

Honoring the Body



Exploration: Discovery

About this Setting

Honoring the body underlies what makes us the United Church of Christ (UCC). We believe each body, made in the divine image, is an expression and demonstration of holy love. To honor what God honors is at the core of our identity and history as a denomination. Our covenants at the local, regional, and national levels are undergirded by a profound respect for the bodies God created, Christ redeemed, and the Spirit renews daily. Honoring the body becomes a catalyst for our UCC sense of welcome, justice, service, and witness—in and for the world. This faith practice embodies the holy love that bore us and lives through us, both in our denominational past and in these present days.

About this Exploration

God not only creates our bodies, God also relates to us through the embodied form of Jesus Christ. We are moved to reclaim God's presence in the joyful and messy details of everyday life, a task more complicated and richer than depicted in the idealized images of bodies in the media. Through the senses, we experience and explore creation. We enjoy the sight of a rainbow, the smell of roses, or the taste of garlic. We connect with each other through the sound of a voice, the touch of a handshake, or the intimacy of a kiss. We can choose to use our bodies in ways that affirm that we are made in the image of God, discover that God's goodness is planted within our bodies, and express ourselves through our varied talents and limitations.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

1 Kings 19:4-8

John 4:1-42

Leader Preparation

Consider the gift of the body and thank God for it. The body is home to the spirit and mind. It is whole in itself, but flourishes in community. Joining with other bodies in worship, in ministry, in work, and in play, the body grows stronger even amidst the rubbing and tension of being with others. The body was created for relationship, to live in harmony with God, other bodies, and all of creation. The UCC did not spring from a quest for uniformity of bodies, but from a deep desire for unity within the body of Christ, to see the church not broken or in factions, but one with Christ as its head. Invite those present to reflect with you on the history, purpose, and vision of the UCC—and thank God.

Prayer: Lord Jesus who was born into flesh, God who came to us and who is Emmanuel, God with us, thank you for your body. Thank you for its lessons in life, death, and resurrection. Thank you for my body, for its strength and fragility. Help me not to take this body for granted, for through this body comes my prayer, my acts of kindness, my worship of you. Let me respect my body and the bodies of others. Thank you for these bodies meeting with me. Anoint us all now by the power of God as we consider what God has done through our forebears in the faith, things present and to come. Let the Spirit abiding in us speak peace now throughout our bodies as we prepare to see, to smell, to taste, to hear, and to touch God. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 What's in a Name? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: It is not required to lead this session, but “A Short Course in the History of the United Church of Christ,” found on the UCC website <http://www.ucc.org/about-us/short-course>, gives a lot of information about the history of the denomination. The excerpt used for this activity is provided on the attachment. Read and reflect on it. Optionally, you may make copies of the excerpt for everyone. This activity introduces the significance of the identity and history of the denomination as expressed in its name.

Supplies:

- paper
- colored markers
- (optional) “The United Church of Christ,” Attachment: Activity 1

Introduce names as a part of a person’s identity and history. Invite sharing of a few personal stories of what persons’ names mean and how/why they were given their names. Ask about names and nicknames associated with physical characteristics or events (Biggie, Red, Samuel, Lefty, Blondie). Invite discussion of the importance of names in many ancient cultures and traditions (for example, the Buddhist tradition in which the baby’s name is whispered in the left ear three times by the child’s mother and repeated by guests; or Egyptian ceremonies dating back to the time of the Pharaohs where the baby is named on the seventh day of life, dressed in white, and placed in a sieve to be rocked slowly by the parents, symbolizing the motions of life).

Conclude with the references to the naming/presentation of Jesus in Luke 1:30–33; 2:21–22. Then ask each person to take paper and a marker(s) and write the main words in the name “The United Church of Christ” (omit “the” and “of”), arranging them so that the three words connect to one another as in a crossword puzzle. Discuss these “word pictures” in light of this experience. Read the excerpt on Attachment: Activity 1, or have a volunteer read it. Ask for reflections on what the name of the denomination says about its identity. End with this question: *What paragraph will we add to UCC history based on the actions of our congregations today?*



2 Talking UCC

Leader preparation: This activity listens to what the UCC says about its beliefs and mission through its mottoes. Participants can gauge their familiarity by matching a motto with a UCC belief or mission. Prepare by previewing the motto sheet on Attachment: Activity 2 and making copies. [Answers: 1.C; 2.B; 3.D; 4.E; 5.A 5A; 2B; 1C; 3D; 4E.]

Prayer: God of all, let us hear clearly from you most of all. Speak to our minds and hearts. We listen. We speak the wonderful things of God. We walk in the power of Jesus’ resurrection. We move by the Spirit of God. Thank you for still speaking. Amen.

Supplies:

- “UCC Motto Sheet,” Attachment: Activity 2
- pens

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

Among its other senses, the body sees and listens. Invite participants to listen to what the UCC says about itself in some of its mottoes and slogans. Have them match a UCC motto with one of its beliefs and/or missions. This can be done as individuals or in teams. Invite discussion afterward, opening with what it means to “walk the talk.” What are some of the challenges and consequences of aligning what we say with what we do—our beliefs with our actions?

3 Mirrors

Leader preparation: With this activity participants are invited into a discussion concerning their physical bodies, using mirrors and our interest in how our bodies look. The discussion moves to how God sees our bodies and concludes with holding up a mirror as the UCC and taking a look at ourselves. What does the UCC body look like?

Prayer: Our Sovereign God, we are your handiwork, the masterful creations of a limitless God. May we bring you glory and honor with the works of our hands and hearts. May we be the love to the world for which you made us. Amen.

Supplies:

- Bible
- mirror

Unless there is a mirror in the room, stand in front of an imaginary mirror and preen a little so participants will understand that a mirror is there. Say loudly, “Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who’s the fairest of them all?” Most of us would consider it bad form and socially suspicious for persons other than small children to gaze at themselves in a mirror for extended periods. It may be acceptable when grooming oneself or someone else, such as at a beauty salon or barbershop. It may be acceptable also when taking part in some sort of training, such as dance or fitness. Still, many of us have an interest in how our bodies look past grooming, and, therefore, we are interested in mirrors even if only in private.

Where are some places at church where mirrors may be found? Invite participants to expand the concept of mirrors to include anything and anyone that offers a “reflection” of our bodies (glass doors, friends, family, church family, television, media, complete strangers). Many of us may feel some dissatisfaction with our bodies because of the way the “mirrors” around us cause us to see our bodies. Invite participants to read silently Genesis 1:26–27, 31 while you read it aloud. As God did the rest of creation, God made our bodies and pronounced them “good.” Invite participants to reflect a moment on what would happen if we saw our bodies and the bodies of others as God sees them. Provide time for brief sharing of thoughts.

Direct the conversation to thoughts about the UCC. *What does the UCC body look like? If the UCC holds up a mirror, what will we see?* (Possible answers: “us,” many bodies, multiracial, multiethnic, diversity, unity in Christ, welcoming smiles and arms, bodies hearing and helping other bodies especially those on the margins)

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Rest (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: The human body is a magnificent creation, the special design of God. While we rest or sleep, the body, whether healthy or ill, checks all of its systems and in some instances even restores itself. In this activity, we invite the learning community to consider God’s intentionality in designing the body to need rest. Our world is busy and increasingly emphasizes work over just about everything else. Yet, even in our mission as a denomination in the work of the Gospel, we must be intentional—as Creator God was—in building in times of rest. In our practice of honoring the physical body and the body of Christ, we must rest and sleep. Read Psalm 127:2 and Mark 1:29–35; meditate on verse 35 in preparation for this activity.

Prayer: God, I honor this body that you have given me by resting, by being still sometimes, by taking adequate time to sleep. In all times I rest in the assurance of your love. I release the day’s triumphs and tensions to you, O God, in the blessed assurance that I am yours and you are mine. I breathe in the wonder of your grace and breathe out anything that would obstruct me—settling into the calm, steady, eternal warmth of your love in my life. Thank you. Amen.

Supplies

- Bible in various translations

Read Psalm 127:2 in various translations, using notes on alternate wordings. Invite participants to interpret the verse’s meanings (God providing for us while we sleep as well as God granting sleep). Suggest that American workers on average get less sleep and take fewer vacations than their counterparts around the world. It is common to hear people actually brag about themselves or others requiring little sleep—even three or four hours per night—although it is clinically proven that a routine of regular rest and sleep (seven to eight hours) boosts the immune system and may even add years to a person’s life. God designed the body to rest as well as to work, but many relegate rest and sleep to the very young (and they fight it from about age two years up) and the elderly.

Invite persons to describe ways they rest their bodies and/or prepare themselves for sleep. Suggest that even in our work in the local church and as the UCC, we must give time for rest, for re-creation, and for sleep. Invite persons to share ways that they rest in ministry. Suggest that meditation is one way that we can rest in God, and invite participants to join in one type of meditation on scripture where we will read the scripture and just enter into it as if we were there. Read Mark 1:29–35 aloud and ask persons to follow along in their Bibles.

Read Mark 1:35 again by itself, slowly. State that we are going to enter into verse 35. Ask persons to close their eyes (dim the lights if possible, but total darkness is usually not as effective).

It is early morning time before the sun comes up, to the quiet, smells, stars, sky. *(Pause.)* Jesus stirs, looks around at everyone still sleeping, wipes his eyes, rubs his face, and quietly rises to leave the house. Someone sees him, feels him go, but drifts back to sleep in the darkness of the morning. *(Pause.)* How does Jesus’ body feel after the long previous day of serving? *(Pause.)* What is he thinking, feeling as he quietly moves in the dark to a solitary place? *(Pause.)* He gets there, kneels, and starts to pray. Let us pray with him. *(Take a long pause/say a silent prayer here with Jesus.)* Light moves slowly across the sky. Day has come again.

Give participants a few moments, and then quietly invite them to rise up to this new day to go where God leads, just as Jesus did.



5 Five Loaves

Leader preparation: With this activity, we consider the body's need for food and sharing versus the reality of hunger and greed in our nation and world. The UCC Justice Ministry will be highlighted. Provide five fresh loaves of wheat bread (keep packaged) and predetermine a place where the bread can be taken directly after the session to help feed others, such as a homeless shelter. Read about a justice issue concerning hunger and greed from the UCC Justice Ministry Hunger website prior to the session (link provided in the supply list). Ideally, during a previous session seek volunteers for the roles of narrator and parents and provide copies of the skit. One brief rehearsal on another date prior to the presentation would be optimal. If the group is small, the "children" could be imaginary rather than actual individuals. The "stage" should be set up before the session so the skit can be presented and most of the time period left for discussion.

Prayer: Dear God, somewhere today still there is the irony of a bloated, swollen belly that is empty while others throw away good food because it is not needed or wanted. Let us share, God, for it all belongs to you and you have given for all of us. Let us give and share out of your great abundance, for which we thank you so that every belly will be full. Amen.

Supplies:

- five loaves of fresh wheat bread
- three tables, desks, or chairs to represent three homes
- small package in a brown paper bag
- ski mask
- "Five Loaves," Attachment: Activity 5
- website: "UCC Justice Ministry on Hunger" <http://www.ucc.org/justice/hunger/>

Present the skit. Ask the actors and the group how they feel about this experience. *What issues does it raise? With which family did you most identify, and why? How could #3 Neighbors represent Christians? What do you think about the dual role of the Narrator?* Suggest that hunger and greed are justice issues, and talk about some of the work from the UCC Justice Ministry link and how your congregation is or can be involved. Ask for volunteers to take the fresh bread today to the predetermined mission.

Option: Compare this experience with the account in John 6 of Jesus feeding the five thousand.



6 Safe Waters

Leader preparation: The activity reflects on the human body's need for clean, safe water to drink as well as God's provision and our responsibility to conserve and share the world's resources as gifts from God. Before the session begins read and reflect on the focus scripture, and read the excerpt from the UCC Global Ministries mission statement quoted at the end of the activity description.

Prayer: God, thank you so much for your provision. We are grateful that you give us everything we need for everyone that needs. Teach us to share what belongs to you anyway. Help us to stand against lies of scarcity and defeat and proclaim them lies in the name of Jesus. Strengthen us to fight greed and materialism in ourselves and others. There is no want or lack in you. So let us live lives of abundant generosity, letting little become much in you. Let us be makers of peace so we may be called the children of God. Jesus showed us how. Bless God. Amen.

Supplies:

- Bible
- artwork: “The Public Fountain” by Manuel Alvarez Bravo, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1401636333?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37962&store_id=1401

Invite the group into a brief discussion about the importance to the body of clean, safe drinking water. Inquire whether anyone drinks at least eight glasses (64 ounces) of water daily and why. Points may include:

- the human body is mostly water
- the body’s systems need water to function properly (blood, digestion, immune, skin)
- the body needs more water at certain times, such as in warm weather, illness, before and after exercise
- describe the dangers of dehydration.

Clean, safe drinking water is not taken for granted in places around the world where water is scarce or drinking water has been polluted through human-made or natural disaster. Water may be seen and valued as a gift from God to be managed and used by all.

Ask several persons to read aloud portions of John 4:1–42. Invite reflection and sharing on this passage, focusing only on what it says about the process of obtaining drinking water from wells during this time.

Introduce the art piece “The Public Fountain” by Manuel Alvarez Bravo. Invite people to reflect silently on the piece for a few minutes. *What do you think that the artist was trying to convey with this piece?* Ask participants to imagine themselves standing directly behind the child. What do they see, and how do they feel about what they see? What other thirsts may be symbolized by this picture and in our lives that prompted Jesus to speak of “living water”?

As a country, as corporations, and as Christians, we must rethink our personal and corporate use of water and the other natural resources that God provides. We must ask God’s forgiveness for any waste and destruction, consciously practice conservation, and relentlessly advocate for equitable and just distribution of all natural resources while simultaneously providing for those “robbed and left by the side of the road to die.”

Perhaps it is this process of sharing with everybody all that God has provided that will lead us to “safe waters,” to places of acceptance, to met needs, and, ultimately, to a world of peace and love. We join with the mission of the UCC Global Ministries that states: “We commit ourselves to a shared life in Christ and to a global sharing of resources and prophetic vision of a just and peaceful world order, joining with God’s concern for the poor and oppressed. . . .”

Sending & Serving Activities



7 “An Invasion of Light and Love”— Part I (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity considers God’s care for our bodies, especially when we are “in service and in trouble.” Our points of entry into this experience are the stories of Elijah the prophet after his confrontation with the priests of

Baal. In part II, we will consider the American Missionary Association (AMA) teachers in our faith history that came to the South to teach the legally freed slaves after the Emancipation, only to find themselves despised like the slaves. Review the event described in 1 Kings 18:16–40 as background, and then review Elijah’s and God’s responses in 1 Kings 19:1–9. Addressing the focus verses of 4–8, reflect on any one time in personal ministry when serving God created personal trouble or a problem, recalling how your body felt at that time and God’s ministry to the body through self or others.

