

Discovering Gifts of Ministry



Exploration: Discovery

About this Setting

This UCC Identity and History component may be used with a variety of ages and settings. Appropriate ages are listed beneath the activity title. You may adapt any activity. Many of these activities may be used in any church season, for officer training, confirmation, new-member classes, intergenerational gatherings, retreats, and so on. Discovering gifts of ministry is an exciting lifelong process.

About this Exploration

Throughout our whole lives we have the opportunity to discover our gifts of ministry. As we listen attentively to God's call and affirmation, identify our own passions, gifts, and skills, and participate in community where gifts are celebrated and shared, our gifts shape the unique ministry we have as we serve God and God's people. The process of discovery may involve prayer, community, scripture, nature, solitude, silence, and openness to the gentle nudging of the Spirit. We may be surprised by the Spirit, as well, and discover new and unexpected gifts along our journey.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Ezekiel 2:1-5
1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Leader Preparation

Read the selected Bible passages at least twice. Review the activities with the age group or setting you are leading. Enjoy this Discovery Exploration so your joy is evident as you guide others.

Prayer: Giver of all gifts, open my heart and mind as I create an environment where people can explore, discover, and affirm their gifts of ministry. May all my efforts honor you and make your presence in my life visible. Amen.

Session Development

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

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Walking Prayer (Easy Preparation)

Age Levels: Multiage, Younger and Older Youth, Intergenerational, Adults
Leader preparation: Consider walking outdoors or in a sanctuary or chapel. If this activity includes children less than 18 years old, designate a spacious area where you can observe them while walking but not be intrusive.

Supplies:

- Bibles

When discerning how God may be calling you, it is always helpful to engage scripture actively and to pray. Divide into small groups of no more than three people. Ask the group to read either Ezekiel 2:1–5 or 1 Corinthians 1:1–9, first silently and then aloud. In their small groups have each person identify what word or idea was most important to them, what stood out as interesting or challenging. Have someone in each small group read the passage aloud a third time. After the third reading, invite the group to walk in the designated space for five minutes or more reflecting on the passage and the word they chose, praying their thoughts.

2 We Are One at Baptism and at the Table

Age Levels: Intergenerational, Younger and Older Youth, Adults
Leader preparation: This activity may be separated into two activities, one about baptism and one about communion, or the activity can explore both together. The website “We are one at Baptism and at the Table” provides background information about the UCC’s stated theology regarding baptism and communion.

Set up the table for the baptism activity by placing the pitcher and water on the table, as well as towels. In the communion activity the participants will make a bread mural similar to the one at the top of the website “We are one at Baptism and at the Table” The bread will be made up of a collage of pictures of congregation members. Cut out a large loaf-of-bread shape from tan construction paper and a cup from purple or grey construction paper, and glue them to the center of a piece of mural or craft paper. Decide how you will obtain a photo for each person, either by taking and printing a digital photo or by cutting pictures from a church directory. Place the prepared bread mural, scissors, and glue sticks on a table for the communion activity.

Supplies:

- website: “We are one at Baptism and at the Table,” <http://www.ucc.org/vitality/what-matters/we-are-one-at-baptism-and-at.html>
- table with 5–6 bowls of water, towels, and cups
- prepared mural or craft paper with a loaf of bread and cup
- digital camera, photo paper, and photo printer or pictorial church directory
- scissors
- glue sticks

Invite participants to discuss how your congregation celebrates the sacraments,

baptism and communion. Ask them how baptism or communion impacts or informs their current involvement in ministry. If you have a large group, divide into groups of four to six people. Invite people to the two tables you have set up, one for baptism and one for communion, and engage in the activity at each table. Explain that at the baptism table they may dip their hands in the water and feel the water running through their fingers. Tell them to listen to the language of the water as it returns to the bowl. Encourage them to remember their baptism and being claimed by God through the waters. Explain that at the communion table they may make a collage of congregation members within the shape of the loaf of bread and cup. Invite the participants to have a picture taken of themselves and printed on the photo printer, or to cut out pictures from the pictorial church directory. Encourage them to think about the gifts of God for the people of God, a phrase commonly used during Communion.

3 Gifts: UCC Values

Age Levels: Intergenerational, Older Children, Younger and Older Youth, Adults, Seekers

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself the video “UCC Values,” which is found on the “Stillspeaking Videos” website. Scroll down to find the “UCC Values” video.

