



Keeping Sabbath

About this Faith Practice

Sabbath is intentional time taken by individuals and faith communities to integrate the Divine with humanity and creation. Jesus models how to keep Sabbath both inwardly (through prayer, solitude, silence, and meditation) and outwardly (through communal ritual and acts of justice). Our inward movement toward a life centered in the Spirit indicates the reign of God within us. Jesus embodies the depth of sabbath-keeping experiences through outward action to followers and to those he encounters who have specific needs. Our practice of Sabbath is informed by God resting on the seventh day after laboring for six days to create the world, establishing a day of Sabbath. Building on this biblical tradition, some faith communities dedicate a specific day of the week to rest, worship, and work for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

Let's Begin...

Now that you've downloaded the files for your faith practice and age group or setting, you can get started planning one or multiple sessions:

1 Open the .pdf file for your age group or setting. Choose an Exploration, the approach you think will help your group to best experience the faith practice. Choose any one of the following Explorations to use for one session:



Discovery



Scripture



Discipleship



Christian Tradition



Context and Mission



Future and Vision

Note: If you're planning multiple sessions, you can follow the order suggested above or feel free to use any order that fits the needs of your group. Some groups may choose to start with Scripture and then see where that leads them. Others may be more ready to act in their community and might want to start with Context and Mission.

2 Locate the Exploration you've chosen

3 Look through all 9 activities and select the ones you would like to do with your group.

- If you're planning a 30–45 minute session, choose 3 activities.
- 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.
- For 45 minutes to 1 hour, choose 4 or 5 activities.
- For a 1½ to 2-hour session, you can use all 9 activities.

Tip: Look for this symbol  to find activities designed for Easy Preparation (able to be done with minimal preparation using supplies normally found at the church).

4 Make copies of any handouts () related to your activities. Order posters (), if using art (see "Ordering Posters," below).

Use of Art, Music, and Scripture in Faith Practices

Faith Practices activities include many opportunities to grow in faith through the use of scripture, music, and art.

Ordering Posters

If you choose activities that use an art image, you or your church will need to purchase posters of the art by clicking on the link provided in the activity. If you wish to use art, you will need to plan ahead, since it takes 1 to 2 weeks for the posters to arrive after you place your order.

Art

Six posters are used with the faith practice Giving and Receiving Hospitality and may be ordered by clicking on the links provided.

From Imaging the Word Poster Sets:

"Out of Work" by Käthe Kollwitz (<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>)

"The Public Fountain" by Manuel Alvarez Bravo (<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>)

"Guatemala: Procession" by Betty LaDuke (<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>)

From AllPosters.com:

"The Dance of Youth" by Pablo Picasso (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters7>)

"Going to Church" by William H. Johnson (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters8>)

"Midday Rest" (after Millet), c.1890 by Vincent van Gogh (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters9>)

Music

Three music selections are used with Giving and Receiving Hospitality. We have selected music which is easily found in many hymnals. A web link is provided to give more information about each music selection.

Let Me Enter God's Own Dwelling, Tune: Unser Herrscher (<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong7>)

I Woke Up This Morning, Tune: Woke Up This Morning (<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong8>)

I've Got Peace Like a River, Tune: Peace Like A River (<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong9>)

Scripture

Twelve Bible passages are used with Giving and Receiving Hospitality, two with each Exploration.

Discovery	Genesis 2:2–4	Luke 12:22–31
Scripture	Mark 2:23–3:6	Exodus 20:1–17
Discipleship	Luke 6:1–11	Deuteronomy 6:1–9
Christian Tradition	Mark 6:30–34, 53–56	Isaiah 58:9b–14
Context and Mission	Jeremiah 17:19–27	1 Corinthians 11:17–26
Future and Vision	Psalms 119:105–112, 129–136	Matthew 27:51–66 (Matthew 26:14–27:66)

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Keeping Sabbath



Exploration: Discovery

About this Setting

Sabbath is grounded in justice. God set aside Sabbath in order to allow that all creation might enjoy fullness, peace, and God's abiding presence. As people of the United Church of Christ, our practices of Sabbath are informed both by our present ways of organizing ourselves for local church mission and ministry, and for entering the world seeking justice so that all those made in the image of God, and creation itself, may receive the blessings of the Sabbath. In this Exploration we will introduce the concept of Sabbath and its implications for us who seek to serve a God who is still speaking.

About this Exploration

Sabbath is intentional time taken by individuals and faith communities to integrate the Divine with humanity and creation. Jesus models how to keep Sabbath both inwardly (through prayer, solitude, silence, and meditation) and outwardly (through communal ritual and acts of justice). Our inward movement toward a life centered in the Spirit indicates the reign of God within us. Jesus embodies the depth of his Sabbath-keeping experiences through outward action to his followers and to those he encounters who have specific needs. Our practice of Sabbath is informed by God's resting on the seventh day after laboring for six days to create the world, establishing a day of Sabbath. Building on this biblical tradition, some faith communities dedicate a specific day of the week to rest, worship, and work for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Genesis 2:2-4
Luke 12:22-31

Leader Preparation

Spend 5–10 minutes in centering breath prayer. Find a comfortable, quiet place. Breathe deeply. On breathing in, pray, “Holy God ...” When exhaling, pray, “... let me feel your presence.” Then spend a few minutes meditating upon things for which you are thankful: relationships, personal gifts, or any other person or thing that you have experienced as a blessing from God.

Prayer: Holy God, thank you for your presence in my life and the lives of others. Help me to receive your gifts, especially your gift of Sabbath, as a willing and open disciple of Jesus Christ, in whose name I pray. Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from 9 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 using supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

* To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.

* To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 using at least one activity from each category.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

① Making Sabbath (Easy Preparation) — Children and/or younger youth

Leader preparation: Read Genesis 2:2–4.

Supplies:

- Bible

If your location and the weather permit, take the participants outside. If not, look out a window. Ask the participants to look around quietly for 1–2 minutes. Taking turns, ask them to name things they see that God created. If someone points out an object made by people, affirm this choice by saying something like: “Yes, God made people and helped them make that!” Read aloud Genesis 2:2–4. Point out that God rested after making all these things.

Go back inside or, if the weather and location are appropriate, sit down outside, and ask the participants what they like to do to rest. Encourage them to share their stories. Tell them that “Sabbath” is a Bible word that means real rest, and that God made Sabbath for them and for all people and animals.

End with this or a similar prayer (optional): *God, thank you for making Sabbath so that we can rest and enjoy all the things, animals, and people that you have made. Amen.*

② Brave Belonging — Confirmation-age youth, older youth, young adults, adults, older adults

Leader preparation: One of the United Church of Christ’s Six Historic Emphases is “We belong to Christ,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/25et4bb>. Follow the link and scroll down the page to the section headed “Brave Belonging.” Read about the forty-two Hungarian Protestants who refused to recant their faith during even the most trying of circumstances, and about the “Hymn of the Hungarian Galley Slaves”/“Lift Your Heads, O Martyrs, Weeping,” written by one of those who survived the ordeal, found in *The New Century Hymnal* #445. Read the words of the hymn reflectively (sing them if you are able). Read Luke 12:22–31 in light of the hymn’s impact upon your heart.

Optional: If you are near a congregation of Hungarian Reformed Christians from the Calvin Synod of the United Church of Christ, invite someone from their community to come and share and lead this activity.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- copies of *The New Century Hymnal* (NCH), <http://www.tinyurl.com/NCHymnal>
- a keyboard player or CD accompaniment copy of NCH, <http://www.tinyurl.com/NCHymnalCD>

Briefly tell the story of the Hungarian Protestants who were made galley slaves, and about the hymn written by one of them. Sing the hymn together. Read Luke 12:22–31 together. Remind everyone that Sabbath can come to us even at the worst of times when we feel, know, and experience God’s presence.

End with this prayer, based on one written by Gyorgy Szendrei, another of the surviving galley slaves:



*God in the struggles of life,
be merciful to us, and draw us ever near.
Help us when we are troubled and in pain.
You are our only hope.
All that we are and all that we have come from you.
Provide for us always. Amen.*

③ Earth Care — Confirmation-age youth/older youth/adults

Leader preparation: Read *And Indeed It Is Very Good: A Pastoral Letter on Faith and Environment*, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2fgxtf5>

Read Genesis 2:2–4. Watch the UCC’s EarthCare video at <http://www.tinyurl.com/2eks9sd>

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access and a projector
- copies of “And Indeed It Is Very Good: A Pastoral Letter on Faith and Environment” (optional), <http://www.tinyurl.com/2fgxtf5>
- video: EarthCare, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2eks9sd>

Read Genesis 2:2–4 to the group. Watch the EarthCare video together. Discuss feelings, connections, observations that form within the group. If you choose, share copies of “And Indeed It Is Very Good: A Pastoral Letter on Faith and Environment” with the group, or refer them to the Web site.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

④ Our Evangelical Heritage (Easy Preparation) — Confirmation-age youth, adults

Leader preparation: Read the Introduction section of the Evangelical Catechism, <http://www.tinyurl.com/269yzc2>. Print copies for the group. As you read this, remember that it comes from an earlier era in which exclusive, male language was used. Read Luke 12:22–31. Understand that from the perspective of most biblical writers, “righteousness” would mean being in a right relationship with God by remaining ever faithful to the covenants that God has made with human beings. As implied by this scripture text, though, Luke’s ideas about “righteousness” did not always suggest perfect legalistic adherence to God’s covenant commandments. Rather, the gospel writer implied a righteousness based more on right relationships than right beliefs.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- copies of the Introduction of the Evangelical Catechism, <http://www.tinyurl.com/269yzc2>

Read Luke 12:22–31 together. Pass out the copies of the Introduction to the Evangelical Catechism. Explain to the participants that the Evangelical Catechism was a document that German Christians who came to America in the middle of the nineteenth century used to help teach faith traditions to their children. Explain that these Christians formed the Evangelical Synod and then the Evangelical Church. Early in the twentieth century they and the Reformed Church in the United States came together to form the Evangelical and Reformed Church.