Prayer: Our Sovereign God, thank you for being with me in the times when I got in trouble because I was serving you. Thank you for your presence that assures me that I am not alone and that I can press on. Thank you for sending food and water, either by reminding me to take care of my body’s needs or by sending a ministering angel. Your care of my body continues to give me the strength and clarity to act. Thank you for sending me a measure of your peace so that I can lie down and close my eyes to rest my body even when I can’t sleep. Thank you for not leaving me or forsaking me when I have been afraid, frustrated, or “weary in well-doing.” You are my faithful companion, my sustainer, and Sovereign. I am grateful, Jesus. In your name, Amen.

Supplies:

- Bible

Ask for a volunteer to describe the show down between Elijah, the prophet of God, and the 450 prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, as described in 1 Kings 18. In the absence of volunteers, you can recount the event. Ask the group to read 1 Kings 19:1–9 in unison. Ask if people have ever had an “Elijah moment” in serving God when they did what God told them to do and things just weren’t working out. Things not only weren’t getting better, they were actually getting worse.

Invite participants to remember such an event in silence, especially how they felt and how their bodies reacted, and then to share not what happened, but how they felt (angry, depressed, tired, afraid, fed up, wanting to stop or leave, betrayed, anxious, hopeful, and so on) and how these feelings impacted their bodies (heartburn, stomach problems, headache, lack of energy, nervous energy, sweating, weeping, heart attack, adrenaline rush, “fight or flight” response, illness). Invite persons to join Elijah under the broom tree for a moment and ask God for what they want in silence. Then reread 1 Kings 19:4b–8 and comment that Elijah asked for death or a way out, but God gave him the things to sustain his body and life. Invite discussion on God’s care for our bodies and the implications of Elijah’s story for us when we face opposition or hardship (even if internal) because of what we do to serve God.



8 “An Invasion of Light and Love”—Part II

Leader preparation: This activity considers God’s care for our bodies especially when we are “in service and in trouble.” In this activity, we consider the teachers of the American Missionary Association (AMA) from our denominational history who came to the South to teach the legally freed slaves after the Emancipation, only to find themselves despised like the slaves. Joyce Hollyday’s *On the Heels of Freedom* is an excellent treatment of AMA history and milestones, a recommended addition to any personal library. A brief excerpt is provided here for this activity. Other background information is provided optionally on the UCC website (link provided in the supply list). AMA teachers were predominately young white Christian women, many of whom had never been to the South before. Most were totally unprepared for the devastation, disease, dire working conditions, poverty, violence, and ostracism of a defeated South after the Civil War. The teachers may have viewed their work in light of the gospel to uplift the situation of a downtrodden people in a self-described “Invasion of Light

and Love,” but most Southerners saw them as enemy invaders. AMA teachers were even excluded from worship at many white congregations in the communities where they worked. Still, the AMA was able to establish some five hundred schools and train seven thousand African American teachers across the South. The AMA operating between 1846 and 1877 is listed on the UCC website as the first integrated antislavery society.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to remember that you are with us in any difficulty that we face for you. Strengthen our bodies, our minds, and our hearts to continue with confidence and to find the joy that you have surely placed somewhere in the situation to encourage us and to remind us of your presence. Amen.

Supplies:

- “Excerpt from Joyce Hollyday’s *On the Heels of Freedom*,” Attachment: Activity 8
- more information on the Hollyday book, http://books.google.com/books?id=ETYQAQAIAAJ&q=On+the+Heels+of+Freedom&dq=On+the+Heels+of+Freedom&hl=en&ei=ziusTr3-G8XYgQfR0oH5Dw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CDYQ6AEwAA%20
- UCC Recommended Books on Race, <http://www.ucc.org/sacred-conversation/recommended-bookshelf.html>
- hymn: “Nearer My God to Thee” by Sarah F. Adams (tune: Bethany), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEwiPLUe-cg>; *The New Century Hymnal* #606

After explaining who AMA teachers were and what their work entailed, suggest that AMA teachers may have had some “Elijah moments” in the course of their work and mission. Perhaps, at least figuratively like Elijah, they sat under a broom tree and concluded at points that what God had told them to do simply wasn’t working (give examples of dire working conditions, ostracism, and dangers to them and their students). Ask a volunteer to read the Hollyday excerpt, Attachment: Activity 8. Most teachers completed their assignments despite or maybe because of the conditions and the undaunted eagerness of their students of all ages to learn, especially to be able to read the Bible.

Invite the group into a discussion of how God cares for our bodies in and through worship (the impact of singing the songs of Zion, kneeling, joining hands to pray, reading the psalms, listening to or playing instruments, weeping, smiling, hearing and giving sermons or testimonies, receiving the sacraments, giving, clapping, movement). Invite the group to join in a chorus of “Nearer My God to Thee” or another favorite hymn of faith, as did the AMA teachers.

9 Giving

Leader preparation: With this activity we consider our hands, open and extended to give. We also explore Our Church’s Wider Mission (OCWM) as the extended hands of our denomination supporting local church missions as well as commitments to ecumenical initiatives and global missions. Find out in advance if there is anyone in the congregation who has worked with OCWM and who can offer a personal reflection on giving. Otherwise, select a testimony from the “Changing Lives” stories on the UCC or OCWM homepages or a local mission to illuminate, inspire, and/or provoke reflection on open and extended hands in our denomination.

Supplies:

- 4" x 6" note cards, thank-you cards (blank inside), or folded paper
- colored markers
- (optional) computer and screen
- “Changing Lives,” <http://www.ucc.org/ocwm/>

Invite participants to look at their hands and consider their many functions. Hands give or receive. They open to do both. Hands can meet in the completion of a hug. They can stretch toward heaven in praise. They can close to protect or to harm. They can extend the heart’s joy or pain. Those who do not have one or both of their hands or have lost full use know best the wonder of the simple things of which the hand is capable and appreciate the profound blessing of gifted hands. Invite everyone to take a few more seconds to look at their hands: palms, fingers, knuckles. Suggest that they listen to the stories in the lines, veins, skin, and marks.

Offer everyone a card and marker to write a three-to-five-sentence “thank you” to their hands. Those specially abled or who prefer to do so can use a volunteer scribe or elect to use Jesus’ hands as the subject of their thanks. As members of a denomination that espouses the extravagant and radical welcome of all into the love of Christ, our hands are open and extended in every setting. Invite participants to consider the mission and work of Our Church’s Wider Mission through a personal testimony, local mission, or a shared testimony from the UCC or OCWM home pages.

Reflect

We discover and rediscover our bodies, ourselves created in the image of God, in our ordinary needs for rest, food, and water, and in the bodies of others—especially the most vulnerable among us. We see and bear witness to the love of Christ in the open and extended hands of our denomination from its beginnings to the present.

Attachment: Activity 1

The United Church of Christ

Excerpt from "A Short Course in the History of the United Church of Christ"

On Tuesday, June 25, 1957, at Cleveland, Ohio, the Evangelical and Reformed Church, 23 years old, passionate in its impulse to unity, committed to "liberty of conscience inherent in the Gospel," and the Congregational Christian Churches, 26 years old, a fellowship of biblical people under a mutual covenant for responsible freedom in Christ, joined together as the United Church of Christ. The new church embodied the essence of both parents, a complement of freedom with order, of the English and European Reformations with the American Awakenings, of separatism with 20th-century ecumenism, of presbyterian with congregational polities, of neoorthodox with liberal theologies. Two million members joined hands.

The story of the United Church of Christ is the story of people serving God through the church. . . .

Source:

<http://www.ucc.org/about-us/short-course/shortcourse.pdf>

Attachment: Activity 2

UCC Motto Sheet

Match the motto with its belief/mission by placing the belief/mission letter next to the proper motto.

MOTTO

1. No Matter Who You Are or Where You Are
on Life's Journey, You Are Welcome Here. _____
2. In Essentials—Unity, In Non-Essentials—Diversity,
In All Things—Charity. _____
3. Our faith is 2,000 years old. Our thinking is not. _____
4. God is still speaking. _____
5. That They May All Be One _____

BELIEF/MISSION

- A. John 17:21: This motto of the United Church of Christ reflects the spirit of unity on which it is based and points toward future efforts to heal the divisions in the body of Christ. We are a uniting church as well as a united church.
- B. The unity that we seek requires neither an uncritical acceptance of any point of view, nor rigid formulation of doctrine. It does require mutual understanding and agreement as to which aspects of the Christian faith and life are essential.
- C. The call of extravagant welcome and radical hospitality
- D. We prepare our members and leaders to be engaged in ministry in the present and future church, and we embrace all kinds of communities and new modes of thinking.
- E. We believe in God's continuing testament.

Attachment: Activity 5

Five Loaves

Narrator/Thief

#1 Neighbors (Parent, Spouse, and three children)

#2 Neighbors (Parent, Spouse, and two children)

#3 Neighbors (Parent, Spouse, and one child)

Narrator: This is a story about a community. Maybe it is like yours. Maybe it isn't. All the families in this community live in glass houses, and the community is fed by blessed bread.

This is special bread that never grows old, never diminishes, and is absolutely delicious! This story is about three families in this community: #1 Neighbors, #2 Neighbors, and #3 Neighbors.

Let me introduce you. *(Walks to home of first family represented by a table, desk, or chair with the family around it. The table is empty.)*

Narrator: #1 Neighbors are a family consisting of two parents and three children. They are a loving family, but they have no blessed bread and are very hungry. The children have taken to hanging around #2 Neighbors' home around dinner time. *(Children leave and go to #2 Neighbors' house.)*

(Walks to #2 Neighbors' home. There are two loaves of bread on the table. #1 Neighbors children are leaving to go home.)

#2 Spouse: OK, kids, go straight home. Tell your parents we said hello. Take that package to them. See you, tomorrow. *(To own children)* OK, the rest of you, finish homework and go to bed. Early day tomorrow!

Narrator: #2 Neighbors' family consists of two parents and two children. They are a loving family and have two loaves of blessed bread.

#2 Neighbor: Honey, we have got to help them! They have nothing, and we are so blessed. God is really dealing with me about #1 Neighbors.

#2 Spouse: I know, Darling, but we are sharing with them! But you do whatever God tells you to do.

Narrator: *(Walks to #3 Neighbors' home.)* #3 Neighbors are thrice-blessed, for this family has three loaves of blessed bread. They are a loving family, and they thank God for their good fortune.

(#3 Neighbors family bow their heads in prayer.)

#3 Neighbor: Dear God, bless this food. Thank you for all that you provide. And God, please help #1 Neighbors, for their family is without bread. Bless them, God, as you have blessed us. Amen.

Attachment: Activity 5 (continued)

Narrator: Well, #2 Neighbors also pray to God and are directed to give their extra loaf to #1 Neighbors. There is great rejoicing among all three families, for now #1 Neighbors' family is no longer hungry and has blessed bread of their own (*Pantomime of giving of loaf and all families rejoicing, then everyone settling down to sleep in their homes.*)

But then life happens! The unthinkable! One evening, while everyone is sleeping, thieves break into #2 Neighbors' home and take the remaining loaf of blessed bread (*The Narrator slips a ski mask on, breaks into the home, and takes the bread. The Narrator puts away the stolen loaf, takes off the mask, and watches with the audience as the neighbors in all three houses wake and find the loaf stolen.*)

Narrator: Now, #2 Neighbors are without bread, and that family is hungry.

#3 Neighbor: My goodness, do you hear what's happened? Robbers broke into #2 Neighbors' home and stole their remaining loaf of bread. Now they are without bread and hungry just like #1 Neighbors' family used to be!

#3 Spouse: Sweet Jesus! What should we do?

#3 Neighbor: Why, things are really getting bad out there! This is a warning! We are going to lock up our two extra loaves, that's what we're going to do! So if anything happens, our family will never be without bread! See what happens when you try to help out others!

Attachment: Activity 8

Excerpt from Joyce Hollyday's *On the Heels of Freedom*

When local white churches shut their doors to the schoolteachers, they created their own worship. A visiting AMA officer reported the following poignant scene in a mission home in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley: "In a grand old room, defaced by war . . . I saw yesterday a scene not to be forgotten. A room full of youthful women, far from home and all its loves, sang the Lord's song in a strange land. Loving hearts trembled as they sang 'Nearer, my God, to Thee, Nearer to Thee.'

"Here was the red-lipped school-girl, just from school; here the young widow, holding in tearful love the memory of buried husband and child. . . . Such were the teachers of the freed slaves, who sat and knelt together; whose soft eyes dimmed with tears as they sang the hymns of home, and prayed for the blessing of God upon their work."

Source:

Joyce Hollyday, *On the Heels of Freedom: The American Missionary Association's Bold Campaign to Educate Minds, Open Hearts, and Heal the Soul of a Divided Nation* (New York: Crossroad, 2005.) 68.

Honoring the Body



Exploration: Scripture

About this Setting

We believe that the still-speaking God continues to speak to us through scripture and in other ways. We listen with fresh ears and eyes. Our minds and hearts are open to the Spirit of God. The pages of scripture are replete with bodies created in the image of God who became flesh. This is a living Word, not closed or static, that empowers us through the stories and witness of previous faith communities and the teaching of the still-speaking God.

About this Exploration

Through careful study and prayer, we discern scripture's guidance for faithful living. From the creation of human beings in Genesis to the Gospel accounts of God Incarnate in Jesus Christ, scripture references and celebrates the human body. The body is a source of wonder in the Psalms, of delight in the Songs of Solomon, and of hope in the New Testament. We learn of God's tender embrace of humanity, made in God's very image. We discover bodies of all ages, abilities, and healthiness—multifaceted and diverse. While scripture cannot be used as an inerrant blueprint for modern living, it presents the opportunity to continually evaluate and reimagine the miraculous and amazing vessel that God not only gives but co-habits with us. Scripture is a living, breathing source continually growing and changing as it empowers persons in all ages and of all ages..

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Genesis 2:1–25
Romans 12:1–8

Leader Preparation

Disputes over interpretation of the Christian scriptures have divided Christians—even within denominations—though most all hold the scriptures to be sacred writings. So how does a denomination that believes it is called by God to be “united and uniting” deal and dwell with the conflict concerning the sacred text? In statements about who we are as a denomination, the UCC affirms the primacy of the Bible as the foundation for its statements of faith and traditions, but also affirms that the study of the Bible is not limited to past interpretations and that every age pursues fresh insights for living in its times. We hold with our Congregational forebears that “there is yet more light and truth to break forth from God’s holy word.” We also listen with expectation and anticipation for the still-speaking God.

Prayer: Holy One, reveal to me the ways your word lives in me and lives in the UCC. Help me to discover afresh the endless possibilities of your revelation in the places and people of the UCC, particularly in the people and places that unnerve me. Renew my hope and commitment to be a part of the living body of Christ. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Covenant God (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: The opening statements about scripture in this Exploration describe the scriptures as a place to learn about “God’s tender embrace of humanity.” God’s embrace is a faithful one. This activity celebrates our relational, covenantal God who, despite our repeated failure to uphold our end of the agreement, always makes the way for us to return home. We look at the covenant that God established with Abraham, some of whose descendants would become the nation of Israel, and others, Palestine. We look also at the fulfillment of God’s promise of deliverance and eternal covenant with God through Jesus the Son. We invite participants to consider and offer praises to our God, whose essence is communal in the harmony and unity of Creator, Son, and Spirit. With belief in the God of covenant, the UCC takes seriously its role as a covenant people united in Christ to reunite the church and the world.