This activity is also good for new Christians, officer training, confirmation, or during worship as a refresher on UCC values. Write the two sets of questions provided in the activity below on sheets of newsprint for everyone to see

Supplies:

- Bibles
- computer with Internet access and projection capability
- digital projector
- video: “UCC Values,” <http://www.ucc.org/god-is-still-speaking/ads/>
- prepared newsprint sheets with questions
- markers

Divide into small groups of four to six people. Invite someone in each small group to read 1 Corinthians 1:1-9. Ask the group to reflect on the following questions.

- In verses 1-2, how is the word “call” or “called” used?
- What do Christians mean when they say they are “called”?
- How does this passage describe a Christian’s relationship with Jesus?
- What does Paul say about spiritual gifts?

Bring the group together and show the “UCC Values” video. In their small groups, have them consider the following questions.

- How has the UCC been called?
- Think about your congregation. How does it have the gift of hearing the ancient story anew?
- How does it offer continuing testament to all?
- How does the congregation’s love know no borders?
- Where does the congregation work for justice for all?

Celebrate your congregation’s gifts and ministries, making sure that options are included that represent all ages.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Are You Ready?(Easy Preparation)

Age Levels: Older Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: This is a reflective activity that requires soul work. Determine how much time you can allot for reflection so that can be clearly communicated. Cut narrow strips of paper. When coming back together as a large group, allow for a gentle gathering together, using a soft voice, chime, or bell.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- basket or bowl
- strips of paper
- pencils or markers
- (optional) chime or bell

Read Ezekiel 2:1–5 to the group. Repeat the first two verses. Ezekiel was asked to “stand up” on his feet, to be prepared to speak with God. Ask the group what God asked of Ezekiel in the remaining verses. Make the discussion more personal by asking the group how they prepare themselves so they are ready for a conversation with God. Mention that sometimes we are ready, and sometimes we need to do some prayerful housecleaning. Ask people to silently consider what they would need to do so they were prepared to hear God clearly. Allow them to wander in the room or seek a comfortable space. Tell them how much time they have to reflect. Invite them to write what they need to be “housecleaned” on the strips of paper, and then tear the paper into a basket when they feel ready.

5 UCC Firsts

Age Levels: Intergenerational, Younger and Older Youth, Seekers, Adults

Leader preparation: This is a fun activity that older children, middle and high school youth, can work on as time allows. If you have a computer lab, use it or have several laptops available with Internet access so the participants can work in small groups on a computer.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- computers with Internet access
- website: “UCC Firsts,” <http://www.ucc.org/about-us/ucc-firsts.html>

Gifts develop over time, for people and for organizations, including churches. Ask the group to note when they learned a new skill like playing the piano, learning to read, learning to walk, started a new job, and so on. Sometimes we are required to learn how to do something (school), and sometimes we choose what we learn (sports, music). Churches also make choices, which can be just as scary. But churches act as they discern that God is calling them. Sometimes everyone applauds a church’s decision, and sometimes they do not. Read Ezekiel 2:1–5 to the group. Churches try very hard to work so that people “shall know that there has been a prophet among them.” Have the participants get into small groups at each computer and direct them to the website for “UCC Firsts.” Invite the small

groups to explore the website and choose a particular date. Invite them to report back to the group about what they learned. Engage the group in conversation using the following questions.

- What gifts of ministry are part of the UCC's history?
- Has your congregation played a role in any of these "firsts"?
- What firsts are significant for your congregation?
- How does your congregation discover its gifts for ministry?

⑥ Christmas in July

Age Levels: Multiage, Intergenerational, Younger and Older Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself with the UCC website "Stewardship Messages" and select the July 2011 stewardship message by the Rev. Rochelle A. Stackhouse from New Haven, Connecticut. Make a copy of the July 2011 stewardship message for each person.

Supplies:

- "July 2011 Stewardship Message" from UCC website "Stewardship Messages," <http://www.ucc.org/stewardship/stewardship-messages> (one copy per person)
- Christmas tree or outline of a tree
- construction paper
- yarn
- markers
- scissors
- holepunch
- tape
- (optional) hymnals

Ask the group what gifts they have. Listen and affirm the responses. Hand out copies of "July 2011 Stewardship Message," and invite someone to read the message to the group. Note that the author writes about Mary asking "How can this be?" in response to God's call because God was asking what seemed impossible. Stackhouse writes, "Yet, as Mary discovered, if she was a willing partner with God, together they could change the world." Ask the following questions.

- When have you been willing to partner with God?
- What were the results?
- How could you and God change the world?

Invite the participants to create a paper ornament. On the ornament instruct them to write or draw a picture of how they would like to partner with God. Have them punch a hole, add a piece of string, and hang their ornaments on the tree. If desired, sing a few first verses of some Christmas carols.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Giving Thanks (Easy Preparation) (all ages)

Age Levels: All Ages

Leader preparation: Read 1 Corinthians 1:3–5. Being grateful helps us see how we are gifted by God in creation and by other people. Being grateful helps us recognize our gifts..

