne, a laywoman from Aotearoa/New Zealand, has written this “Benediction in a Trinity of Birds”:

As the whirr of unseen wings tell us of the flight of the *keruru*, may the blessings that surround us speak of God’s love.

As the call of the *morepork* sounds in the loneliness of the night, may we recognize the companionship of the Christ in our dark times.

As the song of the *tui* peals melody to hills and sky and bush, may your joyous spirit sing through us into the world around us. Amen.

*(keruru—Maori word for a bird also called the New Zealand pigeon; morepork—Maori word for a small brown owl, mainly nocturnal, sometimes active at dawn and dusk; tui—Maori name for a honeyeater bird with two voice boxes)*

Beverley Osborne uses bird imagery for God. This is common in the Bible, from Psalm 91:4 “God shall cover you with long feathers, and under God’s wings you will find refuge,” to Jesus in Luke 13, likening God to a mother hen who would love to gather her chicks under her wings.

There are many images in the Bible for God: light and stronghold, tent and rock of ages, living water and true vine, fountain, shepherd, voice in the darkness, breath of life, burning bush, and many more.

In our opening prayer there is a blank where we would usually see “God,” or a metaphor for God. We will pause this morning for people to call out different names for God, and then we will continue with the prayer. During our worship service we will pass around a pad of paper and invite you to write a name for God. That pad will come forward during the final hymn, and our closing benediction will use some of the names you have chosen. Other metaphors will appear in our liturgy in the next couple weeks.

*Giving thanks to the God of many names, the God who is uniquely present in our lives, let us pray: We come to worship you this morning, \_\_\_\_\_ grateful for the community of faith, looking to your presence for our hope, and sharing gifts of love. Open us to unexpected sources of inspiration, holy words of friends and strangers, and cups of cool water from many wells so that our prayers for healing may be stronger and our songs of joy brighter, and so our feet may neither stumble, nor cause another’s stumbling. Amen.*

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### ④ Invitation for Funeral Sharing (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Some worship leaders, clergy and lay, are not comfortable with an “open mike” format of witness to the life of a person who has died. It takes very strong and very gentle leadership to know how to gently rein in the impulsive or rephrase the incoherent. A sanctuary setting is the best place to learn this liturgical skill because it shapes the speech of people who gather. When fearful of the “joke-likeness” of a particular family or friend grouping, use the prayer to settle people and to give people unused to funeral customs some clues. If this opportunity for witness happens early in the service, the rest of the service can be abridged subtly if it takes more time than expected.



## Supplies:

- “Invitations to Use at Funerals or Memorial Services,” Attachment: Activity 4

It’s becoming customary at funerals and memorial services to provide an opportunity for people to witness to their love for and good memories of a friend who has died. Some families are concerned that people will speak on and on, or that there will be inappropriate memories shared. They tend to choose the prepared speeches of a few friends or family members. Providing a couple invitations that can be given at this time may put their minds at ease and help them participate in this practice of testimony that is healing and hopeful for family and friends alike. Use the sample invitations on the attachment or modify as appropriate.

## 5 Blessing the Cell Phones

**Leader preparation:** Cell phones and smart phones are loved and disparaged. They are certainly one way people tell their stories to one another. Potentially they are a way to share good news. People are distracted by cell phones; they are defensive about cell phones; they are dependent on cell phones. Blessing this small instrument is a reminder to those who consider the device almost a body part that every way we connect with other members of the body of Christ should be blessed.

This planning process may be an opportunity to empower young adults or youth. As they consider what it is to “bless” technology, they may want to expand this ritual or develop a parallel ceremony for laptops or Ipods or include those devices in this blessing.

## Supplies:

- laptop with projection, or whiteboard or newsprint and markers

The faith practice of testimony and bearing witness is about telling our stories. We tell our stories so often on our cell phones/smart phones that it is appropriate to bless them so that the words we speak may connect us to the Word who is Christ Jesus. There are four parts to planning the ritual: an invitation to have cell phones blessed, a litany of thanks for them, a litany of confession for their misuse with the connected assurance of grace, and a prayer of blessing. After welcoming the group and deciding whether it is most appropriate to have cell phones on or off, begin with the litany of thanks. Use the laptop or newsprint or whiteboard to record ideas and suggestions.