Supplies:

- Bible

Within its constitution, the UCC places all expressions of its structure in covenant with one another. We also enter into agreements with other Christian churches, such as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and work ecumenically across faiths and around the world in initiatives to help people, particularly those most vulnerable. We see ourselves as a people of covenant, and we express our agreement with God and one another on every level and within every setting of the denomination. Throughout the scripture and in our lives, God has shown again and again God’s faithfulness to covenants.

Invite participants to read the covenants established by God in Genesis 12:1–3 and by Jesus in John 14:1:1–4; 23, 25–29. Ask: *What do these texts say to you about our relational God? God’s nature is relational, communal, indivisible, and harmonious. The essence of God is unity and community. Invite discussion on the implications of a God who is faithful to covenants. As those who believe in a God of covenant, what does this say about our relationships with others?*

2 Beginnings

Leader preparation: The second creation account in Genesis 2 starts with God’s creation of man (*adam*) from the dust of the earth (*adamah*) before all other living creatures. The primacy and honor of the human body is apparent throughout this account. This activity explores the primacy of human bodies in the original plan of God as one basis for our practice of honoring the body. We will also consider God’s connection of the human body with the rest of creation and its implications for our spiritual and ecological connection to the rest of creation today. A slide show called “The Practice of Wearing Skin,” adapted from chapter 3 of Barbara Brown Taylor’s book *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith* provides an entry into the second part of the discussion.

Read Genesis 2:1–25 and preview the slide show.

Option: It would be nice to add instrumental music or nature sounds to play quietly in the background of the slide show, but it is powerful in silence as well.

Supplies:

- Bible

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

- slide show: “The Practice of Wearing Skin,” <http://www.ucc.org/feed-your-spirit/your-life-better/wearing-skin/>
- computer, screen for showing the slide show.
- (optional) Instrumental music or nature sounds as background sound for the slide show.

Both creation accounts are beautiful in their imagery and focus on God’s special design of the cosmos and everything in it, including human bodies. Invite several volunteers to read sections of the second creation account in Genesis 2:4–25, telling the story with wonder and excitement. In this account, man (*adam*) is the first living creature made. Ask the significance of this in terms of the entire creation in God’s plan. Invite participants into a discussion of the creation of the man’s and woman’s bodies by God. How did it differ from what is stated about the rest of creation?

What was God’s concern for the man? The primacy of human bodies, how they were created, their function in God’s plan to take care of the rest of creation, their relationship with God and one another—these give the human body primacy, value, and honor from God for the purpose of taking care of the rest of creation. Ask participants what verse 25 means to them in terms of the body. The human body without adornment was a work of beauty situated in a beautiful creation with everything provided and only one limitation imposed by God. Whatever happens later in the story, the human body in the design of God was created with beauty, care, and purpose. Our purpose ties us to the cosmos, which we were created to nurture.

Invite participants to look at the slide show and think about our bodies as seen by God’s eyes from the beginning when God pronounced them “very good.” *What are the spiritual and ecological implications that that our God-intended caretaker role raises for the mission of our denomination?*

Note: If the link for the slide show does not work, use the UCC website “Search” function on the home page. For this slide show, type in “The Practice of Wearing Skin” and click “Enter.” This will take you to all related items on the UCC website. Click on the first item listed and it will be the slide show based on Taylor’s work.

③ In the Image of God

Leader preparation: To be created in the image of God brings significance, responsibility, and great joy. It means that we are spirit as God is spirit. We are spirits clothed in flesh even as the Son of God became flesh. As Jesus was obedient to God in God’s purpose for his life, we can also choose to be obedient to God in God’s purposes for our lives. The psalmist asks God, as we do, “What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them” and suggests, “You made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor” (Psalm 8:4, 5). In this activity, we will watch a music video and reflect on what it means to us personally to be made in the image of God. Read Psalm 8 and preview the video prior to the session.

Supplies:

- Bible
- video: “Imago Dei” by Jill Kirsten Warner, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2duLAakNyuw>
- equipment to play and show the video

Invite participants to listen to the song “Imago Dei” and watch the video. Then

reflect on what it means to them to be created in the image of God. Start the discussion with questions about their response to the video, and then proceed with an open-ended question, such as: *Why do some Christians malign or are suspicious of the human body? Jesus was born into flesh, died, and rose as flesh. What does this statement mean to you in light of your own body right now today?*

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Prayer and Praise (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity considers different postures of prayer and praise. Several psalms are selected to demonstrate the body's participation in prayer and praise activities. Preview the selected psalms in a study Bible, if available, as this may be helpful in listing the function of the psalm when originally written. Sometimes the inscription in a regular Bible will also indicate the psalm's original function or context.

Option: You may want to select or add other psalms or biblical passages.

Supplies:

- Bible

Invite persons to list all the ways that their bodies respond to talking to God. Invite them to make the same considerations for praise. What does the body do, how does the body respond in prayer and praise? (Kneel, bow, stand, raise hands, clap hands, shout, sing, cry) Invite everyone to name ways that persons of other faiths or cultures may pray to God or praise God with their bodies. Read Psalms 150, 3, 13, and 47. Invite everyone to imagine how each functioned originally (for example, it may be a psalm of ascent that would be sung in a processional going up the hill or mountain to worship). As it is read, persons may name or actually do the body movement that the psalm suggests or inspires. The body does offer prayer and praise. Suggest that with the great and rich diversity in our denomination and in our work in other countries with our global partners, there are many wonderful ways that our bodies give praise and pray to our God and Savior in the UCC.

5 The Still-Speaking God and the Bible

Leader Preparation: With this activity the group will dialogue about the "God Is Still Speaking" program. The following links are background information for discussion. A main point to stress is that the UCC has not discarded the Bible with our belief that God is still speaking.

Supplies:

- "New York Times Ad," <http://www.ucc.org/newsletter/pdfs/ny-times-ad.pdf>
- "We Listen for a Still Speaking God," <http://www.ucc.org/vitality/what-matters/we-listen-for-a.html>
- "About Stillspeaking," <http://www.ucc.org/god-is-still-speaking/about/>

Invite the group into a discussion about the UCC's "God Is Still Speaking" belief and ministry. We believe that God did not stop speaking with the close of the biblical canon and that God has "yet more light and truth to break forth from God's Word." Select one (or all) of the websites listed under Supplies to begin this conversation. Begin the discussion by asking participants to talk about their personal

sense of the power of scripture. Discussion points might include the continued primacy of the scriptures in the life of the church; the wisdom of a living and dynamic Word that is not fixed to one time or place; that we are not bound by past interpretations of scriptures; and that God may reveal other things through the words of scripture for the current generation and times. You may even facilitate a discussion about UCC critics' contentions that "anything goes" with the UCC because it does not have a theology or set beliefs.

In the UCC we look for fresh insights in the words of scripture revealed by the Spirit of God as well as in our heritage, community, and world. We are grateful that God did not close God's testament and continues to speak today.

6 Living Pentecost

Leader preparation: The experience of Pentecost fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus Christ speaks of the coming of the Holy Spirit, as Jesus promised. Also known as the Comforter and the Paraclete, the Spirit came to work in and through God's people for God's purposes. As described in Acts, the church at Pentecost was clearly a multiracial, multicultural church. At General Synod 19, the UCC called the denomination to be and to become more fully a multiracial and multicultural church. This activity examines the implications of living Pentecost today across the world, but particularly in the United States with its history and legacy of racial, class, and ethnic separations that permeate many settings, including churches. Read the definitions provided from the UCC Multiracial Multicultural Glossary and the excerpt from the Synod 19 pronouncement. A link to the entire pronouncement is provided. The glossary is a wonderful reference, but it is fourteen pages long. Consider printing one copy and recopying it double-sided if you decided to provide copies for the group; you may want simply to provide the link for reference.

Supplies:

- Bible
- "Multiracial Multicultural Glossary," <http://www.ucc.org/justice/multiracial-multicultural/glossary/>
- "Excerpt from General Synod 19 Pronouncement," Attachment: Activity 6
- "Multiracial Multicultural Church Pronouncement," <http://www.ucc.org/justice/multiracial-multicultural/pronouncement.html>
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Invite participants to sing one or two choruses of "Jesus Loves the Little Children." Ask those who grew up singing this song what they recall in singing it now. Ask if anyone sees a "color" that was left out of the original version (brown for Hispanics). Suggest that it's a really simple song for children that teaches Jesus' love for all races and, therefore, how we should relate to races other than our own. The reality of our love for and relationships with others who are different from ourselves is much more complex and troubled. During President Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign, some suggested that his family, including his siblings, parents, and grandparents, constitute a mixture of races and ethnicities that are more indicative of what America really looks like. Ask persons to react to that suggestion.

Invite participants to take home a copy of the definitions from the glossary and read them before the next session. Then ask them what they estimate to be the racial and cultural make-up of their congregation. Post estimates on the board. Ask them to also estimate the make-up of churches in their area, city, or county. Ask volunteers to read Acts 2:1-13 and the Synod 19 excerpt, Attachment: Activity 6. Discuss the UCC pronouncement in light of living the Pentecost experience as Christians today.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 The Church: Christ's Body (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: With this activity we consider our service to God in light of the local church, using Romans 12:1–8 with its great comparison of the church to a human body. Article V of the UCC Constitution states, “The basic unit of the life and organization of the United Church is the local church.” We will also take a look at our church body as a vital part of the body of Christ. Read and meditate on Romans 12:1–8. Say a special prayer for your congregation today, for its health, strength, faith, and hope as they continue in service to Christ.

Supplies:

- Bible

The local church is the lifeblood of the UCC structure. It is autonomous, but at the same time in covenant with the other settings of the denomination. State that we are the local church sitting here now, autonomous, but also in covenant with our association, conference, and the General Synod. Invite participants to read aloud Paul’s words to the local church at Rome in Romans 12:1–8, using the version most prevalent in the group. Paul uses the human body as a metaphor or comparison to the church. In light of Paul’s comments to the church at Rome, how is our congregation like a human body? When are problems likely to arise with the parts (gifts) and therefore the whole body? What advice does Paul give to the church? Invite participants into a discussion about their congregation as a body and as part of the body of Christ. As a functioning body, what about our congregation works well? What could work better? *If the UCC is compared to the human body, what part of the UCC body is the local church in your opinion, and why?*

8 Women’s Songs

Leader preparation: We are limited by our contexts, but in God and in our praises, we are not. In praise we soar in God, moved by the limitless Spirit to profess the things of God beyond ourselves. This activity considers the praise songs of Mary and Hannah as God’s profession of inevitable justice in and beyond their situations. We also consider the praise work of UCC women called by God to help end their sisters’ invisibility and suffering from the misuse of their bodies by others for profit, as we consider the work of the Justice and Witness Ministry. The group is invited to compose a spontaneous act of praise. Read and meditate on Luke 1:39–56 and 1 Samuel 2:1–11.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pen
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Ask for volunteers to read aloud Luke 1:46–55 and 1 Samuel 2:1–10. What do we know about the immediate social situations of these two women? Invite participants into a discussion about the declarations in these praises that move beyond just the personal and social situations of Mary and Hannah (both talk about social class reversals by God where the powerful are reduced and the meek, exalted; the greedy go hungry and the hungry are fed). These praises by two socially vulnerable women empowered by the Spirit are also professions of God’s inevitable justice. In this, both Mary and Hannah witness prophetically. The UCC

praises God and declares God's justice in word and deed on behalf of the oppressed. The UCC also assists the most vulnerable when they can't or won't speak out for themselves. *How may our work on justice issues also be praises lifted up to God like those of Mary and Hannah?* Invite the group to compose a spontaneous praise song that speaks of God's powerful role reversals today. Record on newsprint or a whiteboard the group's effort for all to see.

9 Rich and Poor

Leader preparation: This activity focuses on the increasing divide between the rich and the poor as well as with the prophets and ministers of God caught in between. An article about religious leaders will be our entry into the discussion. These religious leaders were arrested for protesting against government cuts of services to the poor, working poor, unemployed, children, and the elderly, that is, those most vulnerable in society. We will then examine the challenges of God's prophets to the establishment in their day concerning the plight of the poor and the state of the wealthy and powerful.

Supplies:

- Bible
- "Faith Leaders Arrested,"

<http://www.ucc.org/news/faith-leaders-arrested-in.html>

Invite persons to read and respond to the July 2011 article about the religious leaders, including two UCC ministers, who were jailed for nonviolent protests and sit ins at the Capitol to urge the government "not to balance the budget on the backs of the poor." Ask participants what they think about the situation of the economy and this tactic. Ask for volunteers to read Micah 6:8, Proverbs 31:8–9, and Isaiah 10:1–2, and reflect on the situations that the prophets of God challenged in their day. *What was God saying through the prophets? What can we hear afresh for our situation of high unemployment, home foreclosures, skyrocketing medical costs, federal deficit, uninsured and underinsured persons, and the financial struggles of the poor, working poor and even the middle-class?*

Reflect

We continue to seek the Still Speaking God for fresh insights into the scriptures even as we study our faith foundations, history, and traditions. We embrace the dynamic and living Word made flesh, asking for courage, wisdom, and guidance today in honoring the bodies of others and ourselves made in God's image.

Excerpt from General Synod 19 Pronouncement

The Nineteenth General Synod calls upon the United Church of Christ in all its settings to be a true multiracial and multicultural church. A multiracial and multicultural church confesses and acts out its faith in the one sovereign God who through Jesus Christ binds in covenant faithful people of all races, ethnicities, and cultures. A multiracial and multicultural church embodies these diversities as gifts to the human family and rejoices in the variety of God's grace.

Honoring the Body



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Setting

Discipleship, the embodied practice of following Christ, is our mission as the United Church of Christ. In communion with Jesus and through Spirit power, our bodies are called to be disciples even as our embodied example, our service, and our love are used by God to disciple others. Discipleship is the only way to love God. We answer the call as bodies in every setting of the denomination. Our bodies listen, hear, and follow the risen Christ so that the good news of God's love cannot help but pour out of us into the world.

About this Exploration

When Jesus said to the first disciples, "Come, follow me," he was speaking not only to their hearts and minds, but also to a reorientation of their entire bodies. He expected a physical movement from one place to another and a commitment of their whole person to a new way of living. All Christian disciples are incarnations of God's love and compassion. For modern-day disciples, following Jesus remains an embodied task—one rooted firmly in practice and lifestyle as well as belief. As disciples we are still invited to follow Jesus with our whole selves, engaged body and soul, by God's grace and love. As we care for and with our bodies, in the daily practices of eating, movement, resting, and relating to other God-created beings, we offer new and profound models of Christian discipleship as an embodied practice for others to embrace.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Psalm 71
Mark 5:21-43

Leader Preparation

Read the passages selected for this Exploration. If you are working with older youth or adults, consider asking one of them to lead an activity, sending them the information so they can prepare. Mostly, remember that discipleship isn't necessarily the big moments, but sometimes the simple moments where if only you touch Jesus' cloak, you will be made whole.