Supplies:

- Bibles

Read 1 Corinthians 1:3–5 to the group. Ask the participants the following questions.

- Why is Paul grateful?
- Why is he confident about the congregation

Then ask each person to read the verses again silently, replacing their name at the first “you.” For example: “Grace to [Name] and peace from God.” Invite them to make the affirmation from Paul personal.

Invite the group into a circle. Ask each person silently to think of one gift for which he or she is grateful and one gift that he or she receives from the congregation that blesses his or her life. Invite them to share as desired. Close with the following prayer, or one like it: *Giver of all gifts, we are grateful for . . . Thank you for partnering in ministry with us. Amen.*

Invite everyone to offer thanks to God at least twice a day, at times of their choosing, for at least one week.

8 Taking a Stand: Basis of Union, 1943

Age Levels: Older Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself with the online article “Basis of Union.”

Supplies:

- Bibles
- “Basis of Union,” <http://www.ucc.org/beliefs/basis-of-union.html>
- pencils

Give each person a copy of the “Basis of Union” from 1943. Ask participants to read it, highlighting parts that interest them. Have a volunteer read Ezekiel 2:1–5 to the group. Ask the group why they think the Ezekiel passage would be paired with the “Basis of Union.” Place the document in historical context by sharing the following points.

- The Evangelical and Reformed Church eventually merged to create the UCC in 1957.
- This document was a public declaration
- The Evangelical and Reformed Church was also a German-speaking denomination.

A snapshot of 1943:

- Franklin Delano Roosevelt was President of the United States; Winston Churchill was Prime Minister of Great Britain.
- This was the fourth year of World War II; Allied leadership was aware of German concentration camps; Italy surrendered to the Allied forces.
- *Oklahoma* by Rodgers and Hammerstein opens.
- Duke Ellington performs at Carnegie Hall, New York City.

Engage the group in conversation using the following questions.

- Why was the “Basis of Union” a justice document?
- Why was this document prophetic?
- What gifts of ministry were needed to create this writing.

Ask everyone to notice during the week where leadership is occurring in justice issues. Ask each person to note and give thanks for times when they heal and affirm others.

Music: We Belong

Age Levels: All Ages

Leader preparation: The song “All God’s Critters Got a Place in the Choir” is a popular children’s song that proclaims that all of creation has a part in God’s glorious choir, whether small or large, reptile, fish, insect, mammal or bird, and whether winged, webbed or hooped. The video “All God’s Critters Got A Place in the Choir” will bring a smile. What’s important is learning the song and exploring its message. This song is appropriate for all ages, but it is beloved by children.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- video: “Makem & Clancy: All God’s Critters Got A Place in the Choir,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NcG1JNpazN4>
- “All God’s Critters Got A Place in the Choir” lyrics, <http://kids.niehs.nih.gov/games/songs/childrens/allgodscreaturesmid.htm> (for each person)

Show the video “Makem & Clancy: All God’s Critters Got A Place in the Choir.” Hand out copies of “All God’s Critters Got A Place in the Choir” lyrics, and invite the participants to sing along as they feel comfortable. Engage everyone in conversation about the song using the following questions.