In 1958 the Evangelical and Reformed Church merged with the Congregational Christian Churches to form the United Church of Christ. After discussing these details and the issue of inclusive language, read the first two questions and answers.

Lead a discussion about the righteousness of which Jesus speaks and the righteousness referred to in the Evangelical Catechism. Offer some biblical background on the term “righteousness.” In what ways do the ideas of “righteousness” in the Evangelical Catechism relate to those in Luke’s Gospel? In what ways do they not seem to relate? How do both these forms of righteousness relate to the concept of Sabbath?

5 God Creates and God Provides—Children

Leader preparation: Read Genesis 2:2–4 and Luke 12:22–31.

Supplies:

- old magazines
- scissors
- construction paper or poster board
- glue sticks

Read Genesis 2:2–4. Invite the participants to look through the magazines and cut out pictures of things that God created before God established the Sabbath. Then read Luke 12:22–31. Have them look through the magazines for pictures of houses, clothes, and food. Give each person a piece of construction paper or poster board. Fold the paper or poster board in half. Label one half “God made these.” On that half, paste two or three pictures of things that God was pleased to have made. Label the other half “God helps me have these.” On this half, paste pictures of houses, clothes, and food. Discuss that just as God was happy to make everything in creation, God is pleased to help us have the things we need.

End with this or a similar prayer: *God, thank you for making everything and for giving us what we need. Amen.*



6 The Wrong Kind of Rest—Adults

Leader preparation: Study the poster “Out of Work.” Make special note of the faces of the woman and the man. How do they appear to feel? Read Luke 12:22–31. Think about your own or others’ experiences of being cut off from some primary human need such as food, shelter, or work. Look at some of the following materials available on the United Church of Christ’s Justice and Witness Ministries Web site: Recession Financial Crisis, <http://www.tinyurl.com/28nfsas>.

Supplies:

- poster, “Out of Work,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>, by Käthe Kollwitz
- Bibles

Read Luke 12:22–31 together. Then lead a discussion about the poster. Pose these or similar questions: How do the adults in the poster appear to be feeling? Do the people in the poster appear to have everything that they need in order to live? Invite the participants to tell about times during which they experienced a lack of food, work, shelter, or other primary human need. How did they feel? How do these feelings relate to Jesus’ words about not worrying? In what ways can the church help people who find themselves in circumstances like those experienced



by the people in the poster? Share with participants some information you found at the Justice and Witness Ministries Web site.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 God Is Still Speaking (Easy Preparation) — Confirmation-age youth, older youth, adults

Leader preparation:

Do the leader preparation activity at the beginning of this Exploration.

Supplies:

- Bible

Read Genesis 2:2–4. Allow time for silence, and then lead the group in 5 minutes of centering breath prayer. Find a comfortable, quiet place. Breathe deeply. On breathing in, instruct all to pray, “Holy God,” When exhaling, pray, “let me feel your presence.” Following this, ask everyone to spend a few minutes meditating upon things, people, events for which they are thankful. Ask each person to share one or more of the things for which they are thankful. Lead them by saying, “Thank you, God, for speaking to me through _____.”

End by praying this or a similar prayer: *Holy God, thank you for your presence in our lives and the lives of others. Help us to receive your gifts, especially your gift of Sabbath, as willing and open disciples of Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.*

8 Nickommoh — Younger children, confirmation-age youth

Leader preparation: Our Congregational forebears, the Pilgrims, held the first Thanksgiving feast in the autumn of 1621. It had been nearly a year since they had arrived aboard the Mayflower, spending the first winter on the ship. By spring, nearly half of the passengers and crew had died. But through help they received from the Naragansset people, including the Wampanoag Indians, they learned to plant native crops and hunt native game. When autumn came, they enjoyed their first harvest and held a thanksgiving feast that coincided with the Natives’ celebration of Nickommoh, a yearly feast that included thanksgiving for the harvest, music, and games.

Supplies:

- Bible
- book *Nickommoh!: A Thanksgiving Celebration*, by Jackie French Koller; illustrated by Marcia Sewall, illustrator (New York: Atheneum, 1999) (optional), <http://www.tinyurl.com/2b5thmm>

Read Luke 12:29–31 to the group. Then tell them the story of the first Thanksgiving and the role that the Wampanoag people played. If you are working with younger children and read *Nickommoh!: A Thanksgiving Celebration* to them. Highlight for them the connections between Jesus’ words in Luke 12 and the Native American celebration of Nickommoh. Ask them in what ways we can show our thanks to God.

End with this or a similar prayer: *Thank you, Great Spirit, for all the things that Earth gives to us! Amen.*



9 God's Providence—Young adults/adults

Leader preparation: "Providence" is an old-fashioned religious-sounding word that simply means "guidance" or "care." When we use it in the church, we often do so in light of God's care and provision for all creation, including ourselves. Read Genesis 2:2–4 in light of the concept of God's providential care for creation. Phillis Wheatley (1753–84) was among the first published African-American authors. She was certainly the first African American woman poet to be published. Her poems were praised by George Washington, among others. Read her poem "Thoughts on the Works of Providence." Notice the themes of creation and God's provision for it.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- pens/pencils
- paper
- copies of Phillis Wheatley's poem "Thoughts on the Works of Providence," <http://www.tinyurl.com/2bcz95p>

Reflect

What does it mean to practice Sabbath? How does the practice of Sabbath impact our relationships with God, others, ourselves, and creation? How can a Sabbath orientation change our approach to material wealth and work? Reflect upon the ways that your experience of these activities has changed your outlook on the meaning, importance, and practice of Sabbath. Write your thoughts in a journal, and share them with your fellow faith practitioners the next time that you get together.

Read the poem together. Allow a few moments for reflection. Invite the participants to write a short poetic or prose reflection upon God's care for creation. Invite those who wish to share their reflections. When all have been given the chance to share, read Genesis 2:2–4 together. End by inviting participants to pray as a group as they feel led to do so, focusing especially on prayers of thanksgiving for the goodness of creation and God's care for it and for us.

Keeping Sabbath



Exploration: Scripture

About this Setting

The Hebrew scriptures tell us that the Sabbath is set aside for rest. But what is rest? Is it an absence of activity, or can it include the presence of activities that seek justice, healing, wholeness, and equality for all? The United Church of Christ and earlier groups who have informed our denominational experiences have sought to find a balance in their ideas and practices of Sabbath between the letter and the spirit of the law. Different congregations and people from different generations can certainly have different understandings of Sabbath. In this Exploration we will explore some of the different understandings of the Sabbath from our individual, congregational, and denominational perspectives.

About this Exploration

Scripture defines Sabbath in several ways. Our journey will help us explore how Sabbath was given as commandment and blessing, and how Jesus expanded Sabbath to be more inclusive. Jesus reinforced the concept that the Sabbath was about God but for people (Mark 2:23–3:6). Sabbath is a time of blessing, a time to rest from daily work and restore energy and “godness.” Sabbath is not a time to worry about rules, but to work for God’s reign, letting God take care of the rest. What helps us focus on Sabbath? Consider how we can recharge, refresh, and renew our spirits, minds, and bodies.



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Exodus 20:1–17

Mark 2:23–3:6

Leader Preparation

Take a few moments to think about your past Sabbath experiences. Reimagine the sights, smells, sounds, tastes, and feelings of one special experience that comes to mind. Spend time enjoying this revisit of your personal Sabbath history.

Prayer: God of Sabbath wholeness, be with me as I lead fellow pilgrims to reflect upon your Sabbath covenants and promises. Open our hearts to the joyful renewing of our bodies, minds, and souls. Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from 9 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 using supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

* To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.

* To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 using at least one activity from each category.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Our Congregational Heritage I (Easy Preparation) — Confirmation-age youth, adults

Leader preparation: Check out The Kansas City Statement, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2cowa3v>.

Look especially at the paragraph under the heading “Faith.” Make copies of this paragraph for the group. Remember that this was written in 1913, before gender-neutral, inclusive language was widely used. The Kansas City Statement was written by the delegates of the National Council of the Congregational Churches at their 1913 convention in Kansas City, Missouri. It was an important time for members of the Congregational Churches as they, although tracing themselves to the earliest decades of European settlement in the New World, were reaching a point where a redefinition and reaffirmation of their historic faith commitments were needed. Jesus also ministered at a time when God’s people needed to redefine and to reaffirm their covenant commitments to God. Read Mark 2:23–3:6 to get an idea about what this meant for Jesus’ ministry.

Supplies:

- newsprint or whiteboard and markers
- Bibles
- copies of the “Faith” paragraph of The Kansas City Statement, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2cowa3v>

Prayerfully read Mark 2:23–3:6 together as a group. Explain a bit of the background of the Kansas City Statement to the group, and read together the section on “Faith.” Discuss ways your congregation:

1. “proclaims the Gospel”
2. “exalts the one true God”
3. “labors for the progress of knowledge”
4. promotes “the reign of peace” and the realization of human sisterhood and brotherhood.

Write the group’s ideas on newsprint or white board.

2 Sense, Scents, and Sounds of Sabbath — Confirmation-age youth, older youth, adults

Leader preparation: Read Mark 2:23–28. Try out the Leader Preparation activity at the beginning of this Exploration. Recall that, as stated in the preamble to the Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ, (<http://www.tinyurl.com/28117bc>),

the United Church of Christ, “in accordance with the teaching of our Lord and the practice prevailing among evangelical Christians, recognizes two sacraments: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion.” Reflect on your experiences of these two sacraments.