### **Litany of Thanks for Cell Phones**

Suggest a response such as, “Thanks, God.” This may be replaced later by a litany line the group writes. Invite the group to create at least eight lines that express their gratitude for the communication that cell phones offer.

Here are some suggestions, but the group will be more creative:

- For all the ways we communicate . . .
- For quickly being in touch with those who matter most . . .
- For texting words that give people confidence in difficult times . . .
- For apps that keep us from getting lost . . .

As they come up with their own suggestions, participants will share stories about times they have been connected.



### Litany of Confession for Cell Phones:

Suggest a response such as “Forgive us, God.” This, too, may be replaced. Invite the group to create at least eight lines that express repentance and regret.

Here are some suggestions, but the group will be more creative:

- For all the times cell phones are used for bullying . . .
- For all the times cell phones ring and distract us from important conversations . . .
- For being tempted to text while driving . . .
- When we walk by natural beauty without enjoying it . . .
- When a wedding is interrupted . . .

Invite the group to shape an Assurance of Grace or Words of Forgiveness, such as “God always talks to us. God always listens to us. God’s forgiveness is never out of range.”

During this time there will also be personal witness about the hard times such as being ignored by a friend in favor of a phone conversation, or experiencing a parent’s invasion of privacy.

For the Prayer of Blessing the planning group will decide whether each person will bring forward a phone or bluetooth for a blessing, or whether these devices will be collected in a basket and a single prayer said over all.

The group will be creative by this time and can shape their own blessing using the format “Bless the cell phone. Bless the owner of the cell phone.” But here is a sample.

*God, bless this cell phone that it may plan fun times, be used in moderation, take kind pictures, express friendship, protect us in danger. Bless (name of cell phone owner) to remember that as immediate as a cell phone is, prayer is faster. And, just as a cell phone needs to be charged, so does the life of faith. Amen.*

## 6 Track Team—Running the Race Together, or Developing a Worship Committee

**Leader preparation:** Read 2 Timothy 4:6–8 and 16–18. The apostle Paul worked with many colleagues. When the end of his life was approaching, he celebrated a retrospective of his many fights and races (his metaphors for witnessing to the good news), but also complained of times he lacked support and was even deserted. That is a common feeling for many church professionals. Becoming a track team rather than a long distance runner is a way to cross God’s finish line as a community. Clergy, choir directors, and other church staff do well to empower others to share worship decision-making and planning. It is often more work to share responsibility than to simply do things oneself, but this commitment offers deep joy.

### Supplies:

- Bible
- laptop or newsprint or whiteboard and markers
- 6” squares of aluminum foil—enough for each participant
- worship center with books at different heights covered by lovely cloth to create levels



Convene a new special worship committee or worship team for a trial year. Let tasks such as serving communion, lay reading, or ushering be cared for by the usual committee. By making this a one- or two-year experiment, the congregation's bylaws do not need to be changed. This activity gathers representatives from different parts of the church to discuss what might be appropriate for this new group.

Gather the planners in a circle, and give each participant a square of aluminum foil. Read Romans 16:1–16. Thank the reader for tongue-twisting his or her way through all these names! Indicate that as best as scholars can tell, Paul is sending greetings to lay people—thirteen women and fifteen men.

Invite the group to remember a layperson—male or female, young or old—who has made a difference to them. With the aluminum foil fashion a little replica of this person. The tiny statue can't be ugly—it is shiny foil! Invite participants to share stories about these persons, and place the aluminum foil figures on the worship center. Spiritually speaking, this one-time planning committee has now doubled in size!

Read 1 Timothy 4:6–8 as a rationale for developing a “track team” for worship rather than the “loneliness of the long-distance runner.” Discuss what two to five things this group could begin by doing—perhaps by looking at the suggested list. Only then, with an idea of what the tasks might be, consider the composition and size of the group, noting the suggestions below, and trying to collect some new faces. Finally, discuss the covenant that this group will make, including regular attendance and an open, honest relationship with clergy and staff support.