Prayer: Christ Jesus, you are the sole head of the church. You call us from where we stand, sit, or lie to come and follow you, to use the gifts we've been given, to take care of these bodies. We are vessels of the Holy Spirit, and God has honored us with God's own image. You call us for life and for love. Strengthen us for the task ahead. Let us not fail these bodies that take us where you send us. We repent for nourishment we have not appreciated, water we have not drunk, and rest we have not taken. We will honor these bodies to do the work to which you send us, to serve other bodies in need of your love. You are gracious and kind, Lord Jesus. We love you, Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from "Exploring and Engaging," at least one from "Discerning and Deciding," and at least one from "Sending and Serving." The first activity in each category is designed for "easy preparation" (able

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Young Bodies (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: The denomination has educational materials available on a variety of children and youth interests, including youth sexuality in an affirming environment. These are written by professionals and would be of assistance. This activity, however, examines our witness to young bodies about the beauty of bodies, the "God-purposes" of bodies, and the practice of honoring our bodies and the bodies of others in the "day-to-day."

Supplies:

- Bible
- construction paper (if you borrow from children's ministries be sure to replace) or index cards or folded paper
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- board to post and proper writing instrument

There is perennial discussion and complaint about the dress, conduct, and bodies of young people. But if we can get past the complaints and be real, their bodies are beautiful. In diverse shapes, sizes, and colors, their skin, eyes, bodies, and youthful flair are what our culture envies and wants—though not necessarily honors. Post four columns on the newsprint or whiteboard with the following headings:

- Youth Body Dishonored
- "Rewind"
- Youth Exposed to Adult Body Dishonor
- "Rewind"

Ask for a volunteer to record the group's responses on the newsprint or whiteboard.

Invite participants to list in column 1 a specific situation in which a young person's body was dishonored by an adult, for example, a youth called fat; a youth called a derogatory name; a youth slapped; a youth yelled at. If there is more than one expression of the same example, place a tally mark to indicate number of times. In column 3 do the same thing, but these are times when an adult body sets a body-dishonoring example for youth and others, such as an adult gives or receives physical abuse, an adult only gets three or four hours of sleep each night, an adult disparages others' bodies, an adult smokes, an adult is never seen in prayer or serving others. The "Rewind" columns (2 and 4) are the opportunities we are given to honor the bodies of youth, others, and ourselves. Every act of dishonor is a missed opportunity to honor, so in columns 2 and 4 we "rewind the tape" to help us think about what might have happened if we had remembered to "honor what God honors." Go through each dishonoring incident and rewind it. For instance, "youth is called fat" rewinds to "youth is not disparaged, but encouraged by a discussion of an article on healthy eating at any size." Discipleship is an embodied task—one foot rooted firmly in practice and lifestyle. Discipleship is about what we do, what we show, and about the Christ in whose name we act.

to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

② Bodies Aging

Leader preparation: In this activity we look at American cultural perceptions of aging bodies. We also engage the often very different perceptions of aging bodies in other cultures. Provide images of a variety of older adults, including images of ill persons, wrinkles, active, and different cultures and races. There don't have to be a lot of images, but they should express the gamut of the aging body and not be "magazine perfect" types only. These images may be taken from old magazines, newspapers, or advertisements geared toward the elderly for health care services, senior residences, or organizations such as AARP. Prior to the session you may also ask group members to bring in photos of older relatives or friends.

Supplies:

- images of older adults from magazines, advertisements, websites

Invite the group into a discussion of whether the aging body is honored in popular American culture. America values looking young and working. What happens when the body ages and is definitely no longer young or youthful and is at the point beyond surgery or good genes? What happens when the body can no longer work, or is no longer allowed to work? Ask the group to share perceptions of older bodies by the business world. Invite participants to consider perceptions of the aging body by society in general and by the elderly themselves. *What are some reasons elderly bodies are dishonored?* Invite discussion of how aging bodies may be viewed differently in other cultures and the reasons why. Display pictures of older people and have the group respond to them.

A church group recently returned from the Gambia and Senegal in West Africa. They were in a poor, very rural area of Senegal, and the pictures that they took of the elderly men and women there were very beautiful. The eyes, faces, and robes were very beautiful despite the poverty of the area. These people were well-respected for their years, and it showed in the carriage of some of them even sitting.

What is it about us in our country that makes it different here? Invite others to comment or offer insights into honoring bodies that grow older, in line with this faith practice.

③ Conquering the Enemy

Leader preparation: This activity is based on a reading and reflection on Psalm 71. This serves as a backdrop for a deeper reflection on UCC discipleship with the consideration of an article in which former UCC President and General Minister John Thomas, invites to Amistad Chapel at the UCC headquarters an evangelist who disparaged the UCC. Dr. Thomas provided the venue for an in-person visit and dialogue. A link to the article is provided here for reference. Make copies of the article for the group.

Supplies:

- Bible
- "Thomas invites evangelist," <http://www.ucc.org/news/thomas-invites-evangelical.html>

Invite participants to read silently Psalm 71. Ask participants to share a section that really "speaks" to them about discipleship and why. Inquire about the movement of the passage with the movement of the psalmist/disciple: What is happening in the discipleship to this individual? Does any of it speak about the disciple's body? Invite anyone present to share from his or her own experience of service and/or witness.

Invite everyone to listen to and/or read along with the article on John Thomas' invitation to a detractor to visit Amistad Chapel. Comment that this is not the first time that Dr. Thomas invited a detractor of the denomination for a visit and dialogue. Ask participants to suggest some reasons (beyond using a disarming tactic) at the core of UCC beliefs that may bring about this type of discipleship in John Thomas or ourselves (emphasis on unity of a fractured Christian church; reconciliation; the Still-Speaking God; in all things, charity; leadership of Christ through the Holy Spirit; overarching creed of love; openness to hear others; trust in the protection and plan of God; the physical meeting of bodies). Conclude the discussion with what this action says about the UCC.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Healing Touch (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity considers Jesus' healing of a woman and the resurrection of a dead girl recorded in Mark 5 as ways to think about the body's response to healing touch. UCC Global Ministries provides training to nurses in massage therapy called "Healing Touch." The nurses have also been trained in meditation as one part of a comprehensive assistance program to areas devastated by hurricanes and tsunamis. The purpose is to help patients and their relatives better handle trauma. Read Mark 5 and meditate on the touch of Jesus to the disciple and through the disciple.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pen
- marker and newsprint or whiteboard

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Mark 5:21–34 and another volunteer to read Mark 5:35–43. Invite participants to look at both passages separately and to list on newsprint or a whiteboard all the physical actions of Jesus' body and the bodies of Jarius, the woman, and the girl. Secondly, note all their actions that involved physical contact with another person. Invite participants to name the physical contacts that involved healing and state why. Mark on the list only the physical contacts that the group thinks involved healing.

Share information on Global Ministries work to train nurses to work in areas devastated by hurricanes and/or tsunamis in certified massage therapy. Called "Healing Touch," this training was part of their assistance package to help some patients and their families manage trauma better. Invite participants to share and reflect on times when the healing touch of physical contact helped them. Examine together reasons why persons today may rather not be touched and/or why disciples may choose not to touch others.

5 Disbelief

Leader preparation: This activity looks at doubt and disbelief in the disciples.

Supplies:

- Bible

Invite the group into a discussion concerning the doubt or disbelief Jesus faced in his hometown—by his brothers and even by John the Baptist in his last days in prison. Invite persons to read in silence Mark 6:1–6, John 7:1–9, and Matthew 11:2–6. In what ways do these scriptures help them reflect on their own possible

doubts or disbelief as disciples, in Jesus, in leadership, or in decisions of ministry? Ask: *What was common in the readings about the way that doubt and disbelief were handled? How does the body react to disbelief and doubt?* Invite sharing of experiences in managing doubt or disbelief. Invite discussion of how we have handled these situations as a denomination (or congregation) when unsure of our course or the ways that we are doing things. Close in prayer for the continued faith and strength of our denomination and our own discipleship.

6 Called

Leader preparation: This activity involves a simple game through which to enter into discussion about what it means to be called by Jesus Christ as individuals and as a denomination.

A chorus of a song is used within the session. If participants know it, the song may be sung. Otherwise, use the words as a meditation.

Supplies:

- Bible
- song: “Lead Me, Guide Me” by Doris Akers (tune: Lead Me Guide Me)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-lKyeysMV8>

Ask for a volunteer to go outside the room and wait to be called. (Make sure that your volunteer does not respond to the first two calls.) The volunteer should be within hearing distance. Inform the group that you are going to call the volunteer back in; then do so twice. Inform the group that your call of the volunteer did not produce a response the first two times and ask what our options are now. Ask for some different ways to call the volunteer (cell phone/email/text/megaphone).

The call that we are talking about as disciples is the call of God. Ask for a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 3:1–11, the account of Samuel’s call from God. Indicate that a call from God requires a response, even if the called person doesn’t respond right away. The call is nearly always the same, no matter the specifics, the persons is called to “walk with” and “follow.” The call of God is to the person’s whole life—including the body. The only acceptable response is the person’s life. Invite reflection and sharing on the call of God from the story of Samuel and from personal experiences, and how responding to God honors the body. How does the UCC see its call from God? Close the activity with the words to the chorus of “Lead Me, Guide Me,” sung together or used as a spoken meditation.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Prayer (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity engages the value of prayer to the disciple both in formation and to sustain and to serve. The value of personal and corporate prayer to sustain the human body and the body of Christ is fully connected to the faith practice of honoring the body. Participants will be invited to talk about the experience, prayer in general, or in other expressions of the denomination, such as at General Synod.

Supplies:

- (optional) Bible

Invite participants to open the session in prayer focused on discipleship. The prayer format used will be a line prayer in which someone begins the prayer,

each person prays a sentence, and the prayer is closed. As the leader, open the prayer and ask a volunteer to close the prayer. After the prayer, invite the participants to respond to the experience of the line prayer in a way that leads into a discussion of prayer in discipleship. Ask participants to share prayer experiences that have helped ministry. Invite them to identify favorite prayers or pray-ers in the Bible who helped disciples to serve. Ask if anyone has experienced prayer in powerful ways at General Synod or other settings of the denomination. Invite participants to conclude with reflections on the connections between the practice of prayer and the practice of honoring the body. Close the activity with prayer in any format chosen.

8 Body and Soul

Leader preparation: With this activity participants will view a slide show and reflect on the connections between exercise (healthy lifestyle) and discipleship. Make sure proper equipment is available to show the slide show and provide background music, if desired.

Supplies:

- slide show: “10 Ways to Exercise Body and Soul,” <http://www.ucc.org/feed-your-spirit/your-life-better/10-ways-to-exercise-body-and-soul/>
- (optional) background music

Play the slide show and invite discussion of the body’s role in discipleship. Those willing and able may be invited to do a few simple stretches and breathing while praying silently for the body’s strength in service to others.

9 Travels

Leader preparation: Ministry for older disciples seem to be designed to minister to them rather than their ministering to others. Where is the demand for use of the older disciple’s “travels” and gifts in the UCC? This reflection considers the stories of older bodies whose gifts and life experiences were useful to younger leaders in the stories of Jethro, Paul, Lois, and Eunice.

Supplies

- Bible

Travel and journey are often used as metaphors for life. Invite persons to read and reflect silently on Exodus 18:13–27, 2 Timothy 1:3–7 and 3:10–12. Jethro’s travels or life experiences assisted him in giving sound advice to Moses, as did the life experiences of Timothy’s mother and grandmother to Timothy. Of course, Paul’s mentoring and training also helped Timothy. Invite participants into a discussion regarding whether the aging body should be equated with mental capacity in a devaluing way. Ask for reasons why life experience in someone of a certain age may or may not be as valued (because of technological advances, perception, or a reality that the experience is outdated) and move into a discussion of mentoring.

Reflect

As an individual and a denomination, discipleship is our answer to the call of God, to the work of Jesus in the world, and to the dictates of divine love. It is not easy, but the Spirit of God empowers us for this work and the love of Christ sustains us in it.

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Honoring the Body



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Setting

One of the mottoes of the UCC is: “Our faith is 2000 years old. Our thinking is not.” We are the wise child, a young body that knows and appreciates its foundations so as to walk steadily in its present, but whose gaze inevitably turns to the present and the future with the excitement and anticipation of youth. We are what is called in African culture *Sankofa*, the bird that looks back to move forward. This setting looks at the bodies that have come before us and what they have placed in us, the things that have made the denomination—strong or weak but still looking to the same God for the nuances of our calling as we go.

About this Exploration

Tradition presents a mixed perspective on the body. Part of tradition upholds the body as created by God and proclaimed as “good.” Hebrew law contains regulations to keep the body safe and healthy, and Hebrew praise includes joyous movement. Jesus shared God’s presence in bodily form—touching, laughing, walking, eating, speaking, and exploring. Through Jesus we see the body as “the temple” of God’s spirit. The body is cherished during Sabbath time and engaged fully during worship through song, dance, touch, and more. The same tradition also sees the body as “evil” and opposed to the Spirit, leading individuals and groups to abuse it and attempt to limit its impact on the Spirit. Because this part of tradition does not agree with the teachings of Jesus, it is important to go beyond its influence and seek to honor, feed, celebrate, and engage the body on our spiritual journeys.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
**Song of Solomon 4:1-7,
5:10-16
Luke 7:36-50**

Leader Preparation

Even though we are a relatively young denomination, we have deep roots in faith. With this Exploration we look at our traditions, for better and for worse, as a basis for discovery, enrichment, and/or change. We should not be tied to traditions that have limited us and caused us to disparage our bodies and those of others (patriarchy, racial/ethnic oppression and discrimination, heterosexism, the quest for power and possession). Yet we are enriched by other traditions that have shown love to be a “more excellent way” (diversity, unity, “extravagant welcome,” and “extravagant evangelism”). The history and polity course offered by the denomination is a great investment in time and money for any UCC instructor or facilitator. Details about course offerings can be found on the UCC website. In lieu of this training, the self-managed *A Short History of the UCC* is also great material for an overview of UCC history in preparation for this Exploration: <http://www.ucc.org/about-us/short-course/>.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for those who came before me in faith and for those who are still coming to enrich. Let us remain engaged in significant struggle and determined love. May we remain one in God as our Lord Jesus desired. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Walking Before (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity invites participants to consider the faith of our forebears through an excerpt from writings that became the Preamble to the Constitution of the United Church of Christ. In the activity this event is compared to the body getting ready for a great event or a change. Participants will first read the scriptural passage that was on the hearts of those who came to unite the Church of Christ, and then read the excerpt from the preamble.

Copies of the attachment may optionally be provided to participants.