Supplies:

- pitcher of water
- a small bowl
- fresh baked bread
- wine or grape juice

Lead the group in a guided, meditative hearing of Mark 2:23–28. Have them sit comfortably and close their eyes as you read these verses. Recall for them the sacramental gifts of baptismal water and Eucharistic bread and wine, and the ordinances through which these were gifted to us by Christ. With their eyes still closed, allow the group to hear the water and wine or juice being poured. Let them touch the water. Let them hear the bread being broken (a good French bread would be well suited to this). Let them smell and taste it.



End with this or a similar prayer: *Maker of Sabbath, Savior of bodies and souls, Sustainer of life, thank you for the gifts of Sabbath. Amen.*

③ Another Wrong Kind of Rest — Older youth/adults

Leader preparation: Study the poster “Out of Work.” Make special note of the faces of the woman and the man. How do they appear to feel? Read Mark 3:1–6. Be aware that the man with the withered hand was probably cut off from all forms of income and security because of his disability in the primarily agrarian and artisan work culture of Jesus’ day. Think about the way our current U.S. health care system is almost completely based upon employment. Take a look at the following links: “Health care should not depend on employment,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/2dkpdtc>, and “Health Care Justice,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/2cjqq9k>.

Supplies:

- Bible
- poster: “Out of Work,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>, by Käthe Kollwitz

Read Mark 2:23–3:6 together. Lead a discussion about the poster. Pose these or similar questions: What do the adults in the poster be feeling? From what you see in the picture, what resources to the people have in order to live? Are their resources sufficient? Would Jesus break Sabbath rest to help these people and others like them? Should we? In what ways can the church help people who find themselves in circumstances like those possibly experienced by the people in the poster? Share with participants some of the information you found online. Have a discussion about this important issue.

④ Our Reformed Heritage (Easy Preparation) —

Discerning & Deciding Activities



Confirmation-age youth/adults

Leader preparation: Read Exodus 20:8–1 and Mark 2:23–3:6. Go to The Heidelberg Catechism, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2cqawhf>. Scroll down to the section labeled “What is God’s will for you in the fourth commandment?” Make copies of this section for the group.



Supplies:

- Bibles
- copies of “The Fourth Commandment” from The Heidelberg Catechism, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2cqawhf>

Read Exodus 20:8–11 and Mark 2:23–3:6. Pass out the copies of the section of the Heidelberg Catechism. Explain to the participants that the Heidelberg Catechism was a document used by Swiss and German Reformed Christians who came to America during Colonial days to help teach faith traditions to their children. These Christians inherited the traditions of such early Reformers as John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli. Early in the twentieth century the Reformed Church in the United States joined with the Evangelical Synod of North America to form the Evangelical and Reformed Church. In 1958 the Evangelical and Reformed Church came together with the Congregational Christian Churches to form the United Church of Christ. After discussing these details, read together these questions and answers from the catechism. Then lead a discussion about the common ground participants see between the focus scriptures and the Heidelberg Catechism’s approach to the idea of Sabbath. In what ways do they relate? In what ways do they not seem to relate? How would participants define Sabbath?

5 Health Care Justice — Adults

Leader preparation: Check out the information at Claiming our Vision: The Road to our Health Care Future, <http://www.tinyurl.com/29ub541>.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- copies of single panel comic at Health Care Justice page, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2cjqq9k>, or a computer and projector
- a projected link to “Claiming our Vision: The Road to our Health Care Future,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/29ub541>

Read Mark 3:1–6 together. Suggest that the Pharisees seem to wish to limit healing and health for some. Ask the group if this seems fair. Share some of the information, along with the comic found on the Health Care Justice page. Lead a carefully mediated discussion on the topic of health care, making sure that everyone’s opinion is heard. End with a prayer.

6 Theology of Missions—Adults

Leader preparation: Read Mark 2:23–3:6. Note the intertwining themes of worship and justice-based mission work that stand out in both sections of this text. Read “Missiology: Models of Mission in the 20th Century Ecumenical Movement,” found at the Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ Web site, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2bbe7pc>. Prepare to present some of the approaches to missions that seem to relate best to what Jesus is doing and teaching in Mark 2:23–3:6.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- printed outline of mission models most pertinent to Mark 2:23–3:6 found in the document “Missiology: Models of Mission in the 20th Century Ecumenical Movement,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/2bbe7pc>



Divide the group into parts to read the text (narrator, Pharisees, Jesus). Present the mission models you found most related to this passage. Discuss which ones best relate to the way your congregation engages in and understands mission. Discuss what how you might carry out mission in other ways.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 What Can We Do? (Easy Preparation) — Confirmation-age youth, older youth, adults

Leader preparation: Read Mark 2:23–3:6, check out the United Church of Christ’s Calendar of Prayer, <http://www.ucc.org/worship/calendar>, to find a story that fits either the theme of food justice, health care justice, or work justice. Identify ways the story you choose relates to the themes of the Mark text.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- newsprint or white board and markers

Read the section of the Mark passage that most closely relates to the Calendar of Prayer story you chose, <http://www.ucc.org/worship/calendar>. Then introduce the Calendar of Prayer story. Brainstorm ways in which a similar ministry could be carried out in your own congregation, cluster group, mission area, or association. Present your ideas to your congregation’s council, consistory, or mission board. End the session by praying the prayer suggested in the Calendar of Prayer article.

8 A Sabbath for the Sick — Adults

Leader preparation: Read Mark 3:1–6. Check out “Workers who get sick should also get time off,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/28ortxo>, a Justice and Peace Action Network (JAPNet) update. Think about connections between the story of the man with the withered hand and the need for fair and equitable sick-time policies for workers.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access and projector
- Bibles

Read Mark 3:1–6 together. Use the JAPNet update, <http://www.tinyurl.com/28ortxo>, as a starting point to discuss issues of justice and work in the world of the biblical text and in our world. End by encouraging those who wish to do so to take action and to sign up to receive more JAPNet updates themselves.

9 Sabbath Is for Everyone ... and Everything — Youth, adults

Leader preparation: Read Exodus 20:1–17, paying special attention to the Fourth Commandment (verses 8–11). Check out the Summary of Biblical Warrants for Environmental Stewardship, <http://www.tinyurl.com/252xm8b>, written by the Rev. Steven Johnson as a resource for those who cycled to the Twenty-seventh



General Synod in Grand Rapids. Pay special attention to the paragraph in which Johnson refers to the Ten Commandments.

Supplies:

- Bibles or a printed version of the Fourth Commandment (Exodus 20:8–11)

Look at the Fourth Commandment (Exodus 20:8–11) as a group. Ask who can enjoy the Sabbath? Besides humans, what other parts of creation benefit from Sabbath? Discuss ways you allow other parts of creation to enjoy Sabbath in your own lives, your congregation, your communities, your nation, and the world. Suggest some ways we might fail to allow ourselves and the rest of creation to celebrate a proper Sabbath. Come up with some possible solutions to these Sabbath “deficits.”

Reflect

What helps us focus on Sabbath? In what ways are rules and regulated practices more or less helpful to us as we engage Sabbath practices? In what ways does an awareness of our own and others’ human needs add to or take away from our practice of Sabbath? Reflect quietly for a period of time. Recall times in which you have been blessed by healing, feelings of wholeness and “godness,” and refreshing renewal. Write your recollections in a journal.

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Keeping Sabbath



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Setting

What is Sabbath? Does it involve one's attitudes or one's actions? Is it more concerned with one's internal orientation or one's outward actions? Perhaps it involves both simultaneously. We will pursue this possibility as we focus upon activities designed to help us discover ways in which we the people of the United Church of Christ and those who have been our forebears have sought to understand Sabbath in their own explorations of the scriptures of the ancient Hebrews and of the early church.

About this Exploration

Practicing Sabbath leads us to a fuller understanding of who we are as children of God. God calls the people of Israel to keep God's words on their hearts, to teach them to their children, to fix them as an emblem on their foreheads. Jesus reminds the Pharisees that the law is given to free people from oppression, not further to oppress an already downtrodden people. As we explore what it means to keep Sabbath, we will experience that Sabbath becomes a way of being, as well as a way of doing.



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Deuteronomy 6:1-9
Luke 6:1-11

Leader Preparation

Read Deuteronomy 6:1-9. Pay special attention verses 6, 8, and 9. Envision the commandment that God is placing in your heart today. Distill what God is speaking to you today through these Deuteronomy verses down to one word. Write this word on a piece of paper, and meditate upon it for as long as you are comfortable doing so.

Prayer: God, thank you for [the one word upon which you meditated]. Help me to heed its call and promise in my life. Bless all in this session by [the one word upon which you meditated].

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from 9 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 using supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

* To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.

* To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 using at least one activity from each category.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 God Is Still Speaking ... to Each of Us! (Easy Preparation) — Older youth, young adults, adults, older adults

Leader preparation: Try out the Leader Preparation activity suggested at the beginning of this Exploration.

Supplies:

- Bible
- scrap papers
- pencils/pens

Before you read aloud Deuteronomy 6:1–9 to the group, ask them to pay special attention to verse 6, where Moses tells the people to place the words in their hearts. Ask the participants to imagine themselves putting upon their hearts the commandments that God is communicating to them today. Have them distill these commandments down to one word, to write this word on a piece of paper, and then to meditate on it. If you plan to use Activity 7, ask them to put their names on their papers, and collect the papers to use later. You may want to do the two activities simultaneously.

2 Our Christian Heritage — Confirmation-age youth/adults

Leader preparation: Read Luke 6:1–11. Access “Principles of the Christian Church,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/252degu>, paying special attention to #5: “The right of private judgment and liberty of conscience is a right and a privilege that should be accorded to and exercised by all.” Print copies of the page for participants.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- printed copies of “Principles of the Christian Church,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/252degu>

Engage in a dramatic reading and acting out of the two vignettes in Luke 6:1–11. Have one volunteer portray Jesus, one the man with the withered hand, and the rest be either disciples, scribes, or Pharisees. At the end of the second episode, allow the “scribes and Pharisees” to ad lib their outrage and their plans to punish Jesus.