Suggestions, or rather a palette of activities from which to choose:

- Lead and read in weekly worship—if not otherwise done.
- Choose music or plan the liturgy (writing calls to worship, litanies, benedictions, and so forth) for the month ahead.
- Discover, invite, welcome, introduce, and conduct fund-raising events for special worship elements, such as cellists, praise bands, chancel drama, liturgical dancers.
- Two weeks before the beginning of each new liturgical season host a “What Is the Season” discussion after church.
- Host and moderate occasional sermon feedback times.
- Plan worship for the pastor's absence by inviting, resourcing, and hosting guest preachers, or offering different worship experiences.
- Take worship “out to pray” at nursing homes and assisted living complexes, correctional facilities, hospice houses, and hospitals, and prepare home sacraments for shut-ins.
- Support Christian educators by offering children's “church” events, leading after-church communion services for teachers, and preparing worship at Christian education events so that program planners can have a piece for which they are not directly responsible.
- Plan special services, such as Palm Sunday, Pentecost, All Saints Day, Ash Wednesday, MLK Jr. Commemoration, Blessing the Animals, Labor Day, World Communion Sunday, Sunrise Service . . . occasions that are present in the church's life, but not already “ritualized.”
- Plan and host (letting clergy and other staff take a break) worshipful “nonworship” events, such as a labyrinth walk, open chapel during Lent, a Good Friday prayer vigil, or a take-home Advent candle liturgy.



Consider these suggestions for the composition of the group (some people may fit more than one role):

- Persons representing newcomers, longer-time members (five years or more), and different ages, including youth
- Someone with musical gifts
- Someone with artistic/design gifts (not necessarily hands-on, but able to envision visual elements in worship that would empower others, such as quilts, crèches, Bibles, group banner making)
- Someone with writing gifts
- Someone with technology gifts

End the planning session by inviting a layperson to give a concluding prayer.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Holy Humor Service (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Claim joy and laughter as having a rightful place in worship: to lift up the health benefits of laughter; to refuse to give over comedy to the off-color, vulgar, or mean-spirited; and to give members of the faith community the courage to speak out against humor based in cruel depictions of the “other”—race, ethnicity, gender, orientation, profession. These themes alone are worth a service in which people witness by telling kind, joyful jokes and allow themselves to appear foolish. This may need to happen at a nonweekly worship time, perhaps as an experimental evening service. If it occurs in the more normal worship time, it often takes place on the Sunday after Easter (the resurrection is God’s joke on the devil), on Transfiguration Day, or on a summer Sunday in Ordinary Time.

#### **Supplies:**

- basket of jokes
- “Liturgical Resources for Holy Humor Worship,” Attachment: Activity 7

Invite people to bring humorous stories and jokes to worship as a witness to a vision of joy for all God’s people. Remind people that these should not be based in racial, ethnic, ability-based, orientation, or professional differences. Provide a basket of jokes at the door of the sanctuary for those who forget to bring something. This also helps clarify the idea. The times in the service when these are shared are called “Isaac Interludes.” The biblical name Isaac in Hebrew means laughter. Liturgical suggestions for the service may be found on the attachment. Base a sermon on the physical and psychological benefits of humor or on the challenge to respond to “ugly” jokes in workplace, school, or even family.

### 8 Tale Mail

**Leader preparation:** This invitation to write a letter in community can be deeply meaningful. It is appropriate for small group worship, perhaps in the midst of a retreat for adults or youth, or an intergenerational context. As a leader, be aware that participants may access deep needs for reconciliation or expression that may surprise them and cause them to wish to talk with someone for emotional and spiritual support. The activity is focused on people experiencing a written witness to someone else and the shared witness of offering one another support.



Some discussion on Onesimus's slavery and the distinctions between ancient Roman and African American slavery may be helpful and may invite further conversation.

Decide whether to encourage written letters or to include using laptops to send e-mail. The e-mail option may help younger people feel more engaged, but it is important that everyone wait for the blessing prayer before they hit the Send button.

### Supplies:

- Bible
- variety of paper, including “thank you” and “thinking of you” cards, stationary, and plain paper
- envelopes
- writing instruments
- stamps

A community time of writing and blessing letters is based in a reading of Paul's letter to Philemon. Paul wrote many letters and most of them included personal notes to individuals. However, the purpose of the majority of his letters (as is true of the other early church epistles) was to address situations in the small communities either to answer ethical decisions or theological questions that had been sent to him, to share wisdom he had learned in his travels, or to request financial assistance for others or for himself.