Supplies:

- Bible
- “Basis of Union,” Attachment: Activity 1
- “Preamble to the UCC Constitution,” <http://www.ucc.org/about-us/constitution-of-the-ucc.html>

Invite participants to consider how the body readies itself for known or anticipated changes in the days, months, or years before any significant event such as a birth or a wedding. The body reacts to the changing of the seasons in the times before the cold or the heat comes. It gets smaller or bigger. The skin sheds. The hands move to store up goods so as to have access to what will be needed. One with the mind and the spirit, the body may go into a season of prayer: the hands clasped, the knees bent, the head down or lifted to the sky. Read John 17:16-19, noting that those before us had Jesus’ prayer that his disciples would be one as God and he were one. These forebears of the UCC, ten years before its official birth in 1957, penned the words that would become an expression of their basis for union and later part of the *Preamble to the Constitution of the United Church of Christ*. Invite the group to consider these words, Attachment: Activity 1, and reflect on the courage, strength, and faith of the bodies that went before us.

2 Four Streams

Leader preparation: The activity uses the metaphor of streams to express the interconnectivity of the body with the heart, mind, and spirit and of the four streams of tradition that came together to form the UCC: Congregational, Christian, Evangelical, and Reformed. It seeks to have persons experience and bear witness to the continuous movement of these streams into one another in our lives, based in the love of God in Christ. Prepare two large newsprint sheets with the titles: “STREAMS—My Body” and “STREAMS—UCC Traditions.” If possible, place the chairs in a U-shape so persons can see one another during the session.

Prayer: God, you control the heavens and the earth, the oceans and the seas, the streams that move continuously into one another. The streams move in your rhythms. We also move in your rhythms. We pray to return when we move out of place or out of step. We are grateful for your presence and sovereignty today. We thank you for wholeness, for the oneness of which our bodies, minds, hearts, and spirits are capable. We move in that grace today. We thank you for those who came before us, who trusted you for the unity of the church, for the healing of brokenness of the body of Christ. We move in the grace of their unity today. We praise you and thank you for grace. Amen.

Supplies:

- Bible
- markers and newsprint

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

- masking tape or mounting squares
- colored markers
- “Water Sounds,” <http://www.partnersinrhyme.com/soundfx/water-sounds.shtml>
- CD player, computer, or desk fountain with the “music” of soothing water sounds

Ask for two volunteers to tape pre-labeled sheets to the wall, board, or wherever persons can readily see them, and to act as recorders. Introduce the water sounds as quiet background. Begin by asking participants to name the characteristics of a stream. Ask if anyone was baptized in a stream or river or has experienced such an event and would like to describe that experience for the group. Invite persons to turn to Matthew 22:34–40 and read the verses in unison from the version most prevalent in the group. Repeat verses 37–38 for emphasis. Invite the participants to consider how one would love God with all of the heart, soul, and mind. Barbara Brown Taylor states in her work *An Altar in the World* that “every spiritual act begins with the body.”

Invite all to share the ways that their bodies give expression to loving God with their whole hearts, souls, and minds. The recorders may list these on the “STREAMS—My Body” sheet (waving holy hands, weeping, groans, thoughts of God’s goodness or grace, the desire for God flowing into prayer, preaching, hugs, kneeling, lying prostrate, holding hands, singing, smiling, laughing). Suggest that the heart, spirit, and mind are streams that flow into a fourth stream, the body, and back out in the expressions listed.

Name the four traditions that came together to form the UCC: Congregational, Christian, Evangelical, and Reformed. The recorder can list each separately on the “STREAMS—UCC Traditions” sheet. Invite the group to share one main characteristic of each tradition that is found in the identity of the UCC today: Congregationalist, the autonomy of the local church; Christian, the unity of the church with Christ as the sole head, also the name Christian; Evangelical: discipleship; Reformed: the church always reforming, seeking to be better. List these next to the particular tradition. Mention that many other streams continue to flow into our denomination and make it better by their presence, love, and work. Invite quiet reflection for a few moments on the streams that flow in our body and into our denomination. Before listening to the water sounds in silence, state that the love of God in Christ is the basis for them all. To close the session, you may offer a brief prayer of gratitude, or invite people to go in peace.



3 A Reasonable Freedom

Leader preparation: This activity points again to the structure of the UCC governing body in local churches, associations, and conferences and in the national setting. The experience of covenant with its attendant sacrifice and commitment is also demonstrated in bodies that enter into community or in partnership with one another. It is also the experience of our bodies in communion with Jesus in the work of the gospel. Print Attachment: Activity 3 for the participants.

Supplies:

- “Excerpt from the UCC Constitution,” Attachment: Activity 3
- marker and newsprint or whiteboard
- names of main officers and officials for your association and conference as well as the UCC General Minister and President

On newsprint or whiteboard post the basic governing structure of the UCC with Local Church on the first line, then Association on the next, then Conference, and

lastly, General Synod. Ask participants if they know to which UCC association and conference their congregation belongs. Ask for a volunteer to write the name of the congregation, association, and conference next to the appropriate lines on the newsprint or whiteboard. Ask for the names of officers at each level, and supply them if not known. (If there is personal experience with the individuals, the group can relate times when officials were seen or spoken to at the church or other meetings.) Ask if anyone attended the last Synod and is willing to share reflections on its highlights. *Is anyone planning to go to the next one?* Then invite discussion on who is “the boss” in the posted structure and why.

Present the UCC distinctive practice of covenant within its governing structure by reading the excerpt that defines how the settings are to interact with one another, Attachment: Activity 3. Ask why the local church was listed first. (It is the basic unit of the UCC structure. It is autonomous in the selection of its officers and its worship.) The local church with all the other settings has reasonable freedom. This is the same sort of freedom that individuals have when they enter into community or into a partnership—an autonomy that listens to the other and respects its body, its needs, and the image of God imprinted on the other person. The relationship that the settings have with one another is the same reasonable freedom that we have with one another in this fellowship and that Jesus grants us in communion with him.

Ask for a volunteer to represent the covenant that joins the settings on the board by placing them next to one another on a single line on the newsprint or whiteboard rather than in a hierarchical arrangement.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Touch (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: A group of masseurs decide to minister to AIDS patients. There are tears on both sides at the wonder of healing touch when walls of ignorance and fear come down. A struggling elementary school student gets a passing grade on her homework. She is so excited and pleased with herself that her teacher hugs her when she sees the paper. Both recoil, realizing that they’re not supposed to touch. The UCC Insurance Board publishes a manual, *Safe Church*, to assist churches in setting up programs to prevent abuse in churches, especially child abuse.

With this activity we look at Jesus’ response to the touch of a sinner woman in Luke 7 as a backdrop to talk about our current unease and disconnection with our bodies that has resulted in some of the ways that we must relate to one another in areas where a nonsexual touch may have been more acceptable than it is now or ever can be in our society. This activity hopes to provoke discussion as to how the faith practice of honoring the body can move us and our world back into connection with one another so that bodies honor their sexualities and those of others.

Supplies:

- Bible

Invite participants to name public situations in which even nonsexual touch is no longer socially and/or legally correct. *What do you think has changed in our culture to cause this? Are things just more out in the open now?* Share reasons for this perception. Ask two volunteers to read the story of Jesus’ encounter with a woman who

may have been a prostitute, Luke 7:36–50. Ask someone to volunteer to tell what happened in his or her own words. Invite participants to explore their reactions to Jesus' responses to the woman and to Simon. *Why do you think that Jesus was comfortable with the woman's touch? For what things did Jesus chide Simon? Are there other persons that Jesus allowed to touch him?* Suggest that our practice of honoring our bodies and the bodies of others as created in the image of God and vessels of the Holy Spirit will cause us to respond in ways that are honorable and loving, whether sexually or nonsexually, rather than abusive and self-serving. Gently invite participants into a discussion concerning Jesus' body and sexuality asking whether we are comfortable or uncomfortable with seeing Jesus as sexual. Some will be uncomfortable because of the way we have come to use this term, but remember that being sexual does not mean acting or responding sexually, but having sexuality as a gift from God. Ask if this could be the result of the body's dishonor throughout the generations, particularly in religious circles.

Option: Discuss sexuality and celibacy. What are some ways people who are celibate may express their sexuality?

5 **Borning Day**

Leader preparation: This activity considers the sacrament of baptism as a sacrament of grace, new birth, forgiveness, and membership into the community of Christian believers. Our entry into the discussion will be the song "I Was There to Hear Your Borning Cry." We further consider what it means to share in Christ's baptism.

Supplies:

- hymn: "I Was There to Hear Your Borning Cry," by John Ylvisaker (tune: Waterlife), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYnmtQI50ic>; *The New Century Hymnal*, #351
- equipment to play and show the video
- Bible

Invite participants to view the video. Ask them to share reactions. *Who do you think is speaking in the song and to whom? What does this song bring to mind? What feelings does it evoke?* Restate (if already said) that the speaker is there through all the major events of the person's life including when the person was baptized. Inquire what the baptism means to persons. Invite participants to recall their own baptisms or those of loved ones and what they remember. Ask a few volunteers to share reflections.

A UCC statement of belief states: "God calls us into the church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be servants in the service of the whole human family, to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil, to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table, to join him in his passion and victory." Ask what participants think it means to share in Christ's baptism. After thoughts have been shared, ask for a volunteer to read Romans 6:3–4, and invite responses to what Paul has stated. Suggest that some of the slave conversion narratives describe baptism as a "watery grave" in which the sinner dies and is born again to a new life. Ask for reactions. State that baptism invokes great joy and thankfulness for forgiveness and acceptance into the faith community, but it is also to share in Christ's baptism, which is to share his calling to service, sacrifice, and eternal joy.

6 At the Table

Leader preparation: This activity considers the sacrament of communion in its call for discipleship. Louis Gunnerman calls communion the “Sacrament of Discipleship.” Read the article at <http://www.ucc.org/education/polity/pdf-folder/gunnemann-on-eucharist.pdf>.

The communion table is a significant symbol in Christianity and a familiar reference in the UCC to the sacrament of communion. The table belongs to Christ. It is Christ who calls his disciples to his table to give thanks to God and to usher in the new covenant in which he gives his life (body and blood) as a sacrifice to redeem bodies. His disciples agree to remember him and to continue his work. A UCC statement of belief related to communion suggests that “the breaking of bread and the pouring of wine reminds us of the costliness of Christ’s sacrifice and the discipleship to which we are called.” Reread this background and the scriptures before the session. While studying the scripture texts, the leader should look for all the bodies and body imagery to be found at the first Eucharist and today in our remembering Christ’s sacrifice and our call to discipleship in communion.

Supplies:

- Bible
- long table at which all participants may sit
- symbol for Christ, such as a large cross, to place prominently at the table
- paper

Invite everyone to sit at the table (impress on them that this represents Christ’s table and no one is left out). Introduce the topic of communion, along with baptism, as a sacrament of grace observed by UCC churches and most other Christians. Invite participants to describe what communion means to them. Read Luke 22:14–20. (You may also want to read from Matthew and Mark.) Invite discussion on the discipleship that the table represents. Suggest that Christ’s table extends from the sanctuary into the places where we live and serve. Communion is filled with bodies and body imagery. For example, even the table relates to eating or nourishment for the body. Invite persons to take paper and pencils and write down all the bodies and body imagery found in the sacrament of communion. Make an agreement to meditate on discipleship in Christ while participating in the next service of communion and to share reflections on the experience with the group at a subsequent session.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Beautiful Bodies (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity celebrates the beauty of the body in partnership with another body. It invites discussion on the UCC position announced at the General Synod in support of same-sex marriages and also its continued support of churches listing themselves as “open and affirming.” Be cognizant of the local church’s position on same-sex marriage and whether your church is open and affirming to persons of all sexual orientations. Study the scriptures for this activity; use a study Bible for some of the background and information on the Song of Solomon. Offer a prayer to thank God that the Song of Solomon made it into the canon. If you cannot sincerely give thanks for this, ask God through the Spirit to reveal Godself in the Song of Solomon and for peace in facilitating the discussion.

Supplies:

- Bible

The church has historically interpreted the Song of Solomon as an allegory for love between God and the church. An allegory is a symbolic representation that puts some distance between the passion and highly sexual descriptions of a more literal translation. Since this Exploration is the faith practice of honoring the body, we will have the bodies represent human bodies in partnership. Divide the group into smaller groups and have each small group read aloud Song of Solomon 4:1–7, 5:10–16.

Ask if someone would reflect on the imagery of the body as seen through the loved one's eyes in 4:1–7. *What are some highlights of the body in this description?* Note that some of the metaphors and similes would have more meaning during the time and culture when they were written, but we can get the gist of the passage that the body of the beloved is beautiful and desirable to the lover.

Ask for another volunteer to do the same thing for 5:10–16. These passages clearly speak of two people who are attracted to the body of the person with whom they are in relationship. There are even sections in which they are talking to others outside of the relationship about the beauty of their beloved's body. Isn't an intimate and loving marriage or partnership like this, especially in the beginning? The body of the other person is prized, valued, desired and, hopefully, honored. Invite reflections.

If we identify the beloved as a woman in the first passage, would the description of the beloved's beauty and desirability change if the speaker were a woman? Similarly if we identify the beloved as a man in the second passage, would the description of the beloved's beauty and desirability change if the speaker were also a man? Invite participants into a discussion on the denomination's stance in support of same gender-loving marriages and "open and affirming" churches.

8 Amistad

Leader preparation: This activity suggests that the faith of ordinary persons can lead them to see things very differently than others and give them spiritual power to challenge powerful interests and win. Congregationalists in Connecticut and elsewhere were people of faith in the UCC's history who had a deep respect for their autonomy. They believed strongly that they should be self-governing in affairs of the church, free to choose their own leadership and ways of worship (word, congregation). While other Congregationalists and Christians were slave owners, some Congregationalists were ardent abolitionists. In 1839, thirty-nine surviving Africans stolen from their homelands were placed on trial for mutiny and murder when they took over the slave ship *Amistad* and tried to force the remaining crew to take them back to Africa. These famous public trials had their celebrities, including a former president. Two of the three men who raised money in the year that it took for the Africans to get to trial were Congregationalist ministers, but there were many others, ordinary church folk, who supported the Africans before the trial and in the two years after the trial that it took the acquitted Africans to get back home. Students from Yale Divinity School, founded by the Congregationalists, taught English Bible studies to the Africans. Scores of other people whose names are unrecorded provided housing, food, clothing, work, and transportation. This activity explores what in the Congregationalist's experiences of faith might make them see the chained Africans trying to get back home differently than their Christian counterparts. A link to background information on the *Amistad* event is provided here for reference. Joyce Hollyday's treatment of the event in her book *On the Heels of Freedom* is highly recommended. The American Missionary Association (AMA) lists the *Amistad* event as the impetus for its establishment in 1846.