Following this, pass out copies of “The Principles of the Christian Church.” Focus on #5, asking how they might define “private judgment” and “liberty of conscience.” Ask if any in the group have ever felt judged or “put upon” by another person’s expression of their beliefs. Be willing to share an example of this from your own experiences in order to spark conversation. Explain that “private judgment” and “liberty of conscience” are still principles that we in the United Church of Christ try to uphold. Discuss how Jesus upheld these principles in the stories from Luke.

3 I Have Seen the Promised Land — Confirmation-age youth, adults

Leader preparation:

Read Deuteronomy 6:1–9. This is Moses’ farewell address on the eve of the Hebrew people’s entering the land promised to them by God. Then read “I See the Promised Land,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/29q4en4>, the last sermon by the Rev.



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., delivered on April 4, 1968, the night before his assassination in Memphis, Tennessee.

Especially note this paragraph (of which no video can be found) in which he says: “It’s alright to talk about ‘long white robes over yonder,’ in all of its symbolism. But ultimately people want some suits and dresses and shoes to wear down here. It’s alright to talk about ‘streets flowing with milk and honey,’ but God has commanded us to be concerned about the slums down here, and his children who can’t eat three square meals a day. It’s alright to talk about the new Jerusalem, but one day, God’s preacher must talk about the New York, the new Atlanta, the new Philadelphia, the new Los Angeles, the new Memphis, Tennessee. This is what we have to do.”

Supplies:

- Bibles
- copies of “I See the Promised Land,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/29q4en4>
- computer with projector

Read Deuteronomy 6:1–9 together. Note the paragraph cited above to the group. Discuss ways in which we allow holy-sounding and sometimes empty phrases like “a land flowing with milk and honey” to lull our ethical sensibilities. Discuss issues in your own congregation and community that need to be addressed prophetically. End by watching the final few minutes of Dr. King’s last sermon. See <http://www.tinyurl.com/9v92mf>.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Pietism: Holy Inside and Out (Easy Preparation) — Confirmation-age youth, older youth, adults

Leader preparation: Pietism, a movement that began with the German Lutheran pastor Philip Jacob Spener (1635–1705), sought to help European Christians whose lives had been marred by religious wars and economic strife to live virtuous lives in the most socially difficult circumstances. Forms of Pietism spread, influencing both the Puritans in England and New England who would become the Congregationalists, and the Baptists and Methodists in America who would make up part of the Christian Churches. Mostly it entered the stream of the United Church of Christ through the German Evangelical Christians who settled in the Midwest beginning in the 1830s. You can read more about pietism on pages 4–5 of the *Short Course in the History of the United Church of Christ*, <http://www.tinyurl.com/27u5xas>.

Read Exodus 20:1–17 and Mark 2:23–3:6. Think about what parts of each text encourage certain internal attitudes, and which encourage external actions.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Tell the participants a little about pietism’s influence in the history of the United Church of Christ. Read aloud Deuteronomy 6:1–9 and Luke 6:1–11. Ask the group to consider whether internal attitudes, external actions, or a mixture of the two best reflect Christian behavior in the world. Ask people if they feel that their internal and external practices of faith are balanced. Challenge one another to seek more balanced spiritual lives through the discussion of concrete details. You might form accountability teams whereby partners can help each other on this.



5 A Covenant of Peace? — Confirmation-age youth, older youth, young adults, adults, older adults

Leader preparation: One of the United Church of Christ’s Six Historic Emphases is that “We are a people of covenant,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/27cber3>. Scroll down the page to the section headed “Salem: A Covenant of Peace?” Read about the Puritan Congregationalists who made the Salem Covenant, and about the horrific acts committed by their grandchildren and great-grandchildren just 63 years later. Make copies of the Salem Covenant for the group. Then read Deuteronomy 6:1–9, which, as it is framed in the book of Deuteronomy, serves as God’s covenant made with the Hebrew people and restated by Moses as they prepared to enter the land promised to them. Think of the covenants that God has made with us and our own congregation.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- copies of the Salem Covenant, <http://www.tinyurl.com/27cber3>
- copies of your congregation’s mission statement/covenant, often found in the congregation’s constitution

Read Deuteronomy 6:1–9 together. Point out that this is the beginning of a restatement of the larger covenant God made with the Hebrew people before they entered the land promised to them. Pass out copies of the Salem Covenant (help younger people and others with limited reading abilities through the text), and share with the group what you learned about how these forbears kept their covenant. Pass out copies of your congregation’s mission statement or covenant. Discuss ways your congregation keeps the covenant and identify ways you might keep it better.

6 Extending God’s Aloha — Older youth, adults

Leader preparation: Read Luke 6:1–6 with the understanding that Jesus challenged the Pharisees not only by healing on the Sabbath, but also by reaching out in loving care to a communal outcast (the man with the withered hand). One of the United Church of Christ’s Six Historic Emphases is that we are a people of extravagant welcome, <http://www.tinyurl.com/37nzvh9>. Scroll two-thirds of the way down the page to find the story of the Native Hawai’ian, Malo, who offered welcome to white missionaries, was trained for ministry, and taught his own people of God’s loving care, then spoke out against his white sisters and brothers in Christ when injustice against the Hawai’ians and their land became too great. Check out the Hawai’ian verse of “Jesus Loves Me” in *The New Century Hymnal*, #327 (<http://www.tinyurl.com/NCHymnal>).

Supplies:

- Bibles
- copies of *New Century Hymnal*, <http://www.tinyurl.com/NCHymnal>

Read Luke 6:1–6 together. Read or tell the story of Malo, both how he showed extravagant love to the white missionaries, how he shared God’s Aloha (love) with his people, and how he stood against his white sisters and brothers in Christ when they became unjust. Discuss ways that you can offer an extravagant welcome of God’s love to others. Describe issues and circumstances that call for you to take a controversial stand. Sing together the Hawai’ian verse of “Jesus Loves Me,” *The New Century Hymnal* #327.

End with this or a similar prayer: *God, thank you for Jesus and for Malo. Help us to be as brave and willing to seek healing, wholeness, and justice for your people as they were. Amen.*



Sending & Serving Activities

7 God Is Still Speaking ... to All of Us!
 (Easy Preparation) — Older youth, young adults,
 adults, older adults

Leader preparation: Try out the Leader Preparation activity suggested at the beginning of this Exploration. This activity is based on Activity 1. You may want to do the two activities simultaneously.

Supplies:

- white board, newsprint, or electronic projection device

If you did Activity 1, reread Deuteronomy 6:1–9 together. Ask participants who are willing to share the one word that God placed upon their heart. Have someone write all these words on the white board/newsprint/electronic projection device. Spend time as a group trying to identify some common themes that might suggest activities or attitudes that God desires from your congregation.

End with this or a similar prayer: *God, thank you for your call upon our hearts and lives. Help us that we may heed your call faithfully, and that others may be blessed. Amen.*

8 Our Mission Statement — Confirmation-age youth, older youth, young adults, adults

Leader preparation: Read Deuteronomy 6:1–9. Notice that this might have served as a mission statement for the Hebrew people. If your congregation has a mission statement, study it. If not, consider helping to write one for your church.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- copies of your congregation’s mission statement (if available)
- newsprint or white board and markers

Read Deuteronomy 6:1–9 as if it were a mission statement given by God to the Hebrew people. Then discuss your congregation’s mission statement. If the participants do not know it, start working on memorizing it (“writing it on your hearts”). If your congregation does not have a mission statement, start writing one, and share your ideas with your pastor and church board.

9 Virginia Kreyer — Youth, adults

Leader preparation: One of the United Church of Christ’s Six Historic Emphases is that “We are a people of extravagant welcome,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/37nzvh9>. Follow the link and scroll down the page to the section about Virginia Kreyer. Read about her struggles and triumphs in light of the story of Jesus’ healing the man with the withered hand in Luke 6:6–11.



Supplies:

- Bibles
- information about Rev. Kreyer or a computer and projector

Tell the story of Rev. Kreyer found at We are a people of extravagant welcome, <http://www.tinyurl.com/37nzvh9>. Read Luke 6:6–11 together. Discuss the groups' feelings, experiences, and beliefs regarding the biblical story and the story of Rev. Kreyer. Identify ways for your congregation to become extravagantly welcoming to all people.

Reflect

What is Sabbath? Does it involve one's attitudes or one's actions? Is it more concerned with one's internal orientation or one's outward actions? Think of one or more internal orientations that might help one to practice Sabbath. Reflect upon these attitudes and how they can enrich communal practices of Sabbath. Next think of some outward actions that could help in practicing Sabbath. Reflect on how these actions can enrich a community's Sabbath practices.

Keeping Sabbath



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Setting

Does Sabbath imply an external focus upon actions seeking justice, healing, and wholeness for all, or does it call one toward an internal focus upon holiness of heart? Perhaps it calls us toward both simultaneously. We will pursue this possibility as we focus upon activities designed to help us discover ways in which we the people of the United Church of Christ and those who have been our forebears have sought to live out Sabbath in our own times and places by seeking justice, healing, and wholeness for others and themselves.

About this Exploration

Throughout the history of the church, the practice of Sabbath has run from narrow to broad. Certain faith traditions establish restrictions concerning a Sabbath day, limiting everything from household tasks to social activities. Other traditions focus on the intent of the practice: worship, study, and rest. All these traditions highlight rest and re-creation. Current understandings have broadened Sabbath to embrace the practices of justice and of devotion in and around the moments of our daily life. These various interpretations provide the foundation for our practices of Sabbath today.



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Isaiah 58:9b–14
Mark 6:30–34, 53–56

Leader Preparation

Think of the last time (or an especially memorable time) you helped another person or group experience the comfort of God's closeness or care. Share this experience and its effects upon you with a significant person in your life.