Paul's letter to Philemon is different. It is a letter with a particular request addressed to one man, Philemon, telling a story about another man, Onesimus. By reading this very personal epistle we will prepare to spend time in community writing personal letters, acknowledging that they are very important in the eyes of God.

Read Philemon 1–7. Discuss what is contained in the greeting, asking questions such as: *How do Christians greet one another? Has this changed in a busy “ASAP” kind of world? Is thanking someone part of how we introduce a request?*

Read Philemon 8–21 and sort out the story in the letter, including slave relationships in the contemporary world and the punishment for running away. Paul offers Philemon another perspective on a story he already knows from his own point of view—that Onesimus ran away. *How does Paul take care to do this?* Paul does not tell this story objectively. He wants Philemon to free Onesimus and return him to Paul. *How does Paul use compliments or appeal to compassion to gain this effect?*

Read Philemon 22–25 and consider how the closing to the letter is crafted. How do we do this now?

“Grace to you and peace.” So begins Paul's letter to Philemon about Onesimus. Invite the participants to write letters in a time of reflective and worshipful quiet. Perhaps . . .

- you have been meaning to write a “thank you” for something recent. You now have the opportunity for this to be truly special.
- you have been meaning to write a “thank you” for something that happened a long time ago.
- the person you to whom you will write is living, or perhaps she or he is with God. You can still write the letter you have been meaning to write.
- there is someone who needs to hear another side of a story that he or she thinks they know.
- you need to ask forgiveness or for a favor or for a second chance.





- there is someone you have been meaning to be in touch with, someone who would never expect to hear from you, someone who doesn't know you but who touched your life.
- there is a letter in you for a child, one written now but intended to be read on a graduation day or a wedding day a long time from now.
- you would like to write a letter to God.

Prayer before writing: *Gracious God, let us remember one another in our prayers, thanking you for the memories of love, sorting out the memories of pain. May the sharing of our words become the sharing of our faith both with those who will receive these letters and with each of us as our mutual encouragement refreshes us and reminds us that we are the saints of God, empowered by the Word, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Give ten minutes for the writing. Remind the participants that you are writing a tale for the mail or a tale for the e-mail, but, if they are online, please wait for the blessing. After the writing provide time for anyone who wishes to share either the identity of the person to whom he or she wrote, a bit of the story, and whether it was hard or easy to do, or to read a portion of the letter. Do not offer comments or allow discussion. Only say, "Thank you" and ask for any other sharing. Do not mandate this verbal sharing, but gratefully receive it.

Blessing Prayer: *O God, let the grace of Christ Jesus rest upon these letters. May their words be a blessing where blessing is needed, a healing where healing is needed, a joy where confidence is needed, a sign of peace where closure is needed. May all the world's slaveries be ended and all the world compassion be restored. In each relationship between us, and between the us who are here today and the cloud of witnesses living or dead who receive these letters, may the spirit be indeed the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

## 9 Opening Worship for a Church Staff Meeting Focusing on Writing

**Leader preparation:** Fall staff meetings in congregations are often pressured, as if turning the September calendar page opens the faucet on a cold shower. The future comes rushing, not inviting. This model for brief opening worship uses singing and writing as a way to slow down. The group may be paid staff or volunteer staff, but should include those who send e-mail blasts or newsletters, as well as those who create programming for children and youth.

### **Supplies:**

- Bible
- index cards and pencils or pens
- a worship center with autumn leaves or sea shells, pine cones, flowers, fruit, bark from a birch tree placed on simply woven cloth

Taking time for the intentionality and liturgy of an opening worship, rather than a quick reading or questions about summer activities, gives a gentle weightiness to the opening staff meeting. It reminds us that the plans can wait for a little singing, scripture, and writing of prayers. Because of the "agenda anxiety," however, it avoids open-ended witness in favor of a more structured format of twelve to fifteen minutes.