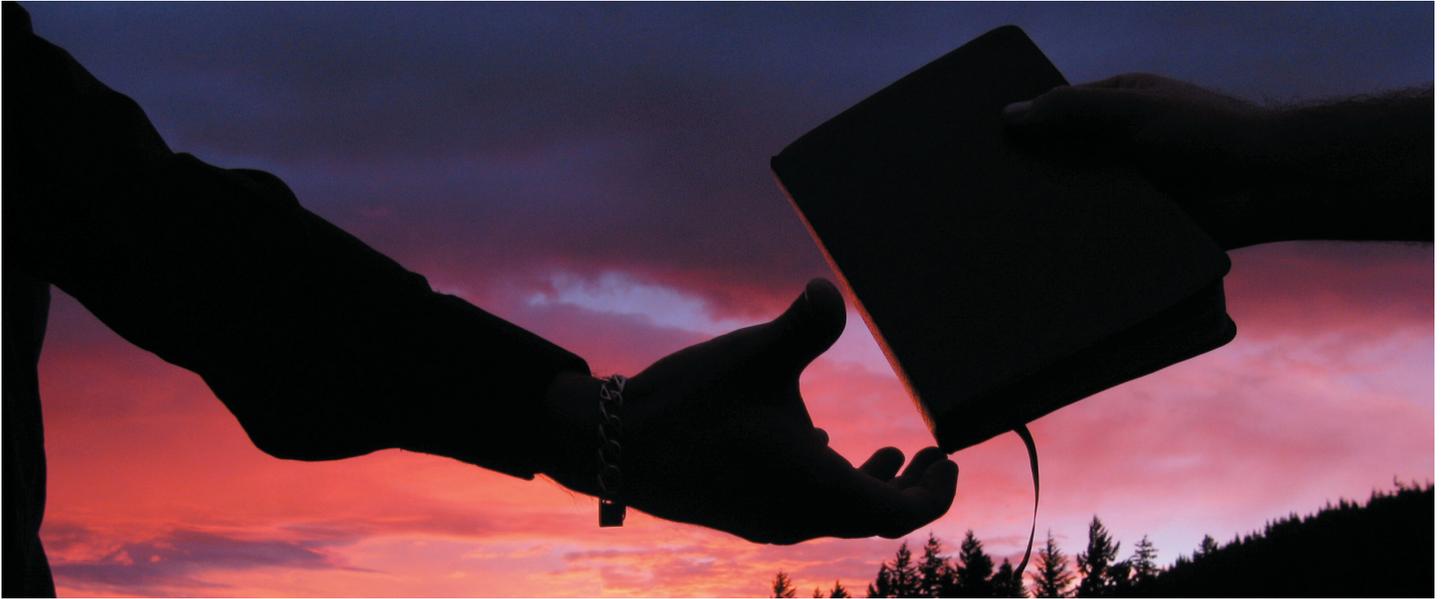
- Who is in God’s choir?
- Why the diversity?
- What does each animal add to the choir? Or, what is each animal’s gift?
- What animals would you add? Why?
- What gifts of ministry can you offer so everyone belongs?

Reflect

How did your group respond to this Discovery Exploration? What fine tuning is needed? What needs to stay the same? How are you challenged? How are you affirmed?

This song is singer friendly all week. Ask everyone to hum the tune and reflect on where they fit in God’s choir.

Discovering Gifts of Ministry



Exploration: Scripture

About this Setting

UCC history, policy, graphic design, worship, stewardship, mission, and advocacy all begin with scripture. Scripture illuminates UCC denominational and congregational life, as well as the lives of individual members. Scripture guides members as they discover how, where, and why God is calling them in a specific time and place.

About this Exploration

Scripture provides many examples of people discovering God-given talents that help them not only in their own lives, but also in ministering to or caring for others. As Solomon discovered, gifts such as knowledge and a discerning mind are to be valued more highly than riches, long life, or power. Scripture, along with the community, inspires and affirms people in recognizing the different gifts they possess. Gifts of ministry allow people to play important roles in this world, in faith-related settings as well as in homes, workplaces, schools, and places of recreation.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

1 Kings 3:3–15
Mark 1:14–20

Leader Preparation

Read both passages, enacting them in your mind as you read. They are powerful stories of God’s love, care, and enthusiasm for God’s followers. The passages also highlight some of the conditions needed before we use our gifts of ministry, such as trust and covenants. Select the activities that will best suit your group.

Prayer: Through the ages, O God, you have called people to witness to your love and to minister on your behalf. Grant me the wisdom to use the gifts you give me with integrity and compassion and to follow you with the enthusiasm of Jesus’ first disciples. Amen.

Session Development

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Drama: Solomon and God (Easy Preparation)

Age Levels: Younger and Older Youth, Intergenerational, Adults

Leader preparation: This activity is based on 1 Kings 3:3–15, but it could be easily adapted to the second reading, Mark 1:14–20. Both stories are not difficult to re-enact. You do not need props.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Invite someone to read 1 Kings 3:3–15 to the group. If working with children, check for understanding by asking the following questions.

- Who is Solomon?
- How can we tell that he and God were friends?
- Why might God have offered Solomon any choice of gifts?
- Which gift did Solomon select?
- Why do you think he chose those gifts?

Divide into smaller groups, and invite the groups to act out the passage. The purpose is to learn the story well, not to create a perfect presentation. If possible, allow enough time so people can switch roles in the same passage and experience the story from a different perspective. Bring everyone together and ask the following questions.

- If you were Solomon, which gift would you want from God?
- What would you do if you received that gift?

2 Follow Me

Age Levels: Multiage, Intergenerational, Younger and Older Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: The website “The UCC Logo” includes a paragraph about the symbolism in the UCC logo that you will need to read and summarize for the group.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- website: “The UCC Logo,” <http://www.ucc.org/about-us/ucc-logo.html>
- “The UCC Logo,” <http://www.uccfiles.com/logo/ucc-color.tif> (for each person)

Ask different people to read Mark 1:14–20 to the group. Ask the following questions.