Prayer: God of comfort, healing, and rest, thank you for the times you have blessed me by allowing me to bless another with your love, hope, joy, mercy, and grace. Help me always to be ready to share these, your abundant blessings. Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from 9 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 using supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

* To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.

* To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 using at least one activity from each category.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 To Believe Is to Care. To Care Is to Do, I (Easy Preparation) — Confirmation-age youth, older youth, young adults, older adults

Leader preparation: Become familiar with Isaiah 58:9b–14. Practice reading these verses aloud slowly and meditatively so that you will be ready to engage the other participants with them in this way. Be aware that there was once a United Church of Christ bumper sticker with the slogan "To Believe Is to Care. To Care Is to Do." Think about that slogan in light of the Isaiah passage (especially verses 10 and 13).

Supplies:

- Bibles

Ask the participants to sit in a comfortable position, relax, and close their eyes. Spend a few moments encouraging them to breathe deeply. Then introduce the slogan "To Believe Is to Care. To Care Is to Do." Use this slogan as a breath prayer: breathe in "To believe is to care;" breath out "To care is to do." Do this several times. Allow the group to sit with this thought for a few moments before you read Isaiah 58:9b–14. Invite them to reflect on any thoughts or images that pass through their minds as you read the scripture passage. After the reading, divide the group into pairs to share those thoughts and images. Invite them into a conversation using this question as a prompt: How is faith expressed in caring and in doing? How do we express our faith in caring and in doing?

2 "Yellow Peril?"—Older youth, adults

Leader preparation: Read Isaiah 58:9b–14, paying special attention to the prophet's warnings about "the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil" (verse 9b), and the conditional nature of the promise: that guidance and light (verse 10) will ensue, if covenant promises are kept by God's people. Go to "Hidden Histories of the United Church of Christ," vol. 2, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2a9386c>, scroll to page 128, and read "Anti-Chinese Sentiment." Make copies of this for the group. Note the "yellow" journalism that accompanied the trumpeting of the so-called "yellow peril" of Chinese immigration to the West Coast of the United States. Think about this difficult part of our national and denominational history in relation to current situations regarding Latin American immigration. Have page one of "A Responsive Call to Worship to Celebrate the Ministry of Pacific Islanders and Asian Americans," <http://www.tinyurl.com/28qvse5>, ready for use at the end of the session.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- copies of "Anti-Chinese Sentiment," <http://www.tinyurl.com/2a9386c> or a way to project the file; and "A Responsive Call to Worship to Celebrate the Ministry of Pacific Islanders and Asian Americans," <http://www.tinyurl.com/28qvse5>

Read Isaiah 58:9b–10. Then look together at "Anti-Chinese Sentiment" in chapter 10 of "Hidden Histories of the United Church of Christ," vol. 2. Discuss what, if any, relationship there is between the two texts. How might the approaches argued for by some nineteenth-century Americans (and even some Congregationalists) inform any contemporary situations? End this activity by using the first part of "A Responsive Call to Worship to Celebrate the Ministry of Pacific Islanders and Asian Americans" as a litany. Stop on the sentence ending "where you are in charge and everyone is welcome and respected."



③ Hurting Souls Seeking Justice — Adults

Leader preparation: One of the United Church of Christ's Six Historic Emphases is that "We are a people of covenant," <http://www.tinyurl.com/27cber3>. Occasionally, however, we can get too caught up in our own personal "stuff" to pay much attention to our covenant keeping. Read "Walk-out: A Hispanic Prophetic Call to Covenant," about the incident that took place at the Sixteenth General Synod in 1987. Look at confessional prayer Option H, page 532 of the *Book of Worship of the United Church of Christ*, <http://www.tinyurl.com/263jjbm>, and the leader part of the statement of assurance on page 533. Make copies of the prayer of confession and statement of assurance.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- copy of the *Book of Worship of the United Church of Christ*, <http://www.tinyurl.com/263jjbm>

Read together Mark 6:30–34, 53–56. Tell the story of Abraham Reyes's prophetic leadership of the Hispanic walkout at the Sixteenth General Synod in 1987. Invite the participants to compare the actions of our Latina and Latino sisters and brothers at that General Synod with the crowds in Mark's Gospel. Compare the responses of Jesus and his disciples to the delegates of the Sixteenth General Synod. Identify the people in your congregation and in the surrounding community who need your congregation's focused attention. Brainstorm plans for how this care and attention might look. End with the prayer of confession and statement of assurance from the *Book of Worship of the United Church of Christ* noted above.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ To Believe Is to Care. To Care Is to Do, II (Easy Preparation) — Adults

Leader preparation: Try out the activity in the Leader Preparation at the beginning of this Exploration.

Supplies: None

Think of the last time (or an especially memorable time) you helped another person or group experience the comfort of God's closeness or care. Tell the group about this experience and its effects upon you. Invite them to do the same.

End with this or a similar prayer: *God of comfort, healing, and rest, thank you for the times you have blessed us by allowing us to bless another with your love, hope, joy, mercy, and grace. Help us always to be ready to share these, your abundant blessings. Amen.*

⑤ Peace with Justice—Confirmation-age youth/older youth/ young adults/older adults

Leader preparation: One of the five historic commitments lived out by the United Church of Christ is that of being a "peace with justice" church. This means that we have historically attempted to live out our faith in ways that seek peace and justice for all God's people and for creation. Read more about the United Church of Christ's devotion to being a peace with justice church in the 50th-anniversary book, *Shine, God's People*. Read Isaiah 58:9b–14. Note that the peaceful abundance promised by God through the voice of the prophet in verse 14 can come only if the justice issues ad-



dressed in verses 9b–13 are dealt with by God’s people.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- newspapers or computer with internet access
- newsprint or white board and markers
- copies of prayer at the beginning of the chapter entitled “We are a peace with justice church” in *Shine, God’s People*, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2fhgbun>

Invite the participants to search through the newspaper or on-line news sources for stories that relate to justice issues. List the justice issues on newsprint or white board. Pose these or similar questions: What would justice, in this particular case, look like? Where (and/or how) could the peace of God break into this situation to make justice appear? What could the people more directly involved in this situation do to allow for peace and justice to pour into the situation? What could we do, where we are, to help in this situation?

Meditatively read together Isaiah 58:9b–14. End with the prayer found at the beginning of the chapter entitled “We are a peace with justice church” in *Shine, God’s People*, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2fhgbun>

⑥ Our Congregational Heritage II — Confirmation age youth, older youth, young adults, older adults

Leader preparation: The Cambridge Platform, <http://www.tinyurl.com/28edk5k>, was drafted by representatives of the New England Congregational churches in 1648 to help them better understand their relationship to one another, civil authority, and the wider world, and to counter the increasing claims of Presbyterians that congregational forms of church government were theologically and doctrinally unreliable. Near the end of the document, its drafters take up questions pertaining to civil authority and its relationship to the churches. Near the end of this final section of the Platform, they wrote: “Idolatry, blasphemy, heresy, venting corrupt and pernicious opinions, that destroy the foundation, open contempt of the Word preached, profanation of the Lord’s Day, disturbing the peaceable administration and exercise of the worship and holy things of God, and the like, are to be restrained and punished by civil authority.” Think about what this might have meant to them. Imagine what our world might look like if civil authorities were still called upon to punish religious irregularities. Read more of the Cambridge Platform at <http://www.tinyurl.com/28edk5k>. For a more recent United Church of Christ perspective on the Platform’s historical and theological significance, see <http://www.tinyurl.com/24bqw6y>, *The Cambridge Platform and the future of the church*. Read Isaiah 58:9b–14. Consult a study Bible to gain understanding of the text’s original meaning and some of its implications.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- copies of the section of the Cambridge Platform, <http://www.tinyurl.com/28edk5k>

Read Isaiah 58:9b–14 together. Discuss what it might mean. Distribute or project a copy of the section of the Cambridge Platform quoted above. Explain the background of the document. Ask the learners what possible connections they see between what we find in Isaiah 58 and what the seventeenth-century New England Congregationalists were saying. Ask the participants to describe their feelings about elected officials, police officers, and other legal authorities enforcing rules we find in the Bible. What might be the implications of this?



Sending & Serving Activities

7 Sometimes Sabbath Is Hard Work! — Youth, adults

Leader preparation: Read Mark 6:30–34, 53–56. Check out the “Ways to Get Involved” about halfway down the page at <http://www.tinyurl.com/2b2x861>. Print out that section and make copies if your learning space is not equipped with a laptop and projector.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- copy of the “Ways to Get Involved,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/2b2x861> or a computer and projector

Read Mark 6:30–34, 53–56. Have the group role play the text, one person playing Jesus, some playing disciples, and other the crowds with their many needs. Discuss how the disciples felt when they were asked to get away for a restful break with Jesus and instead were inundated with requests for teaching and healing. Discuss how the crowd members felt when Jesus paid attention to them. When do we feel that we “deserve a break”? How might this sense of entitlement be biblical?

Introduce “Ways to Get Involved” with healing and wholeness outreach ministries. Invite the participants to agree to research one or two of these possibilities for ministry in your congregation’s community before you gather again.

End with this prayer written by the Rev. William R. Johnson, vice president for member relations, United Church of Christ Council for Health and Human Service Ministries: *Grant that we may have the wisdom and will, O God, to embrace the healing and service ministry of Jesus Christ and make it truly our own. Inspire us, Holy One, to trust that your healing love will use our humble efforts to bring health and wholeness to us and to the whole human family. Amen.*

8 United and Uniting — Confirmation-age youth, older youth, young adults, older adults

Leader preparation: One of the five historic commitments lived out by the United Church of Christ is being a “united and uniting” church. This means that we have historically attempted to live out our faith in ways that show our devotion to seeking common ground with other Christians and those of other faiths. Read more about the United Church of Christ’s devotion to being a united and uniting communion of faith in the 50th-anniversary book, *Shine, God’s People*, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2215x8c>. Read Isaiah 58:9b–14. Note that the prophet calls upon the people to seek unity by stopping “the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil” (verse 9b), adding that if they cease this and seek justice, they will be fed with the heritage of their ancestors (verse 14).