Supplies:

- “Blacks and the American Missionary Association,” <http://www.ucc.org/about-us/hidden-histories/blacks-and-the-american.html>
- (optional) Joyce Holliday’s book *On the Heels of Freedom*, <http://www.amazon.com/Heels-Freedom-Missionary-Associations-Paperback/dp/B0084N7VK2>

American chattel slavery was known as the “peculiar institution” because it was peculiar or tied to the South and was a term preferred to the term “slavery” in legislation. Ask participants why it might be called “peculiar” in the modern sense of the term (bodies in bondage in the “land of the free”). Slavery means bodies and, in this case, black bodies in a system that denied the things that make us human. Ask persons to name some characteristics that make us human (homelands, traditions, family, culture, self-government). Slavery was a lucrative economic venture from which the bodies at its base did not profit. It became an institution impacting religion, law, politics, and culture. While there were slave owners among Christians, there were always Christians who were against slavery for moral and religious reasons. Some of them became abolitionists, supporters to end slavery in America.

One great event in UCC history that has even been popularized (and “Hollywoodized”) through the media is the *Amistad* mutiny and trials. Congregationalists, forebears of the UCC, and others took a decisive stand in this event. Present the event and invite participants to reflect on what in the Congregationalists’ faith may have contributed to many of them becoming abolitionists and/or sending money or offering support for the Africans (belief that slavery was morally wrong; strict Puritan background that was against the debauchery of slave owners; Pilgrim background that may have caused empathy with others in a strange land; strong belief in autonomy and self-government that would resonate with witnessing Africans in bondage, trying to get back to their homelands; missionary work in light of the gospel).

9 God Incarnate

Leader preparation: The ultimate reason for honoring the body is that God “became flesh and dwelt among us.” Jesus showed us the capabilities of our bodies committed in service to God. If the body had fallen from grace, been ripped away from the spirit, disparaged, despised, and feared, then the very act of God becoming body to live as we live, to laugh as we laugh, to move, to breathe, to hurt, and to love restores the body to where it has always been in God’s plan—bodies created in love for the purpose of love. Jesus also redeemed the body, his church, for witness to God’s good news in a desperate and despondent world. In this activity, we honor the breath of God coming into our nostrils that made us living beings. We honor the body that Jesus voluntarily lay down for us all; we honor also its rising to empower our bodies to live fully in God. We honor the Spirit of God inside us and in the world. This is a celebration of God Incarnate and the diverse, colored, textured, shaped, scientific, artsy, beautiful, wonderful and God-loved bodies given us. Preview the Rockwell picture before the session. May the Spirit lead you in celebration.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Golden Rule” by Norman Rockwell, [http://www.art.com/products/p9388041612-sa-i5446642/norman-rockwell-golden-rule-do-onto-others-april-1-1961.htm?orig=cat&origid=0&dimvals=5000032&ui=6c6a730242504593a62db31e60ee1963&ssk=norman+rockwell](http://www.art.com/products/p9388041612-sa-i5446642/norman-rockwell-golden-rule-do-unto-others-april-1-1961.htm?orig=cat&origid=0&dimvals=5000032&ui=6c6a730242504593a62db31e60ee1963&ssk=norman+rockwell)
- (optional) decorations

Invite participants to listen or recite with you John 1:1–2, 14: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. . . . The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (NIV). Suggest that if the body was ever disparaged, hated, or despised as truly evil and the corrupter of the spirit, then God’s act of becoming flesh might say something different. God Incarnate walked among us, laughed, wept, dressed, ate, went to weddings, grieved, washed feet, had his head anointed with oil, slept, suffered, died, and loved. Invite discussion about the many diverse bodies represented in the Rockwell artwork in light of this experience. Invite participants to spend time simply looking at the art. Then invite discussion about the connections between the scripture passage and the painting. *How do they speak to and about each other? How do they illustrate each other? What do we learn about who we are based on these two “statements”?*

- a communion prayer, which occurs before the Words of Institution
- the Words of Institution, which are found in 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 and are to be spoken by the ordained or licensed celebrant
- a Prayer of Thanksgiving, which occurs after the elements have been shared.

Reflect

The UCC has a glorious history that it must take pains to remember and to learn from as it forms partnerships and coalitions with other Christian churches, with its ecumenical partners, with other faiths, and across the globe. The challenge of the UCC in its mission to heal and reconcile the church is to stay open and in covenanted relationship always. In this way, it will never become the self-serving institution that our forebears, committed to the unity of the Christian church, were willing to “die as denominations” to advance. Of course, we know that they did not die, that their best selves flow in us as we move forward with confidence in Christ, based on the steady shoulders that they provided.

Invite members of the group who do not wish to have a “speaking role” to distribute the elements. When you are finished celebrating communion, invite the group to reflect on this experience, and give thanks!

Attachment: Activity 1

Basis of Union

Preamble

We, the regularly constituted representatives of the Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church, moved by the conviction that we are united in spirit and purpose and are in agreement on the substance of the Christian faith and the essential character of the Christian life;

Affirming our devotion to one God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our membership in the holy catholic Church, which is greater than any single Church and than all the Churches together;

Believing that denominations exist not for themselves but as parts of that Church, within which each denomination is to live and labor and, if need be, die; and Confronting the divisions and hostilities of our world, and hearing with a deepened sense of responsibility the prayer of our Lord “that they all may be one”;

Do now declare ourselves to be one body, and do set forth the following articles of agreement as the basis of our life, fellowship, witness, and proclamation of the Gospel to all nations.

Excerpt from the UCC Constitution

ARTICLE III. COVENANTAL RELATIONSHIPS

6. Within the United Church of Christ, the various expressions of the church relate to each other in a covenantal manner. Each expression of the church has responsibilities and rights in relation to the others, to the end that the whole church will seek God's will and be faithful to God's mission. Decisions are made in consultation and collaboration among the various parts of the structure. As members of the Body of Christ, each expression of the church is called to honor and respect the work and ministry of each other part. Each expression of the church listens, hears, and carefully considers the advice, counsel, and requests of others. In this covenant, the various expressions of the United Church of Christ seek to walk together in all God's ways.

Honoring the Body



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Setting

We follow the risen Christ. Our context is God's world, and our mission is reconciliation. Even as our Savior reconciled us to God, we follow him in the work of the gospel to proclaim the good news of God's abundant grace and love in the world. We work through the power of God's Spirit for the honoring of all bodies in the beauty of their diversity and significance in God, for the equitable distribution of resources so that all are fed and have clean water, for health care, dignity, and respect, and for peace in this world.

About this Exploration

Since our bodies are temples of God's Holy Spirit, our bodies are extensions of God's grace and love as we interact with others in our families, communities, and the world. Through our bodies we are invited to serve, responding to human need in all persons. We are invited to help others see the God in them through the presence of God in us. When we love, serve, nurture, and care for one another by respecting and honoring our body and others' bodies, we live out the healthy wholeness for which God created us. Considering the various and diverse contexts in which all live, we learn to choose well between caring for or abusing the body, even as we consider Christian responses to healthy and wholesome as well as violent and abusive living.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Exodus 23:10–12
2 Corinthians 4:13–5:1

Leader Preparation

Our mission as Christians and as a denomination is to love God by serving others, but the rub is the complexity of doing this every day in human situations devoid of love, kindness, and caring. How do we love when indifference, numbness, and anonymity are the preferred *modi operandi*, when others are offended by our concern or abuse it for their own interests and agenda? Service may involve sacrifice of more than just time as we learn patience, humility, discomfort, and a completely unreasonable joy.

Prepare for this Exploration by regular periods of solitude in beautiful places outdoors or curled up in a chair with a cup of herbal tea and a blanket. Look at the stars and think of each person in your group. Call out each name to God. Observe your surroundings, watch the news, and let the Spirit of God minister to you. Seek peaceful, still moments, if only for five minutes, so that peace will live in you and touch others. End your prayers listening for God. These moments, times alone except for God, will help us in community and in mission.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you showed us how. Amen.*

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 God of Abundance (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity proclaims the reality of God's abundant provision in this world and the lie of scarcity. The UCC announced the Mission: 1 campaign on the website. During the first 11 days of November of 2011, the campaign called for 1 million items of healthy food to be collected, 11,111 letters to be written to Congress concerning food issues for the most vulnerable citizens in this country, and \$111,111 to be raised to help neighbors in need. The prophetic announcement of Isaiah 55:1–3 was the backdrop for reflection on this campaign and our advocacy for the bodies of the "least of these."

Supplies:

- Bible
- (optional) "Mission: 1 campaign," <http://www.ucc.org/mission1/>

Read or ask a volunteer to read Isaiah 55:1–3, and invite discussion of the invitation and promise of God to the hungry and thirsty bodies in Israel. What does it say to our capitalistic society when those in need are told they can buy without money? Invite discussion on debt and work satisfaction versus the promises of God to the people of Israel. God speaks to the abundance of life in God. *What do you see to be the witness of the Mission: 1 campaign in light of this text?* The campaign echoed the promises of God's abundance. *In what ways did your congregation participate in the campaign?*



2 Come to Church

Leader preparation: This activity invites participants to reflect on the meaning of church. Provide a video of your local church, preferably with background music so it will be comparable to the video in the supply list. Also plan to talk about the UCC Local Church Ministries that support local churches in areas of Worship and Education, Evangelism, Parish Life and Leadership, Stewardship and Church Finances, and Publication Resources Production & Distribution. A chart showing the four Covenanted Ministries, including Local Church Ministries, is provided on Attachment: Activity 2.

Supplies:

- hymn: "Take My Life and Let it Be," by Frances R. Havergal (tune: Hendon), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXy2MmMLjGQ&feature=related>; lyrics, <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/t/m/tmlalib.htm>; *The New Century Hymnal* #448
- equipment to play and show videos
- video of local church event
- background music for local church video
- "National Ministries of the United Church of Christ," Attachment: Activity 2

First show the video "Take My Life and Let It Be." Then show a video of a function of your congregation, such as a church picnic, Vacation Bible School, mission trip, or worship service with plenty of congregants acting and interacting in the video. After showing both videos, invite participants to share their views on coming to church and what church means to them. If they could leave only one of the two videos behind for posterity, which one would it be? Why? If they could create their own video entitled "Come to Church," what would they include? Why?

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

Distribute Attachment: Activity 2. As the participants look over the information, ask them in what ways the ministry and mission of our congregation are reflected in the circles around the Local Church Ministries circle. *What about the Justice and Witness Ministries circle? What is it about our UCC mission and ministry that attracts people to our congregations?*

3 Sabbath for Rest, Relief, and Restoration

Leader preparation: This activity introduces the concept of Sabbath and the Sabbatical Year in the biblical Hebrew culture with the aim of comparing the system to issues in the modern economy, such as provision for the poor, credit, debt, bankruptcy, rest and restoration, and overproduction. The scripture contains instructions given to Israel by God.

Supplies:

- Bible

Read Exodus 23:10–12. The Sabbath, the seventh day, and the Sabbatical year, the seventh year, are connected with rest for all bodies from work, rest for the land, provision for the poor, release from debt, and respect for the one God Yahweh. The codes assisted production, health, debt elimination, and our equivalency to bankruptcy. They also provided a way to help the poor, who could take what grew naturally from the fields lying fallow or what had been left behind from fields that had been harvested (a called gleaning). This scripture establishes God’s plan for the body’s reconnection with itself, other bodies, the earth, and with God through this system of rest and restoration. Invite participants to compare God’s instructions to the Israelites with aspects of our economic system, such as credit, debt, overproduction, overbuilding, demand and supply, bankruptcy, health, and health care. *What do these ancient teachings have to say to us today? How does honoring your body and the bodies of others and honoring the land reconnect creation with its Creator?*

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Dwellings (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity looks at the physical body as a dwelling place for the spirit and mind as well as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). It also explores the temporal body in the 2 Corinthians text. Participants will be encouraged to draw a symbolic representation of dwelling places that represent their bodies and the UCC. Read and meditate on the scriptures.

Supplies:

- Bible
- construction paper and crayons

Throughout this Exploration we have considered the body created in the image of God, the dwelling place of the spirit-soul and of the mind as well as of the Holy Spirit. With this faith practice, we honor our bodies and the bodies of others for these functions and truths. Invite participants to state in their own words the body as described by Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:13–5:1. How does this description affect honoring the body? Invite participants to draw a symbolic or metaphorical representation of the dwelling places that represent their bodies and the UCC. Remind them that this is symbolic and they can use words or shapes. Ask persons to share their “dwellings.”

5 My Body Is Feared/My Body Is Hated

Leader preparation: The legacy of American chattel slavery and discrimination against African Americans lingers, supporting negative body images that dishonor the body. Racial profiling continues as young black males are stopped for “driving while black,” despite heavy public protest from advocacy groups and even with media coverage of several high-profile cases involving celebrities and public figures. This extends to other races, religions, and special groups, such as the Muslim population after September 11, 2001, or hate crimes against LGBT bodies, or racial profiling as a result of the Arizona immigration law. In the meantime, body image and self-image suffer. How does one honor the body and those of others when one’s body is feared or hated? Reflect on this, using the articles provided as background, and pray regarding the question of honoring and encouraging bodies that are feared or hated by others. Prior to the session, you might also search for images of hated or feared groups or literature that depicts their treatment. You might ask other persons to contribute from their libraries and files too: slave narratives, concentration camp experiments, *Diary of Anne Frank*, hate crimes against LGBT, poetry, art.

Option: For a twist in the discussion, include images of Nazis or the Ku Klux Klan, the Cartel in Mexico, or other groups that victimize others.

Supplies:

- “Racial Profiling,” <http://www.ucc.org/justice/racism/racial-profiling.html>
- “Hate Crime Legislation Becomes Law,” <http://www.ucc.org/news/hate-crimes-legislation.html>
- “Justice and Witness Ministry Issues,” <http://www.ucc.org/justice/issues.html>
- images of hated or feared groups (photographs or artwork of hated racial, ethnic, or sexual groups and/or hate groups such as Nazis, Skinheads, KKK)

Invite participants to arrange their chairs so they are isolated from one another. For the next five minutes have them imagine themselves as part of any one hated and/or feared group and to allow their bodies to feel that fear or hate. Then show the images, without comment or pause in between. Let the images speak for themselves. (This part should last no longer than five minutes.) Afterward, give persons a few minutes to collect themselves, and then invite them to share about this experience, particularly in terms of their bodies. Ask how, as Christians and as a denomination, we can honor bodies that are feared or hated. What impact do these images have on participants? What memories do they evoke? Did anyone have a physical response? What self-reflection do these images evoke?

6 My Body Is Small

Leader preparation: This activity looks at the UCC campaign to stop bullying of young children in schools and in other arenas, such as church. There has been an increase in bullying of children and youth who are same-gender-loving or who are making decisions about their sexuality. The UCC announcement features coverage of laws that will provide a legal recourse for all victims of school bullying, including LGBT children.

Supplies:

- “Bullying is a form of abuse,” <http://www.ucc.org/children/bullying-is-a-form-of-abuse.html>

Invite the group to imagine being young, small, in middle school, and trying to make a decision about your sexuality. You are being bullied relentlessly by a group of kids at school, and you just don't know how much more of the name-calling, pushes, taunting, and embarrassment you can take. Since middle and junior high school are often daunting for anyone, you could ask if anyone actually experienced this kind of bullying. What was it like? How did the person manage?