**Scripture:** Luke 1:1–4; Philemon 1–7; Revelation 21:3–5



**Song:** “I Love to Write the Story” based on “I Love to Tell the Story” (tune: Hankey)

I love to write the story in ways that make it new,  
to touch the hearts of children and those whose days are few.  
I love to write the story in drama, sermon, song,  
for every time I share them, I know we all belong.

I love to write the story for nave or laboratory,  
to write anew the story of Jesus and his love.

I love to write the story on web, in newsletter and prayer.  
the text becomes text-message—Theophilus is there.  
And when folks need the comfort that God will dry their tears,  
the mouse rolls out a gospel that crosses all the years.

I love to write the story for jail or dormitory,  
to write anew the story of Jesus and his love.

I love to write the story for joy or for distress—  
a poem that’s familiar, a blog for newer guests.  
There’s grace I am downloading, there’s hope on my ha-rd drive,  
and framed by old, old stories, my journal is alive.

I love to write the story—this holy inventory  
of hearts graffitied with glory . . . because of Jesus’ love!

### **Time to Write Prayers**

Pass out index cards and pencils, and invite everyone to write a prayer of hope and energy for the coming season. Share the prayers and conclude with the Prayer of Our Savior.

**Closing song:** (based on “Jesus Calls Us O’er the Tumult”) (tune: Galilee)

Jesus calls us from the tumult of this autumn-anxious church, [or Lenten-]  
bids us quiet, bids us listen, turns us inward in our search.

Yes, the programs and the church school! Yes, the stewardship campaign!  
Yes, the fairs and, yes, the pageants educate and entertain.

All these fragile gifts and blessings may become mere pantomime,  
if we do not find the still place. Jesus asks us for our time.

Jesus calls us to be callers. We invite; they take a chance.  
Youth will listen, elders follow. When Christ leads, we all can dance.

### **Benediction with a Word**

Invite each person to add a word or pick up an object from the table that is his or her contribution to a blessing for the meeting and the church program year to come.



## Following the Church Year

“It’s about me!” The practice of testimony and giving witness is most frequently personal story recognition and telling: the heart-open listening to others’ stories, and the personal affirmation of the presence of God, the good news of Jesus Christ, and the windy, fiery, comforting, urging breath of the Holy Spirit. There is another aspect to the practice of testimony. We witness for others. It is intercession in prayer. We tell one another’s stories into the presence of God and the community of faith. Sometimes we tell the whole situation, even if briefly: someone is facing surgery, someone is struggling with an addiction, someone is engaged to be married, a couple is pregnant after long trying. Other times we whisper out a name during a time when all the other worshipers are naming names, and the texture of these names becomes a tapestry of prayer.

A way to “practice” the practice of testimony in intercessory prayer is to change the common model for intercession with the season. Occasionally, the method becomes stiff, unduly lengthy, or simply so common to the community that leaders are unaware that it does not welcome newcomers. A church year of change will renew the practice.

### **Advent—Christmas—Placed at the manger**

For these two seasons concerns are written and not spoken aloud. Index cards are in the bulletins and available in the narthex for people to write out a prayer concern with or without a name. They are gathered and placed around a crèche or beside an Advent wreath. The prayer is for all of these without naming specifics. The advantage is the ease of telling stories that are very painful, and the possibility of praying for oneself, which people often do not want to do. During the week the pastor will read and pray for them again, but only contact those who ask for follow-up.

### **Epiphany—Revealed**

A traditional time of joys and concerns involves people naming those for whom they wish to pray and the pastor then praying for these by name. This is familiar to some congregations and completely new in others. It contrasts beautifully with the quiet waiting format of the preceding season.

### **Lent—Split intercession**

During Lent a time of oral celebrations or joys separated from the time of concerns (opposite ends of the service) demonstrates to people how mixed life is—the same person may appear in both intercessions. It also encourages people to share celebrations. Often in the midst of difficult stories, people are too shy to add a birthday, an anniversary, a school honor achieved. These are just as valid in the rainbow prayers of God’s people.