Supplies:

- Bibles
- newsprint, white board, or computer and projector
- copies of prayer at the beginning of the chapter entitled “We are a united and uniting church” in *Shine, God’s People*, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2215x8c>

Read Isaiah 58:9b–14 together. Pose these or similar questions: How do we burden other people (even other Christians and people of other faiths) with yokes? In what ways do we accuse (point fingers at) other Christians and people of other faiths?



What sorts of evil things do we sometimes say about these other people? What are some things that we could do together with other people to create some “common ground”? What do they have to teach us from their traditions? What do we have to teach them from our traditions? List the ideas on newsprint or whiteboard. As a group identify three ideas to pursue. End with the prayer found at the beginning of the chapter entitled “We are a united and uniting church” in Shine, God’s People.

Reflect

What are your expectations of the Sabbath? Are they more internal or external? When are you more comfortable: sitting and thinking about God and the presence of God, or being out and about helping others meet their needs? How can internally focused Sabbath practices enrich your external practices of Sabbath justice? Conversely, how can your external justice-seeking Sabbath practices enrich your internal experiences of Sabbath?

9 Moral Obligations — Young adults/adults

Leader preparation: Slain abolitionist publisher Elijah Lovejoy was a friend and confidante of soon-to-be-president Abraham Lincoln and one of the main organizing forces behind the Illinois segment of the Underground Railroad. His brother, the Rev. Owen Lovejoy, a U.S. congressional representative from Illinois and one of the organizers of the General Congregational Association of Illinois (a precursor to the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ) in 1844, spoke in his hometown of Princeton on the occasion of a proclaimed day of “national Sabbath.” In his speech on July 5, 1858, Rev. Lovejoy said: “I do not wish to have it understood that because we are great and prosperous, therefore we are released from moral obligation as a people. The more wealth, intellect and power an individual has, the more obligations rest upon him.” If you wish to learn more about Lovejoy, please consult the Web site of The Lovejoy Society, <http://www.tinyurl.com/22n2cgp>. Read Isaiah 58:9b–12. Ponder some of the connections between the prophet’s words and those of Lovejoy.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- a way to display the quote from Lovejoy, such as computer and projector, newsprint, or white board
- pencils or pens
- paper

Prayerfully read Isaiah 58:9b–12 together. Invite the group to sit silently for several moments and contemplate the moral force of God’s word delivered through Isaiah. Then tell about the Rev. Owen Lovejoy. Turn the group’s attention to the words Lovejoy spoke in July 1858. Allow a moment or two for these words to settle on their consciences. Invite the participants to write on a piece of paper one moral obligations that they believe we in the church all share. Gather these papers and then read them aloud. Invite responses from the group to each statement.

Keeping Sabbath



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Setting

Some have called the polity and theological methods of the United Church of Christ excessively pragmatic and functional. Perhaps this is true in some sense, in that Christians of the United Church of Christ and its precursor groups on the North American continent have attempted throughout much of their history to be as inclusive as possible. Such pragmatic functionality that arises from a seeking of unity based upon essentials of the faith can be looked upon as an asset in our busy, hyper-engaged world. Why spend time getting bogged down in details, after all? But our focus scriptures and the activities for these sessions force us to ask, Should pragmatism and functionality always be our highest goal, especially when focusing upon our Sabbath practices? How might our focus upon what works best with the least amount of effort cause us to lose sight of the importance of God's Sabbath commandments and promises?

About this Exploration

The prophet Jeremiah goes to the busiest places in the city to call the people to observe Sabbath as a day intentionally set apart by God. In the same way, we are called to take the gift that is Sabbath to our communities and then to the wider world. As communities of faith, we are encouraged to model Sabbath living that is joyful, inclusive, and not burdensome. The Corinthian church was challenged to rethink the way they lived out the Sabbath together in community. Maybe we will have to do the same! What do you mean—change?



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Jeremiah 17:19–27
1 Corinthians 11:17–26

Leader Preparation

Have you ever hindered your own, or someone else's, practice of Sabbath? Spend a few minutes thinking about this. Then write a short paragraph about this experience. Reflect on how you might have better fostered Sabbath practices in yourself and the others involved.

Prayer: God of Sabbath rest and justice, forgive your servant for times I have hindered your Sabbath promises for myself and others. Help me to be aware of ways I can help bring Sabbath blessings to others and experience them myself, even in the busiest or most disordered times of my life. Bless us as we gather today to experience and discuss your Sabbath hope, joy, and wholeness. Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from 9 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 using supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

① Sabbath for Worse, Not for Better (Easy Preparation) — Adults

Leader preparation: Try out the activity in the Leader Preparation for this Exploration. Familiarize yourself with 1 Corinthians 11:17–26.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Read 1 Corinthians 11:17–26. Explain that some of the Corinthians were profaning their Sabbath Communion gatherings with gluttony, drunkenness, and inconsideration. Some of the more well-off Corinthians were not waiting to celebrate Communion until their servants (who were also members of the community of faith) were done with their work. This made the sacrament inaccessible to them. Invite the participants to identify times when others have been hindered from practicing Sabbath. They may name people who are forced to work on Sunday, people who are not welcome in a church (because of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, social class, etc.) people who have been forced out of their home by war, political oppression, or natural disaster. Ask the group if any of them have ever hindered their own, or someone else's, practice of Sabbath. Remind them that Sabbath does not necessarily mean Sunday. Allow a few minutes to reflect quietly on this. How might they have better fostered Sabbath practices in themselves and the others involved? Invite responses.

End by praying this or a similar prayer: *God of Sabbath rest and justice, forgive us for times we have hindered your Sabbath promises for ourselves and others. Help us to be aware of ways we can help bring Sabbath blessings to others and experience them ourselves, even in the busiest or most disordered times of our lives. Bless us as we go forth today to experience your Sabbath hope, joy, and wholeness. Amen.*

② Luther on Sabbath — Confirmation-age youth, young adults

Leader preparation: Martin Luther and the movement that he founded are part of our United Church of Christ tradition by way of German immigrants who came to North America in the 1800s. A prince in northern Germany had formed one unified, state-sponsored church in his realm in the early nineteenth century. This union church brought together Reformed and Lutheran Germans into a church to which many immigrants who formed the Evangelical Synod in America originally belonged.

Go to Luther's Small Catechism, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2cajwmh>, and read the section titled “The Third Commandment.” (Note that Luther numbered the commandments differently than we usually do. We usually count the Sabbath commandment as the fourth, not the third.) Read Jeremiah 17:19–27 in light of Luther's thoughts on the Sabbath commandment. Think about the busyness of many people these days. How can busy people be prepared to follow the counsel of Jeremiah and Martin Luther? Be prepared to discuss this question.

Keeping Sabbath



* To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.

* To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 using at least one activity from each category.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- newsprint or white board and markers or computer and projector

On newsprint or a white board draw two columns. Label one column “Things I’d rather be doing than attending worship,” and the other “Things I sometimes have to do or choose to do instead.” Ask the participants first to name things that fit in column 2. Next, ask them to name things that fit in column 1. Encourage them to be honest! Read the lists; then read Jeremiah 17:19–27 together.

Take a look at Luther’s comments about the Third Commandment, especially his statement that “we should not despise his [sic] Word and the preaching of the same, but deem it holy and gladly hear and learn it.” What might make the preaching and study of God’s Word a preferable activity for the group members? Brainstorm possible ways to set aside time for God, even when they are absent from communal worship.

③ Accessible to All — Confirmation-age youth, older youth, young adults, older adults

Leader preparation: One of the five historic commitments lived out by the United Church of Christ is being “a church accessible to all.” This means that we have historically sought to live out our faith in ways that allow the greatest number of people to be included in our worship, mission, and fellowship. Read more about the United Church of Christ’s devotion to being a church accessible to all in the 50th-anniversary book, *Shine, God’s People*, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2cajwmh>. Carefully read and study 1 Corinthians 11:17–26. Note that the problem being addressed by the text is that some of the more well-off Corinthians were not waiting until their servants (who were also members of the community of faith) were done with their work. This made the sacrament inaccessible to them. Ask your pastor to take part in the group, or ask if she or he would consecrate the elements of Communion for you ahead of time.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- Communion elements

Read 1 Corinthians 11:17–22 together. Explain that what is being addressed by the text is the fact that the Corinthians are excluding their own servants — fellow sisters and brothers in Christ — from participation in the sacrament of Holy Communion. Have a few participants role play, some being the well-to-do Corinthians who partake of Communion before their servants appear, and some playing the servants. Have the servants walk in while the well-to-do are taking Communion. In the role play, act out what might happen next. Invite others to take the parts, and role play the scene again. What are some possible scenarios? When the scene has played itself out, ask all learners to reflect on what they saw, heard, felt, experienced. How did the “servants” feel? How did the others feel?

Celebrate the sacrament together. Share the prayer found at the beginning of the chapter of *Shine, God’s People* entitled “We are a church accessible to all.”



Discerning & Deciding Activities

  **4 The Prophet and the President—Older youth, young adults, older adults**

Leader preparation: In a speech then-Senator Barack Obama made to the United Church of Christ’s Twenty-sixth General Synod in Hartford, Connecticut, in 2007, he said, in part: “Americans are going about their lives — dropping the kids off at school, driving to work, shopping at the mall, trying to stay on their diets, trying to kick a cigarette habit — and they’re coming to the realization that something is missing. They’re deciding that their work, their possessions, their diversions, their sheer busyness, is not enough. They want a sense of purpose, a narrative arc to their lives. They’re looking to relieve a chronic loneliness. And so they need an assurance that somebody out there cares about them, is listening to them — that they are not just destined to travel down that long road toward nothingness.” Read Jeremiah 11:17–26 in light of this part of Mr. Obama’s speech.