Have the group read together the article on bullying. Invite the participants to respond to the article in the context of their personal experiences.

Invite the group to discuss how the practice of honoring the body is at the core of alleviating this situation. Ask how we can affirm children in situations of bullying. *What can we as a church do to create an environment of affirmation and respect for their bodies and the bodies of others?* (Information on diversity; books that reflect all kinds of children; affirmations; information on the new laws to establish that bullying is wrong; curricula on the body; chances to compliment or encourage positive thoughts toward one's body)

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Blessings! (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity celebrates the blessings of serving Christ through serving other people. Think of one special experience to start off the celebration when you went to serve someone and were blessed by that person(s) in unanticipated ways.

Supplies: None

Arrange chairs in a circle. Invite persons to share briefly one special experience in ministry when they went to serve someone and were themselves served. Consider sharing your own story first to give persons time to remember and reflect. They do not have to give names or identifying details to maintain confidentiality. After the person recounts the experience, the rest of the group will lean toward the person and proclaim them: "Blessed! Thank God!" Continue until everyone who desires to share has participated.



8 Send for the Wailing Women

Leader preparation: This activity looks at the justice issue of the lucrative trade of human trafficking, including but not limited to sex trafficking; it examines as well the work of the UCC Justice & Witness Ministry.

You will need to create the price tags, which should be large with a "value" not greater than \$6 per hour. The tags should also state a role such as SEX WORKER, \$4 per hour; FACTORY WORKER, \$2 per hour; CHILD SEX WORKER, \$1 per hour. VIRGIN, \$5 per hour. (If you can get real price tags, it will help add to the reality of this real human drama.)

In the center of the room place a long table with a black cloth and the basket of tags. The lament also has refers to optional libation pourings, for which you will need a pitcher or glass of water and a bucket or something to catch the water, if it cannot be poured onto the floor or ground. Make sure the table is stark to suit the real environment of many of these bodies. The ceremony starts with reading of Jeremiah 9:17–18. The lament begins immediately after the scripture.

Make copies of the lament, Attachment: Activity 8, for everyone.

Supplies:

- prelabeled price tags
- Bible, marked at Jeremiah 9:17–18
- “The Sum of Justice for Human Trafficking,” Attachment: Activity 8
- a long table draped with black cloth and a basket holding price tags

The UCC has an extensive Justice Ministry fighting to change things here and around the world, addressing issues such as sex and other human trafficking (modern-day slavery), healthcare; the federal budget, children, and family issues. Of the eleven points under the UCC Statement of Mission, three of them specifically deal with justice:

- To hear and give voice to creation’s cry for justice and peace
- To join oppressed and troubled people in the struggle for liberation
- To work for justice, healing, and wholeness of life

From the times of the Congregationalists’ involvement with the *Amistad* trial, the UCC and our forebears have always equated the message and work of the gospel with justice and love. The justice issue being explored in this activity is human trafficking, including but not limited to sex trafficking. This enterprise violates all principles of human rights, especially in cases where the “worker” is physically stolen and moved to foreign countries or areas and deceived into going with a promise of other, legitimate work. It is modern-day slavery. Its victims include both men and women, boys and girls. Even regular factory workers become involved in oppressive situations in some countries where they are literally earning what amounts to pennies to make high-end designer clothing that will be exported to wealthy markets for huge profits, none of which the workers realize. The secrecy of these operations in Western countries, the fact that they hide behind other businesses, and that they are able to move operations often and quickly—all make them more difficult to find and stop. In some countries, the recreational sex trade is legal.

Give each participant a prelabeled tag (do not let them select one; just hand one to them). After everyone gets a tag, each worker will stand and state the job and pay (no personal identity). Then dim the lights, if possible, and workers will be given copies of the lament, Attachment: Activity 8. Two leaders from among the workers need to be already to lead the lament. The lament closes in prayer for God’s bodies, dishonored, and for confidence in God’s justice.



9 Broken Bodies—Healed Spirits

Leader preparation: This activity explores the realities of disabled or specially able bodies. Plan a way to display the artwork “Man in Wheel Chair on Tightrope.” Read and meditate on Luke 14:12–14 before session.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Man in a Wheelchair on a Tightrope”, <http://www.art.com/products/p13951106-sa-i2746744/man-in-a-wheelchair-on-a-tightrope.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0>
- Bible

Read aloud Luke 14:12–14. This story of Jesus takes place at the home of one of

the Pharisees for a meal. Jesus had just talked with the guests about not exalting themselves, but allowing the host to bring them up to an exalted position. Then he turns to the host and makes the comments in Luke 14:12–14. Ask what participants think Jesus was saying to the host. In our faith practice of honoring the body, we meet persons with broken bodies, disabled or specially abled, which is a term coming into more use.

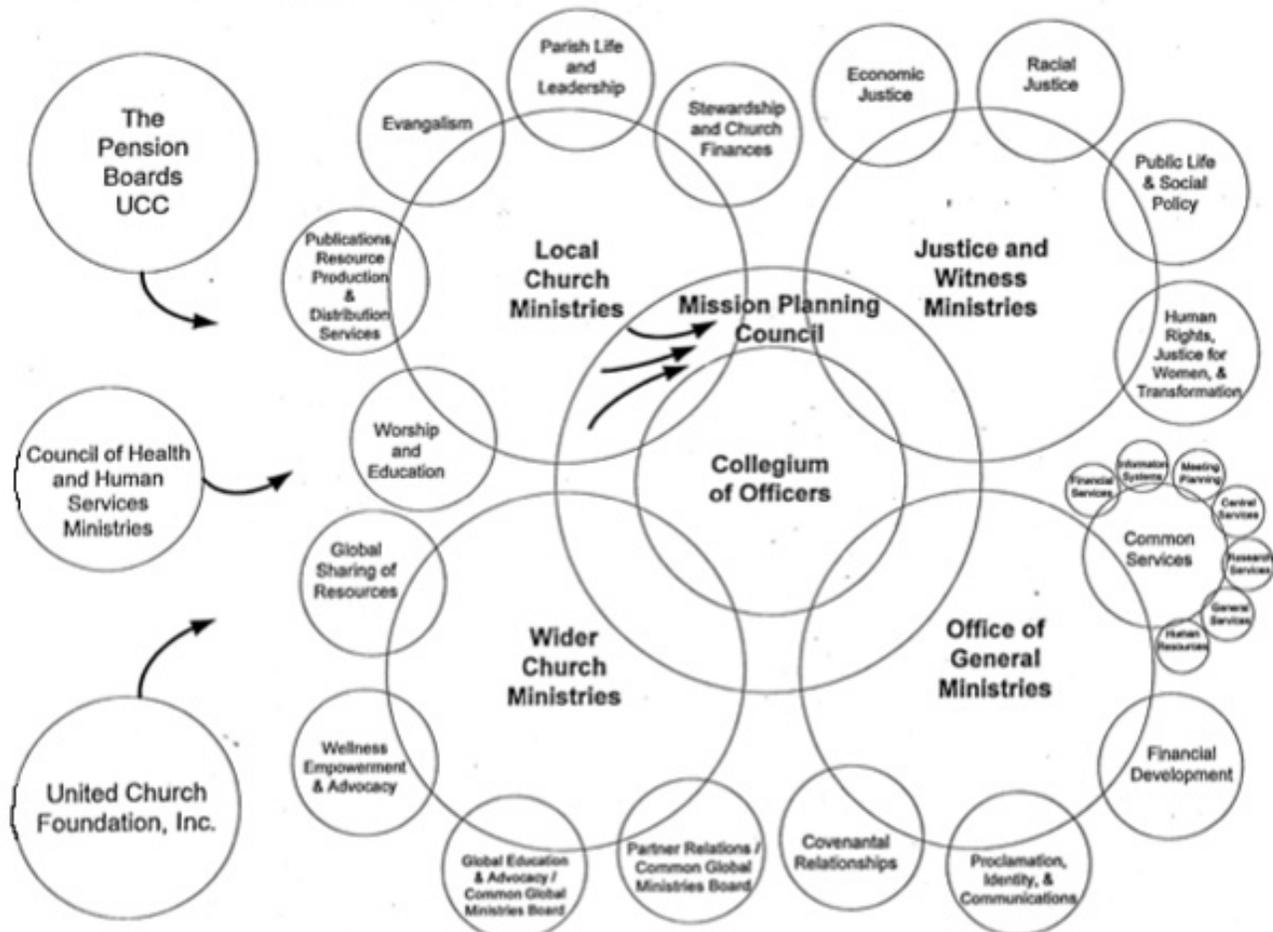
Ask: How do we as a society deal with persons with broken bodies? Why is that? Every body is created in the image of God, including those bodies that are disabled. We must see disabled bodies—and they must see themselves—as beloved of God. How welcoming are we to bodies with special needs at our church? Invite persons to think about the building: entries, chairs, space for wheelchairs, ramps, elevators, restrooms the sanctuary, exits, the service of worship, fellowship events.

Most office and public buildings are legally required to be accessible to the disabled. Most church buildings are also and that is good, but we must also be transparent in our love and care like Jesus. Invite participants to look at the artwork. What strikes them about the image? *What is missing from the painting? What reactions do you have observing this person's situation? If you were the person in the wheelchair on the tightrope, what would you be thinking? What would you want to happen?*

Reflect

Bodies cannot be honored without justice and love. We must shake off theological and philosophical errors that lead to designating the body as evil and separating it from the mind and spirit. We must insist that all bodies are treated with respect and dignity without exception. Bodies of all sizes, colors, shapes, cultures, orientations, lifestyles, ages, genders, identifications, and abilities are all created in the image of God.

National Ministries of the United Church of Christ



Attachment: Activity 8

The Sum of Justice for Human Trafficking

Prayer of Lament and Libation

By Waltrina N. Middleton

Minister for Youth Advocacy and Leadership Formation

Isaiah 61:8

For I the LORD love justice,
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;
I will faithfully give them their recompense,
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

Isaiah 62: 8

The LORD has sworn by his right hand and his mighty arm:
I will not again give your grain
to be food for your enemies,
and foreigners shall not drink the wine
for which you have labored . . .

Congregations may wish to use the following lament as a meditation on human trafficking and our response to it. The different sections of the meditation may be accompanied by a ritual of pouring libation. Such a ritual is based in African tradition. Water is poured into the land as a way of honoring and committing to justice the land and its people, including the ancestors and generations yet to come.

Can we hear with the ears of Justice?
Hear the clattering sounds beneath the pots and pans in kitchens
where more than hot meals are stewing for the greedy;
for those who prepare the feast are the victims of greed and extortion,
themselves hungry and starving for restitution
from overstuffed bellies who refuse to share their crumbs.

Can we escape the stench of injustice?
The smell of slavery, forced labor, debt bondage,
and slavery-like practices must fill the nostrils
just as it chokes the life out of children, women, and men
who are deprived of liberty, freedom, and independence.

Can we be moved by Justice?
To clothe the factory worker with fair wages as she mends garments
for major brands that profit from her toil?
To liberate the hands of the young boy soldier
forced into militia movements that inflict genocide?
To straighten the backs of the farm workers bent over in long labor
to supply fast food chains?

Attachment: Activity 8 *(continued)*

Where is Love in Justice?

In the courage of those who use their freedom to set free
those who are coerced into involuntary servitude and debt bondage.
In the persistence of those who use their pens to author policy and legislation,
creating tough consequences for those who commit crimes against humanity.

In the eloquence of those who use their voices to expose the camouflage hid-
ing
sex trafficking of young girls and uproot the foundation of gender-based vio-
lence.

In the strength of those who serve as bands of love
to foster human security around the world, including the United States.

Are we vessels of Justice?

Can we recognize the traces of blood
on our steel, cell phones, clothing, and food supply?
Will we speak and become the front lines of activism?
Will we faithfully offer recompense and stand in covenant with the survivors
of the fields, factories, mines, restaurants, private homes,
militias, and globalized businesses?

Will Justice remember . . .

. . . the sacrificial suffering of those who died and those who survive?
. . . those who look away from the abject reality of slavery?
. . . those who hold no one accountable for these crimes
—not even themselves?

We are the sum of Justice.

Let us gather ourselves
so the sums of our bodies, minds, and spirits will speak!
Let us find justice within ourselves.

Ashé. Amen.

Honoring the Body



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Setting

We look toward to the future always in anticipation of fresh insights, new ways to serve, better ways to live in wholeness. We honor these bodies that God gives us and the bodies of others as we come together in community. We welcome and affirm all bodies into the love of Christ. We rejoice always in the depths of God's diversity that makes us richer, wiser, and more grateful for each day. We work with our partners across denominations, faiths, and the world to end poverty and hunger and enter into a very real world of justice and peace. As the United Church of Christ, we look to our special calling of reconciliation and inclusion, listening to the still-speaking God as we move with excitement into the newness of life.

About this Exploration

The strength gained through honoring the body empowers those who follow Jesus to lead and serve. The fullness of the body of Christ is contingent upon the ability of humans to appreciate, respect, and celebrate our God-created diversity. Rather than discovering distinction and condemning brokenness, Christians are called to remember our common creation—*imago dei*. In that creation, we celebrate the unique abilities of every person, discovering opportunities to grow, feel, love, and express the fullness of each person's individual humanity. By claiming our physical bodies as spiritual gifts, we grow as persons and as the children of God, finding wholeness as we grow in our ability to more fully reflect the image of God.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Ezekiel 37:1–14
Matthew 22:34–40

Leader Preparation

The song says, “I don’t know what the future holds, but I know the God that holds the future. “ We are glad and very glad for the UCC’s embrace of the beloved community of God that has been shown to us and is realized both now and to come. With this faith practice of honoring our bodies and the bodies of others, we overcome centuries of confusion and error about the beauty and wonder of bodies made in the image of their Creator. We are one within ourselves and with one another. We reconnect with the universe in the rhythm of life. This is a joyous faith in Christ. There are struggles and disappointments that will surely come our way, but we remember that we are mighty in love, equipped and sent for the work of the vision.

Prayer: All praises to the Creator who so loved us, to the Spirit who breathed into us the breath of life. We move by that same Spirit to do the work of our Redeemer, Jesus. You have shown us what must be done. We thank you for our bodies and the bodies of those with whom we will walk. Empower us to embody the wonderful truths of God with a fresh anointing that will satisfy, inspire, and fulfill your plan for our lives. Be glorified, Jesus, in what is done for you and through you today. You are the Christ. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Fresh Stretch (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity examines the scripture in which Jesus said that we should be as little children to enter the kingdom, or realm, of heaven. In order to frame a discussion about the denomination seeking to stretch, grow, and be even more open to new things in God, invite participants into a discussion of the movements and growth of children’s bodies and their sense of discovery. Before the session, read Luke 18:15–16 and ask God for fresh insight into our need to stretch, grow, and discover as children, as adults, and as a denomination.