### **Eastertide—Resurrection murmuring**

During Eastertide a “time of murmuring” invites more people to share prayers. Develop a series of bidding prayers, such as: for those who are ill, for those who anticipate surgery or treatment, for those who are mourning, for those who are celebrating life passages, for those who are making decisions. There is time after each of these for people to name individuals, allowing names to overlap rather than waiting for a silence (which can take worshipers out of a prayerful spirit). Concerns not covered by those more regular ones can be written on a card and given to the pastor or an usher on a particular day. These might be for teachers and students starting a new school year, for Thanksgiving weekend travelers, for those who are divorcing, and so forth. Many more people will participate in these more anonymous prayers.



### **Pentecost (and several weeks following)—The Spirit pours on everyone**

During a period of time from Pentecost forward members of the congregation will lift up their own prayers. They can be guided to say, “God, I pray for . . . concern or celebration . . . let the people say ‘Amen.’” The congregation responds, “Amen.” This is the most vulnerable form of witnessing for others, but it deeply meaningful for all.

### **Ordinary Time—Praying through the week**

In the narthex is both a laptop and a book for people to type/write prayer concerns and celebrations before the service. These are shared in worship and sent out to the congregation for prayer during the week (the “book” of intercessions being entered into the computer). During the time of intercession the pastor asks for any other concerns or celebrations and states that these will not be shared throughout the congregation. This reinvigorates the much loved prayer chain on a weekly basis and provides privacy for those who do not wish dissemination.



## Attachment: Activity 1

### Sample Prayers

Remember that your additions from personal conversation fill these prayers with deep meaning, but also remember that God heard the conversation. You are not responsible to add all the nuances. Your simple prayer seals what we know is true—God is here!

#### **For personal physical healing:**

O God, bless with your grace and healing this your child, \_\_\_\_\_, who faces \_\_\_\_\_. Guide doctors and nurses with insight, give (*both the individual and any health care proxy*) clarity in decision-making, support \_\_\_\_\_'s family with patience and the ability to speak wise and compassionate words, and keep \_\_\_\_\_ constantly aware of the companionship of Jesus Christ. Amen.

#### **Intercession for another's healing:**

Bless, O God, \_\_\_\_\_, for whom we pray, who faces \_\_\_\_\_, that grace and healing, mercy and love may flow freely into his/her life. Bless her/him with your presence whether or not s/he is aware of it. Let this prayer become a garment wrapping him/her in love and give \_\_\_\_\_, who brings this prayer today, insight into appropriate ways to share and care in Christ's name. Amen.

#### **For healing other than physical illness:**

Bless, O God, in spirit, mind, heart, and relationship, your child \_\_\_\_\_, who seeks healing deep within, and give grace so abundantly that all may see your love and give thanks. Amen.

#### **For commitment to Christ/decision-making in life:**

God, we place before you this decision \_\_\_\_\_, rejoicing in the clarity of these moments, grateful for your Spirit's presence, witnessing before you our sense of your love that has drawn us here, and claiming for \_\_\_\_\_ the strength and grace of the Holy Spirit in spite of any temptation, through all difficulties, and in the midst of every confusion, for this you have promised through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

#### **Blessing for an engagement / job:**

God, now begins a new time of \_\_\_\_\_. We feel joy, excitement, some anxiety, much new responsibility. Bless \_\_\_\_\_ with a constant sense of your presence, sustaining the integrity of the journey, not only at this starting point, but throughout every twist and turn, hill and valley. Confident in your love, we pray in the name of Christ, who shows us the path of love and bids us follow. Amen.



## Attachment: Activity 2

## Guided Meditation

Display the art “Blind Feeling” by Diana Ong: [www.tinyurl.com/fp-apdo](http://www.tinyurl.com/fp-apdo). Ask a volunteer to describe the painting for those with limited vision. Invite contemplation with these or similar questions:

- How many faces are visible?
- How many colors are visible?
- How are these lines and colors anatomically realistic, and how are they parables of the human face?

Ask for any additions or clarifications to this description.

**Invitation:** Please take a few minutes to meditate on this picture by Diana Ong called “Blind Feeling.” Look in it for one or more “faces” from your own life. Perhaps one of them is someone you long to see. You would dearly love to see this face. The person may be around the corner, far away, or already in God’s tender care we call the resurrection. Mentally name this person, and continue to reflect and pray for this person if you wish.