Supplies:

- Bible
- copies of quote from Mr. Obama’s speech, Attachment: Activity 4
- computer and projector to watch then-Senator Obama’s speech (optional), <http://www.tinyurl.com/248h62b>

Read Jeremiah 11:17–26. Make it dramatic. Make it sound like a ... well, a jeremiad. Distribute copies of the quote from Mr. Obama’s speech at the Twenty-sixth General Synod. Watch the video of the speech here if you are able and opt to do so: “Politics of Conscience” — Speech by Sen. Barack Obama at Twenty-sixth General Synod, <http://www.tinyurl.com/248h62b>. Invite the participants to discuss feelings generated by Jeremiah’s words and the words of Mr. Obama. This is not intended to be a political debate or a discussion about public policy under the Obama administration. It is one way to hear both ancient and contemporary words and think of them in a similar context. Keep in mind that the focus of this practice of faith is “Keeping Sabbath.” In what ways do the words of Jeremiah and Mr. Obama speak to that faith practice?

5 Halfway Covenant? — Confirmation-age youth, older youth, adults

Leader preparation:

Familiarize yourself with 1 Corinthians 11:17–26. Read about the Puritan Halfway Covenant of 1662, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2ddws6k>. Note the commonalities between the exclusionary carelessness of the Corinthians and the purposeful exclusionary practices of the Puritans.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Read 1 Corinthians 11:17–26 together. Introduce the group to the elements of the Puritan Halfway Covenant of 1662, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2ddws6k>. Who in your congregation is diminished by a “halfway covenant?” Why? What can be done to change this situation? Extend this congregation to your association or conference, to other churches in your community, to the church in general. What circumstances and details cause us to treat others as lesser children of God?



6 Intentionally United — Young adults, older adults

Leader preparation: One of the Six Historic Emphases of the United Church of Christ is that “We are a people of covenant,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/27cber3>. Follow the link and scroll down the page to the section about the United Church in Los Alamos. After reading this section, do a careful reading of 1 Corinthians 11:17–26. Note the differences between the Corinthians’ lack of covenant commitment to one another and the members of the United Church in Los Alamos, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2f62gbu>, who have remained faithful to their covenanting partnerships to the six separate Christian fellowships to which their members relate over a 60-year period.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- copies of or a projected link to the section of “We are a people of covenant,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/27cber3>, about the United Church in Los Alamos, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2f62gbu>
- newsprint or white board and markers

Read 1 Corinthians 11:17–26 together. Tell a little about the United Church of Christ’s historical emphases that “We are a people of covenant.” Briefly relay the story of the United Church in Los Alamos and their longstanding tradition of covenant commitment. Then divide the group into three groups. Have one group work with 1 Corinthians 11:17–26, another work with the information about the United Church in Los Alamos, and the third focus on your own congregation. Ask each group to create two lists: one about things that unite and another about things that divide the groups on which they are focusing. They can write their lists on newsprint or a white board. After a time, ask them to share their lists with one another. Discuss each group’s findings with the whole group.

End with this or a similar prayer: *Divine Oneness, help us to focus upon those things that unite us, rather than those that divide. In Christ Jesus’ name, Amen.*

Sending & Serving Activities



7 One at Baptism and at the Table (Easy Preparation) — Older youth, young adults, adults

Leader preparation: One of the Six Historic Emphases of the United Church of Christ is that we are one at baptism and at the table, <http://www.tinyurl.com/29pjrjd>.

Follow the link and scroll down the page to the section headed “With what words will we pray?” After reading this section, ask your pastor to take part in the group. Do a careful reading of 1 Corinthians 11:17–26. Note the connections between Paul’s concern that some in the Corinthian community were being excluded from the Eucharist and the Eleventh General Synod’s call for inclusive-language rites, which was finally answered with the publication of the *Book of Worship of the United Church of Christ* in 1986.

Supplies:

- A set of Communion liturgies from either *The New Century Hymnal* or the *Book of Worship of the United Church of Christ*
- Communion elements



Celebrate Holy Communion, using the United Church of Christ liturgy of your choice. Use the words of institution from 1 Corinthians 11:23b–25. Following Communion, read 1 Corinthians 11:17–22. Tell other participants what you have already learned about the genesis of our inclusive-language liturgies. Lead a brief discussion of people’s feelings and beliefs on our inclusive liturgies. What values do our different preferences in this imply or not imply? In what ways can we seek to become indeed more united at the table around the elements of Holy Communion?

8 Busy Person’s Sabbath — Older youth, adults

Leader preparation: Read Jeremiah 17:19–27. Download and read “The Busy Person’s Sabbath,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/2f2lvxl>, by Linda Hanick, vice president, communications and marketing, at Trinity Church, a historic Episcopal parish near Wall Street in New York City, reprinted with permission at <http://www.ucc.org>.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- copy of “The Busy Person’s Sabbath,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/2f2lvxl>

Read Jeremiah 17:19–27 together. Sit in silence with it for a few moments. Then introduce “The Busy Person’s Sabbath” to the group. Again allow a moment for silent reflection. Then lead a discussion about the possibilities offered by the idea of practicing “The Busy Person’s Sabbath”. If you wish, covenant with the group members who are able to do this to report back their experience to the group.

9 Multiracial, Multicultural — Confirmation age youth, older youth, young adults, older adults

Leader preparation: One of the five historic commitments lived out by the United Church of Christ is that we are a multiracial, multicultural church. This means that we have historically sought to live out our faith in ways that allow for bonds of shared belief, mission, and fellowship across racial and cultural boundaries. Read more about the United Church of Christ’s devotion to being a multiracial, multicultural church in the 50th-anniversary book, *Shine, God’s People*, <http://www.tinyurl.com/275epwt>.

Carefully read and study 1 Corinthians 11:17–26. Note that the problem being addressed by the text is that some of the more well-off Corinthians were not waiting until their servants (who were also members of the community of faith) were done with their work. This made the sacrament inaccessible to them. If you are blessed to have a multiracial, multicultural congregation, ask a person from a group represented by the United Church of Christ’s Council of Racial and Ethnic Ministries (COREM), <http://www.tinyurl.com/2ceuu9h>, to speak about inclusion and exclusion that they may have experienced in faith-based settings. If no members of your congregation are represented by one of groups that make up COREM, find a congregation in your area to contact that may have members who are. Invite one of their members to speak to your group. Ask your pastor to participate in the group, or ask if she or he would consecrate the elements of Communion for you ahead of time.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- elements of Communion



Read 1 Corinthians 11:17–26. Allow the speaker to share as he or she desires. Celebrate the Eucharist together. End with the prayer found at the beginning of the chapter of Shine, God’s People, entitled “We are a multiracial, multicultural church,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/275epwt>.

Reflect

How can the regular activities of life stand in the way of healthy Sabbath practices? In what ways can our contemporary focus upon efficiency ruin our Sabbath practices? Think of two or three ways in which you can slow down, cut back, and take more time to enjoy the blessings of healthy Sabbath practices.



**Senator Barack Obama,
United Church of Christ
26th General Synod
Hartford, Connecticut
June 23, 2007**

Americans are going about their lives — dropping the kids off at school, driving to work, shopping at the mall, trying to stay on their diets, trying to kick a cigarette habit — and they're coming to the realization that something is missing. They're deciding that their work, their possessions, their diversions, their sheer busyness, is not enough. They want a sense of purpose, a narrative arc to their lives. They're looking to relieve a chronic loneliness. And so they need an assurance that somebody out there cares about them, is listening to them — that they are not just destined to travel down that long road toward nothingness.

The entire text of this speech can be read at:

<http://www.ucc.org/news/significant-speeches/a-politics-of-conscience.html>

You can watch Mr. Obama give this speech at:

<http://www.ucc.org/synod/video-archive26.html>

Keeping Sabbath



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Setting

Sabbath implies renewal based in reflection. Rooted in the past, Sabbath beckons us toward the future. It calls us to encounter God in the present moment. Sabbath is a way for us to remember that we are God's beloved children. Awareness of God's presence can guide us through all of life's experiences. As God's people, we often find ourselves facing challenging times, not unlike those faced by the psalmist and by Jesus' followers after his crucifixion. At such times, a sense of God's presence can guide our choices toward a future filled with the possibilities of Sabbath transformation.

About this Exploration

Living as hopeful Sabbath people in the present leads us unfailingly in the way laid before us by God. But in the midst of life's struggles—oppression, death, disease, war, famine, injustice, hopelessness—where do we find this hope-paved path? In these activities we will pursue ways in which people of the United Church of Christ and its forbears have found and still do find this path.



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**Psalm 119:105–112,
129–136**

**Matthew 27:51–66
(Matthew 26:14–27:66)**

Leader Preparation

Think of the most challenging circumstances that you have ever experienced. Where in these experiences did you find God? Discuss this with a friend or confidante, or write a paragraph or two about one of these experiences of struggle and God's presence in the midst of it.

Prayer: God of covenant hope, thank you for your provision, even in life's darkest corners. Be with us to guide us this day, as we gather to experience your presence among us, and everyday, as we seek to bear witness to your grace, hope, and peace. Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from 9 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 using supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

* To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.