Supplies:

- Bible

Read or ask for a volunteer to read Luke 18:15–16. Invite the group into a discussion of why the disciples may have been trying to keep all those little bodies off Jesus. Kids need recess. They need space. Ask if anyone has ever watched an infant, even a baby puppy or kitten, stretch. They go for the four corners of the world. They really stretch intuitively. Their bodies also grow fast. Our denomination is doing the same thing. It’s stretching to be more attentive to God’s Word, more inclusive, more responsive to God’s calls for justice, mercy, and peace, and more supportive to the body of Christ. It’s seeking to be the growing church that our UCC General Minister and President Geoffrey Black talked about at the General Synod.

Ask participants: *Why does a denomination need to retain that freshness, that growth, that sense of discovery that kids have? What happens if we don’t retain these? What are the risks and the assets of being a growing church? Why would some not want to grow or change?*

2 Together One

Leader preparation: This activity reflects on the UCC commitment to being and becoming a more fully inclusive church and the dedication that it will take to get there. It features one group exercise and two short scenarios. Provide five copies of Attachment: Activity 2 (a heavier paper or light card stock works better for the scripts). Invite four outgoing personalities and one “announcer” to participate in presenting the drama for the group. Each segment is announced to the group by an announcer, who simply says “Pre-Inclusion” before that segment and “Inclusion” before the next and so on. (It would even be funnier if the announcer had three large cards with Pre-Inclusion, Inclusion, and Future Inclusion on them and walked across the front to announce the segments like rounds at an old-time boxing match.) Preview the scenarios and the description of the following group exercise. Pray and meditate on the coming together of God’s people in Christ and thank God.

Supplies:

- “The Great Inclusion,” Attachment: Activity 2
- four chairs for Scenario 2

Open the activity by quoting the following statement from the UCC’s *Toward the 21st Century: A Statement of Commitment*: “By God’s grace, we will be an inclusive church. We commit ourselves to be a church for all people and, in Christ, we celebrate, affirm, and embrace the rich diversity of God’s good creation.” Suggest

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

that inclusion really supports our faith practice of honoring our bodies and the bodies of others. However, things can get a little “hot” sometimes.

Invite everyone to imagine a “Pre-Inclusion,” an “Inclusion,” and the “Future Inclusion” that the UCC desires to realize. Ask for four “wild and crazy” participants and an announcer to help demonstrate the phases in two short scenarios. These persons should go to another area to prepare the scenarios and return in five minutes or less.

Ask participants to clasp their two hands together lightly. Indicate that this gesture is “Pre-Inclusion.” Now have them lightly rub their two hands gently and slowly; that is Inclusion.” Now ask them to rub their hands together quickly for a moment till they feel the “heat.” Indicate that represents “Future Inclusion”—where we are headed and where we need to go.

Have the actors return and present “The Great Inclusion,” Attachment: Activity 2. Then lead a discussion about reactions to the scenarios. Share thoughts on our commitment as a denomination to become even more fully inclusive. Suggest that there may be some tensions and some “rubbings,” but we will work through them as a denomination and be enriched for it. Invite further comments or reactions.

3 The Family Growing

Leader preparation: This activity considers our changing and growing UCC family and the bodies in it as we move into the future. Our entry points will be three art pieces; we will invite God to speak through them about our bodies, our families, and our denomination and world in the future. Before the session, preview the artwork and pray that God will speak. Also make provisions for mounting or showing the artwork. Background music is optional. Display the artwork before the session begins, although you may want to cover the images until you show them.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Margot Embracing Her Mother” by Mary Cassatt, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1502057828?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37961&store_id=1401
- artwork: “Out of Work” by Käthe Kollwitz, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1502057828?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401
- artwork: “Golden Rule” by Norman Rockwell, <http://www.art.com/products/p9388041612-sa-i5446642/norman-rockwell-golden-rule-do-onto-others-april-1-1961.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=5000032&ui=6c6a730242504593a62db31e60ee1963&ssk=norman+rockwell>
- (optional) background music

Introduce the theme for this activity—“The Growing Family”—and indicate that you will view artwork and invite God to let the works speak to us about bodies, families, and the UCC denomination in the future. As you highlight each piece, invite participants to make comments related to the theme. Offer a prayer, and then begin to show or highlight each art piece, giving only the title and artist and repeating the theme as needed. Ask participants to look at the pieces in relation to the growing family theme rather than with the thought of whether they like or dislike the piece. *What does this artwork say to us about who we are and who we need to become? What issues are portrayed that need to help form our future? When all pieces have been highlighted, share reactions to the experience and what God offered.*

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Happy (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read the Beatitudes and meditate on honoring the body.

Supplies:

- Bible
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Invite the group to read aloud the Beatitudes, Matthew 5:1–11 (or have volunteers read while everyone else follows along). Ask participants for another word that means the same as “blessed”; hopefully, the word “happy” will be among the words given. If not, you may share it or read a modern translation or paraphrase that uses it. Make two columns on the newsprint or whiteboard. Title one column HAPPY GROUP and the other BLESSING. The happy group is the group named in each beatitude. There are eight groups and “you” in verse 11. The next column is the blessing stated in each beatitude. Invite the group to complete the columns with nine happy groups and their corresponding blessings. Ask: *Is the happiness in the present or future? In what ways do you experience this kind of happiness now? Will you in the future? What do we need to be about to help such happiness be part of our lives, our families, our congregation, and our denomination?*

5 One Body, One World

Leader preparation: This activity focuses on our practice of honoring our bodies and those of others as individuals and as a denomination. It will use the scripture text “Valley of the Dry Bones” from Ezekiel as a backdrop to this divine charge and encouragement. Read and meditate on the text and the art piece prior to the session. Plan a way to display the artwork.

Supplies:

- Bible
- artwork: “Back Bone, c. 1997” by Tony Cragg, <http://www.art.com/products/p12210191-sa-i1581812/tony-cragg-back-bone-c1997.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=c5dd66dac7d541809fb8256c7daa3064&searchstring=back+bone+cragg>

Ask a volunteer to read Ezekiel 37:1–14. Also, ask for a volunteer to listen carefully in order to explain or paraphrase what happened in the passage. Ask participants to note the four things God offers to the dry or dead bones (tendons, flesh, skin, and breath sent by God). Ask participants what will give life to these dry bones. Why does God make this offer? (Breath sent by God and so the bones/Ezekiel will know that God is Lord) Display “Back Bone” and invite reaction to the artwork, giving the title of the piece and artist. Invite reflection on these questions: *If the UCC and we are Ezekiel following the directions of God, who are the bones that will rise alive and united? Why? How is the practice of honoring the body connected to this passage for your body and for the denomination?*

6 Worship for the Future

Leader preparation: It has been said that all of our lives ought to be worship to God, but when we gather as a people to worship, it is a glorious thing. Worship bears the repeated message of the honor God pays to us as Christians, as the church, and as the UCC because God created each and every body in God’s im-

age. We must thank and praise God for this honor, and we must honor what God honors! Before the session, collect or assign the items for the altar. Other things may be added. Prepare the room before the session. If possible, place the video behind the altar or in front of the altar.

Supplies:

- video: “Imago Dei” by Jill Kirsten Warner, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2duLAakNyuw>
- colorful red or other color drape for a table that will represent an altar
- three candles in a holder, or a single candle
- Bible
- additional music, or replay the video as background music for the reading of the scriptures.

UCC General Minister and President Geoffrey Black announced at the 28th Synod that the UCC has before it, looking to the future, a lot of B-HAGs (Big, Holy, Audacious Goals) that need to be accomplished in our mission to Christ for the world. We proclaim that our worship now and in the future needs to be big, holy, and audacious, too. We praise and thank God today for God’s goodness and kindness toward us.

Read Psalm 8. Play the video of the song “Imago Dei.” Announce that we bear God’s imprint always. Thanks be to God. But what does that mean? How do we live this out? God also lovingly bore our brokenness so that we might live. We praise and thank our Redeemer today, who is the Christ. Jesus allows us to walk in the power of his Resurrection.

Read Isaiah 53:1–5 followed by Hebrews 4:14–16. Invite spontaneous praises and prayers as offerings to God. Through the Spirit of God we are reminded and strengthened to do this work. We offer our bodies as living sacrifices in the service of God.

Read Romans 12:1. We rejoice and are exceeding glad! All praises to the Big, Holy, and Audacious Name! Replay “Imago Dei” and ask everyone to sing along. Close with a prayer of thanksgiving and praise.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Proclamation (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity affirms the practice of honoring the body now and for the future. Participants will write affirmations for their bodies, for other bodies that serve in the denomination, and for the bodies that are served and will be served for Christ. Make sure supplies are provided for the activity. Read and meditate on the scriptures before the session.

Supplies:

- Bible
- squares of colored paper or index cards
- markers

Invite participants to read and reflect on Psalm 102:18–22 and Habakkuk 2:2–3. These passages speak of future things and visions that will not tarry. To that end, we prepare. We practice in faith, honoring our bodies and the bodies of others. We practice in faith. Our practices make us stronger. They open us. Invite

participants to affirm their bodies, the bodies of others in the denomination, and the bodies that we serve and will serve in Christ. Distribute the colored paper or index cards and invite the participants to write down words and phrases that affirm their practices of honoring the body. (If they can't think of one, suggest only one or two of these: "In Imago Dei"; "My Body Is the Dwelling"; "UCC: Bodies Beautiful"; "UCC, Christ, and Me"; "One Body, One World.") Post these affirmations in your learning space or in a more public space where other members of the congregation can read them.

8 Love

Leader preparation: This activity explores the five goals for the denomination presented by General Minister and President Geoffrey Black at General Synod 28 and five Honoring the Body tools of practice that may help our bodies attain these goals. Before the session, read and meditate on Matthew: 22:34–40. Be sure there are copies of "5-5" for each participant. A copy of the synod address is also provided.

Supplies:

- "5-5," Attachment: Activity 8
- Bible
- "UCC Collegium aims for 'Big Holy Audacious Goals,'" <http://www.ucc.org/news/ucc-collegium-aims-for-big.html>

Invite participants to read Attachment: Activity 8, the five denominational goals (B-HAGs) set by the UCC General Minister and President Geoffrey Black and the five body-honoring practices that may help us stretch toward the future. Invite comments and insights. Ask which of these participants accept as valid and can live out. *Which can our congregation embody? How might we live these out?* Read the Great Commandment Matthew: 22:34–40, and go in peace.

9 Emmanuel

Leader preparation: How grateful we are for the promises of God and this opportunity to move forward. This activity reminds us that Jesus is with us always, and we hold the promise of God for new things. Review the scriptures and make certain everything is available for the video. Pray, and thank God!

Supplies:

- Bible or copies of Matthew 28:18–20 and Revelation 21:3–5
- song: "I Was There to Hear Your Boring Cry," by John Ylvisaker (tune: Waterlife), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYnmtQI50ic>; *The New Century Hymnal*, #351
- equipment to show the video

Reflect

We have glimpsed the future, and it is a bright one as we move from glory to glory.

Read Matthew 28:18–20 and Revelation 21:3–5. Ask persons to tell in their own words what those scriptures mean to them and to the UCC. Play the song, and invite participants to rejoice with "exceeding great joy" that God is with us into the future and beyond.

Attachment: Activity 2

The Great Inclusion

Needed: Bodies 1, 2, 3, 4 and the Announcer

Scenario 1

Announcer: Pre-Inclusion or Life was simple then.

(Bodies 1 and 2 step forward)

Body 1: Service was wonderful today. Let's get something to eat. How about barbeque?

Body 2: I was feeling like a hamburger.

Body 1: Okay.

Announcer: Inclusion, or Here We Go!

(Bodies 3 and 4 join Bodies 1 and 2)

Body 1: Service was wonderful today. Let's get something to eat. How about barbeque?

Body 2: I was feeling like a hamburger.

Body 3: I don't eat beef.

Body 2: Okay, let's get barbeque.

Body 3: I don't eat pork.

Body 4: How about chicken?

Bodies 1 and 2: Yeah, chicken is good.

Body 3: I don't eat chicken. I only eat cauliflower.

Bodies 1, 2, and 4: Yuck!!!!!!!

Announcer: Future Inclusion at the UCC

Body 1: Service was wonderful today. Let's get something to eat. How about barbeque?

Body 2: I could go for some cauliflower.

Body 4: Me, too. I love it with the cheese.

Body 3 beams at everyone.

Body 1: Let's go. I could eat a whole bunch by myself today!

(Bodies 1, 2, 3, and 4 exit.)

Attachment: Activity 2 (*continued*)

Scenario 2

(Each Body will need a chair.)

Announcer: Pre-Inclusion—Let’s go back.

(Bodies 1 and 3 bring their chairs in and set them a respective distance apart so that another chair could fit in between them but it would be very close to Body 1’s chair.)

Body 3: Good morning.

Body 1: Good morning.

Announcer: Inclusion—Here we go!

(Body 4 comes in and puts his/her chair right next to Body 1’s chair. Body 1 is clearly uncomfortable but tries to make the best of it.)

Body 4: Good morning, all, beautiful day!

Body 3: Good morning.

(Body 1 mumbles something. Body 4 gets closer and doesn’t seem to notice.)

Announcer: Full Inclusion at the UCC?

(Body 2 enters. He/She is in a wheelchair and clearly in a bad mood. She bumps into the doorway and then comes in and rolls over Body 3’s foot.)

Body 3: Awww! Can I help you this morning?

Body 2: I don’t need any help. You all sure don’t make it easy for us here.

Body 3: Let me help you. I can move my chair.

Body 2: Do I look like I need any help!?

(Body 3 nods his/her head yes.)

Body 2: Well, don’t.

Body 1: Say, Buddy, there’s a little more room on your side. Could you scoot over a bit?

Body 4: You don’t like me because I’m a Sudo.

Body 1: I didn’t know that you were a Sudo and it doesn’t matter to me. I was just trying to get a little more personal space.

Body 4: People can be so cruel.

Body 1: Look, Buddy, maybe we can just switch seats. There’s just a little more room on your side, that’s all.

Body 4: Don’t call me Buddy. I’ll just move.

Body 1: Say, I’m sorry.

(Body 4 moves his/her chair next to Body 3.)

(Silence before Body 2 speaks.)

Body 2 (to Body 4): Oh, so you’re too good to sit next to someone in a wheelchair?

(Bodies 1, 2, 3, and 4 and the Announcer grab hands and take a bow. Good job!)

Attachment: Activity 8

5-5

Five Big Holy Audacious Goals

As announced by UCC General Minister and President Geoffrey Black at Synod 28.

1. A growing church, a growing movement to be conversant with all faith traditions; to be spiritual and missional about our capacity to serve God.
2. A widely recognized witness for peace, justice, equality, and inclusivity.
3. A catalyst for excellent leadership in every setting of ministry.
4. An environmental steward central to our understanding and practice of Christian faith.
5. Relevant to and reflective of the age and racial/ethnic demographics of this nation.

Five Honoring the Body Tools

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Health Care | Food/Water/Shelter/Exercise |
| 2. Spirit | Worship/Prayer/Study |
| 3. Ministry | Justice/Mercy/Grace |
| 4. Rest | In the Lord |
| 5. Love | God/Self/All |