A second face is one you would not like to see. If you caught a glimpse of this face it would make you uncomfortable, angry, sad, guilty, or simply awkward. This face may be from your distant past or near past, living or dead. Mentally name this person and continue in this reflection if you wish.

Finally, I invite you to recognize in these faces a face you see often but do not usually dwell upon—perhaps a family member, a work colleague, a mail carrier, a regular cashier at the grocery store.

Now I invite you to offer the good news to one of these three faces—the face of the person for whom you long, the face of the person you would prefer not to see, the face of the person who is always peripheral in your vision. Do not put the person’s name on the card. Write that good news for that person on your index card. These are completely anonymous, both for you as writer and for the person to whom you

are offering your testimony. They will be collected, shared aloud, blessed, and destroyed.

What might be good news for that person: something as simple as “Jesus loves you” or “You are a beloved child of God” or as specific as “No, I didn’t love your sister more than you” or “You are beautiful, even after the accident” or “You don’t need to be afraid of the chemo; God is going to be right there” or something as true as “You can believe in yourself” or “Your smile across the counter brightens my day.”

God has given us so much good news, and we give witness to it! Please write on your card, and then we will share them. If the person for whom you are writing is still living, you may find that this afternoon or sometime in the week to come you want to personally share that good news by e-mail, phone call, or in person. It is not necessary—before this community of the faithful there floats a multitude of faces and we witness that the good news has been offered to them.

**Prayer of Blessing:** (after reading of the cards)

O Holy One, you looked into the faces of those you healed—a woman who clutched your robe, a man who lived in a graveyard and hurt himself because there were so many unwell spirits in him, a leper clean and returning to give thanks, a woman so bent over she couldn’t see your smile until you helped her stand.

You looked into other faces as well—a boy with his lunch to share, a friend who denied you, soldiers who killed you, a weeping woman who didn’t recognize that you were alive in the garden.

We pray your blessing upon each person upon whose face we have reflected today and upon each of us. Help us to recognize your active holy presence in our lives and in the lives of others and to name it clearly and hopefully that it may change the world. Amen



Attachment: Activity 4

**Invitations to Use at Funerals or Memorial Services**

1. The apostle Paul the wrote to the little congregation at Philippi words that help us reflect on those who have died. He wrote: "Finally, my friends, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things . . . and the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7,6).

Paul is right emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. In sharing our memories of \_\_\_\_\_ we begin to heal the pain of missing him/her. We smile, we cry, we laugh at the stories. I invite you to share a memory—just a sentence or two—no long speeches, no polished words—just a memory of \_\_\_\_\_. Don't worry if you don't recall everything! I will share some of the many stories that people already have told me. These good and healing memories will keep coming every month as the seasons change and we remember how it was to enjoy those season with \_\_\_\_\_. But, if a few of you would do so now, stand where you are and speak clearly or come forward.

Thank you for this remarkable gift of memories. This is not the end to the memories we share. They will ambush and comfort us all our days to come, and that's a good thing.

2. The Second Letter to Timothy is cast as the farewell of a mentor to a beloved disciple: "As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Life is full of fight-moments and bright-moments, strenuous races and sweet graces. We gather to remember someone who not only "kept the faith," as the scripture says, but who passed it on to us. We are going to take a few minutes to remember the details, the ordinary up-and-down moments of \_\_\_\_\_'s life. A crown of righteousness probably has some jewels, and jewels have many facets. So, together we can share facets of a life. No person knows the whole life of someone else, but all together we know many ages, the settings of school or work or retirement, family or friendship or church.

This is an opportunity to share a few of these stories, just a sentence or two of memory so that as many who wish can share. These are not polished speeches, but heartfelt words. Some of you are comfortable with sharing publicly; others will tell your stories later at the reception; and some will write letters, notes, and e-mails.



### Attachment: Activity 4 (*continued*)

Please stand where you are and speak clearly, or come forward to the microphone.

Thank you for your stories, your gifts of words. Let us pause for a moment of silence to reflect on these and our own very personal memories. We will pass on our memories later today and in the months to come, for we are sure that \_\_\_\_\_, who kept the faith, has passed it on to us as we shall pass it on to others.