* To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 using at least one activity from each category.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Never Place a Period ... (Easy Preparation) — Adults

Leader preparation: The United Church of Christ's slogan, "Never place a period where God has placed a comma," is rooted in historical expressions of our faith. Pilgrim minister John Robinson told his flock, before they departed the Netherlands for England and then North America, "There is yet more light and truth to break forth from God's Word." These words might also refer to the specific struggles of generations of the groups that have come together to form the United Church of Christ—Evangelical, Congregationalist, Christian, and Reformed — to make their faith pertinent to their lives. This particular slogan comes to us through the great twentieth-century comedian Gracie Allen, who was a lifelong Congregationalist. Married to her comic partner, George Burns, Allen left a note for him to find after she had died of heart disease in 1964. The note, in part, encouraged him to "Never place a period where God has placed a comma." Reflect on what you gleaned by doing the Leader Preparation activity for this Exploration, and be willing to share your reflections with your group.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Share the story of the difficult situation on which you reflected in the Leader Preparation activity for this Exploration. Include details of your difficulties, but focus on the ways God's presence sustained you during this experience.

Read Matthew 27:51–66 together. Invite the participants to imagine how the disciples (especially the female disciples) must have felt after Jesus' crucifixion. Invite any to share a difficult experience from their own life, and the way they felt God reached out to them in the midst of it.

2 Serenity, Now!—Adults

Leader preparation: One of the United Church of Christ's Six Historic Emphases is that "We listen for a still speaking God," <http://www.tinyurl.com/22sevhk>. Scroll down the page to the section headed "Praying the Serenity Prayer." Read about Reinhold Niebuhr and the origins of his now-ubiquitous Serenity Prayer. Print copies of the prayer. Read Psalm 119:105–112, 129–136. Reflect on the events and circumstances that led the psalmist to call out to God for serenity. Reflect on current or past events in your life in which you were moved to call out to God, "Serenity, now!"

Supplies:

- Bibles
- copies of the Serenity Prayer, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2ar33f>

Read Psalm 119:105–112 together. Reflect on the circumstances that moved the psalmist to call out to God in these words. Introduce the Serenity Prayer to the participants, asking if any of them have heard or used it before. Tell them a little about Reinhold Niebuhr and the writing of the prayer. Then enter a time of silence during which you invite the participants to reflect silently on circumstances in their lives that may be calling out for God's serenity. Invite those who wish to speak them aloud to do so.

Pray the Serenity Prayer together, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2ar33f>.



③ Lee Welcomed Home — Confirmation-age youth, older youth, young adults, adults, older adults

Leader preparation: One of the United Church of Christ's Six Historic Emphases is that "We are a people of extravagant welcome,"

<http://www.tinyurl.com/37nzvh9>.

Scroll down the page to the section headed "Four-year-old Lee Finally Welcomed." Read the story of little Lee Dobbins, born a slave to an African-American mother and pursued relentlessly by his white, slave-owning father, as he and a group of adults sought to escape their bondage via the Underground Railroad. Read the words spoken by the pastor of Oberlin, Ohio, First Congregational Church at Lee's funeral. Read Matthew 27:51-66. Reflect on the attitudes, people, and events that killed Lee, and those that resulted in Jesus' death. Look up "I've Got Peace Like a River," <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong9>; <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong9a>, also in *The New Century Hymnal*, page 478). Sing and/or play it by yourself if you are able.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- keyboard, musician, or CD copy of *The New Century Hymnal*, <http://www.tinyurl.com/NCHymnal> or <http://www.tinyurl.com/NCHymnalcd>

Recount Lee's tragic story. Read Matthew 27:51-66. Discuss where there might be some hope of Sabbath transformation in the stories of Lee's and Jesus' burial. Sing "I've Got Peace Like a River."

End with a simple prayer, such as this: *Help us to keep in our hearts the memory of Jesus Christ and of all the little Lees in the world so that we may be always ready and ever willing to live in the powerful grip of the hope that comes from you, God. Amen.*

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ Where God Has Placed a Comma (Easy Preparation) — Adults

Leader preparation: The United Church of Christ's slogan, "Never place a period where God has placed a comma," is rooted in historical expressions of our faith. Pilgrim minister John Robinson told his flock, before they departed the Netherlands for England and then North America, "There is yet more light and truth to break forth from God's Word." These words might also refer to the specific struggles of generations of the groups that have come together to form the United Church of Christ — Evangelical, Congregationalist, Christian, and Reformed — to make their faith pertinent to their lives. This particular slogan comes to us through the great twentieth-century comedian Gracie Allen, who was a lifelong Congregationalist. Married to her comic partner, George Burns, Allen left a note for him to find after she had died of heart disease in 1964. The note, in part, encouraged him to "Never place a period, where God has placed a comma." Read Matthew 27:55-66.

Supplies:

- Some form of United Church of Christ media that includes the slogan, "Never place a period where God has placed a comma"
- Bibles



Bring the slogan to everyone's attention, and tell a little about its creation. Read Luke 27:55–66 together. Invite the participants to discuss what the slogan means in light of the reality of death and our hope of resurrection.

⑤ More Light and Truth — Older youth, young adults, adults

Leader preparation: One of the United Church of Christ's Six Historic Emphases is that "We listen for a still speaking God," <http://www.tinyurl.com/22sevhk>. Scroll down the page to the section headed "More Light!" Read about John Robinson and his address to the Pilgrims before they embarked for the New World.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Briefly relate the story of John Robinson's farewell address to the Pilgrims before their departure to North America. Invite the participants to close their eyes and to listen for particular words or phrases that come to their attention as you meditatively read Psalm 119:105–112, 129–136. After a period of silence, invite those who are willing to share the words or phrases from the psalm that caught their attention. Encourage them to remember and reflect on these words in the coming days.

End with this, or a similar prayer: *Still-speaking God, keep us open to your call — assured of your grace-filled presence in our lives, as we seek to hear and heed your voice. Amen.*

⑥ The Afro-Christian Connection — Confirmation-age youth, adults

Leader preparation: Read "The Afro-Christian Connection," <http://www.tinyurl.com/2dopmry>, from *Hidden Histories in the United Church Christ*, vol. 1. Note how African American Christians in the South were ignored and marginalized by both their Southern and Northern brothers and sisters in Christ. Look at "I Woke Up This Morning" (*New Century Hymnal* #85), <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong8>. If you are not comfortable leading the song a cappella or with an instrument, arrange for someone else to do so at the session.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- song "I Woke Up This Morning," *New Century Hymnal* #85, <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong8>
- copies of the prayer printed below (optional)

In your own words tell a brief history of the Afro-Christian Connection, focusing on their roots in the pre-emancipation Southern United States and on their status as the forgotten members of the Christian connection by other (predominately white) Christians in both the North and the South. Read Psalm 119:105–112, 129–136. Discuss ways these verses might have brought comfort to the people of the Afro-Christian Connection. Invite members of the group to reflect on their own experiences of feeling afflicted or oppressed. Sing "I Woke up this Morning" (*New Century Hymnal* #85), <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong8>.

End by praying alone or in unison the following prayer taken from the Afro-Christian tradition:



*We want to give you some humble and sincere thanks, O God,
for waking us up this morning with your finger of love.
We want to thank you for waking us up
in time and not in eternity,
so that our bed was not our cooling board
and our covers were not our winding sheet.
We want to thank you this morning, Holy Father,
for articulation of speech and the blood
that still runs warm in our veins.
This is our prayer. Amen and thank God.*

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Entering God's Own Dwelling (Easy Preparation) — Confirmation-age youth, adults

Leader preparation: Read Psalm 119:105–112, 129–136. Try to relate the psalmist's words and feelings to events in your own experience. Look at the hymn "Let Me Enter God's Own Dwelling," *New Century Hymnal* #46, <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong7>.

Pay special attention to the sixth stanza as it offers us a call to live our faith in an active fashion that is responsive to God's call.

Supplies:

- hymn "Let Me Enter God's Own Dwelling," *New Century Hymnal* #46, <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong7>
- keyboard and musician or a CD accompaniment version of NCH, <http://www.tinyurl.com/NCHymnal> or <http://www.tinyurl.com/NCHymnalc>

Read Psalm 119:105–112, 129–136 together. Ask the participants to share stories about times during which they felt like the psalmist. Read the sixth stanza of "Let Me Enter God's Own Dwelling." Invite the participants to reflect on and share ways they feel nudged to action by God's call in their own life. How do their specific callings look? What are they about? End by singing "Let Me Enter God's Own Dwelling."

8 "Looking On from a Distance" — Adults

Leader preparation: Read Matthew 27:55–66 and note that the women often watch from a distance (verses 55, 61). Go to the Hidden Histories chapter entitled Women's Work and Women's Boards, <http://www.tinyurl.com/29lo27h>. Scroll down and read the section headed "Evangelical Women's Union." Note some of the circumstances and attitudes that might have caused the women of the Evangelical Synod to take slightly longer to organize for mission and fellowship than their sisters among the other groups that served as precursors to the United Church of Christ (the Reformed, and the Congregational Christians).

Supplies:

- Bibles

Review the story of the Evangelical Women's Union. Ask the participants if they think that there are still barriers to women's participation in their congregation or in the larger church. Why or why not? Read Matthew 27:55–61 together. Ask:



How might the women in this story felt? What hope might there be for them at this point?

9 Jesus and Libby — Adults

Leader preparation:

Read Matthew 26:14–27:66. Read Libby’s Testimony, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2ddl3jb>. Make copies for the group.

Reflect

Where have you experienced the blessings of God’s Sabbath provisions in the past? In what ways are you currently experiencing them in your life? How do these past and present experiences impact your views of the future? Are your views hopeful or more pessimistic? Why?

Supplies:

- Bibles
- copies of Libby’s Testimony, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2ddl3jb>, or a computer and projector

Read Matthew 27:24–61 together. Take a few moments to reflect silently. Share Libby’s Testimony. Discuss the connections between Jesus’ and Libby’s witness. Ask what both might be calling us to do.

End with this or a similar prayer: *Thank you, God, for faithful witnesses. We especially thank you for the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Help us to experience your Sabbath hope in all seasons of our lives. Amen.*