### 3. God's Eye Is on the Sparrow—Written Responses

*Instructions to family:* Please invite people at the visiting hours to write one sentence of memory, "I remember when . . ." about \_\_\_\_\_ so that these can be read in the funeral/memorial service. Longer letters will come later, and there will be an opportunity for those who wish to share aloud. But this is a chance for the quieter ones to share a memory. If there are young adults as part of the family and friends, tell them that Jesus reminded people that God knows the falling and rising of every sparrow, and so they should think of these brief words as "twitter" about \_\_\_\_\_.

#### *Prayer before Sharing Memories*

Gentle God, thank you for all our memories of \_\_\_\_\_. We pray your grace on those who will share their simple and heartfelt words. Give them the courage to speak to all of us and for all of us. May the blessing they give the rest of us today return to them in days to come. May these shared thoughts, the continued light-hearted reminiscences of our reception, and the sudden precious times of recalling that will fill the months to come comfort our sorrow, heal our spirits, and encourage us to give \_\_\_\_\_ a legacy of love and honor. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.





Attachment: Activity 7

**Liturgical Resources for Holy Humor Worship**

**Welcome**

Today is Holy Humor Sunday—because the resurrection is God’s joke on the devil. Our “Isaac Interludes” are opportunities to share your jokes, light hearted and happy ones. The biblical name Isaac in Hebrew means laughter. Please be careful to weed out the vulgar, those that make fun of ethnic groups, sexual orientation, abilities, weight, and blond hair. There’s a basket in the narthex with some suggested jokes if you forgot to bring one.

**Gathering Words** *(in several voices, but without speaking the texts cited)*

For everything there is a season . . .  
a time to weep and a time to laugh. *(Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4)*

God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise . . .  
we are fools for the sake of Christ . . . *(1 Corinthians. 1:27, 4:10)*

A cheerful heart is a good medicine,  
but a downcast spirit dries up the bones. *(Proverbs 17:22)*

Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. *(Luke 6:21)*

When God restored the fortunes of Zion,  
we were like those who dream,  
then our mouth was filled with laughter  
and our tongue with shouts of joy . . . *(Psalm 126:1–2)*

Now Sarah said, “God has brought laughter for me  
and everyone who hears will laugh with me.” *(Genesis 21:6)*

Why do you look for the living among the dead?  
He is not here but has risen. *(Luke 24:5)*

**Opening Hymn:** “For the Humor of the Earth” (tune DIX)

For the humor of the earth—Easter Day with crusty snows,  
for the raucous seagulls mirth, and spring’s tickling wind that blows . . .  
Christ who meets us as a clown, turn our tight hearts upside down.

For the beauty of a smile—after salty tears and sighs,  
for one anger reconciled, or one kindness as surprise . . .  
Christ who meets us as a clown, turn our tight hearts upside down.

For this church’s open door, where the child in each may rest,  
Letting laughter heal, restore life’s unbalance, hope’s distress  
Christ who meets us as a clown, turn our tight hearts upside down.



### Attachment: Activity 7 (*continued*)

#### **Invocation**

God, thank you for the sheer joy in our lives and the little smiles around the edges of hard times. We come to the light of your presence to laugh—not *at* one another but *with* one another, and to share our hope in Jesus Christ. Amen.

#### **Passing the Hilarity**

*(St Augustine wrote that Christians should find the resurrection hilarious.)*

The joy of Christ be with you.

And also with you.

#### **Prayer of Confession**

Gracious God, we confess that sometimes we put a negative interpretation on the attempts of others to be friendly, stifle the pleasure of others with cynicism, and ignore our own needs for lightness and healing humor. We also confess that sometimes we laugh at the expense of others, or are silent when jokes make fun of others' differences. We hate to feel foolish, but please forgive us anyway. Amen.

#### **Assurance of Grace**

God who takes us lightly, puts new spirits where mean spirits have been.

Thanks be to God.

#### **Benediction**

God created the heavens and the earth  
with aardvarks and everyone's adolescence.

God sent us prophets  
and one of them was Jonah;  
God so loved the world,  
God did not send a committee.

May your tight places be loosened  
and your heavy burdens lightened,  
and may healing come  
through salt tears and chuckles.  
Amen.