- What happened in this story?
- If you were Simon or Andrew, James or John, would you have dropped your net and followed Jesus? Why or why not?
- What people were they supposed to fish for?

Explain that the UCC is a church of extravagant welcome. UCC members affirm that God wants everyone worshipping, working, praying, and serving together.

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

Hand out copies of “The UCC Logo.” Invite people to share what they think the various parts of the logo mean, and explain the parts that are unfamiliar to the group. Pay special attention to the orb that symbolizes witnessing to all ends of the earth and also the words from John 17:21: “that they all may be one.” Reflect on the logo and its meaning using the following questions.

- How does the logo illustrate the UCC’s understanding of following Jesus?
- What gifts of ministry are needed to fulfill the vision drawn in the logo?
- Is the vision of the UCC limited in any way? If so, how?
- How can you best use your gifts to further the UCC vision?

Lectio Divina

Age Levels: Older children, Younger and Older Youth, Multiage, Intergenerational, Adults

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself with website “Lectio Divina.” You may summarize the materials for the group, or you may use it for your own understanding. Practice using Lectio Divina this week so you are familiar with the discipline. Lectio Divina is a way of understanding God’s presence through the Word in many faith communities, not only the UCC.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- website: “Lectio Divina,” <http://www.ucc.org/feed-your-spirit/spiritual-practices/lectio-divina.html>

Explain that Lectio Divina is an ancient spiritual practice, used to help people discover how God is speaking to them through scripture. Invite each person to find a comfortable position to explore scripture. Explain the Lectio Divina process to them: *lectio* (reading), *mediation* (reflection), *oratio* (response), and *contemplation* (rest). Invite them explore Mark 1:14–20 individually for about five minutes. Bring them together. Ask a few people to read the passage to the group. Invite the participants to share their reflections using the following questions

- What jumped out as important to you?
- Which words are especially relevant for you?
- How might Lectio Divina help you as you discern your gifts of ministry?

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Trust: Promises Kept (Easy Preparation)

Age Levels: Younger and Older Youth, Adult

Leader preparation: Read 1 Kings 3:3–15.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Ask the group to read 1 Kings 3:5–15 silently and then invite someone to read the

passage aloud. Ask: *Why did Solomon trust God?* Note that verse 8 refers to the covenant God made with Abraham in Genesis 15:5–6 and Genesis 17:3–8. In 1 Kings, Solomon and God are speaking like friends who already know the story. We do that when discussing sports or music or mutual interests. We don't include references because the references are understood and well known by both parties. Solomon was noting that God had kept a promise to Abraham and that Solomon trusted God's track record. If your group does not know the promise referenced, then read the Genesis passages. Engage the group in conversation using the following questions and record answers on a sheet of newsprint or a whiteboard.

- What do you need to trust God?
- What do you need to trust yourself?
- What do you need to trust the church?
- Why is trust, on so many levels, so important when discovering and using your gifts of ministry?

5 Computers: We Are a People of Covenant

Age Levels: Older Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: You will need several laptop computers or a computer lab. Use either 1 Kings 3:3–15 or Mark 1:14–20 with this activity. Solomon refers to an Abrahamic covenant, the Ark of the Covenant, and covenants with his father, David. The Mark passage has an implied covenant that is strong enough to recruit disciples.

Supplies:

- website: "We are People of Covenant," <http://www.ucc.org/vitality/what-matters/we-are-a-people-of-covenant.html>
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Read either 1 Kings 3:3–15 or Mark 1:14–20 to the group. This activity reviews the concept of covenant. Invite the group to reflect on the meaning of covenant with the following questions, and record their answers on a sheet of newsprint or a whiteboard.

- What is a covenant?
- What are examples of contemporary covenants? (Marriage, pastoral call with congregation, and association)
- How is a covenant similar to a contract?
- How is a covenant different from a contract?

Divide into three groups and have each group gather around a computer. Direct them to the website "We are People of Covenant." Instruct each group to do one of the following projects.

1. Summarize "What Matters to Us" in the first section related to covenant.
2. Summarize how covenant is used at a local level at Los Alamos.
3. Summarize the General Synod walkout in 1987 by the Hispanic Assembly (located near the end of the article).

Ask everyone to report back to the larger group. After the reporting, ask the fol-

lowing questions.

- How does a strong covenant support ministry?
- How might it hinder ministry?
- What covenants does your congregation make with its members?

6 Music: The Summons

Age Levels: Younger and Older Children, Younger and Older Youth, Multiage, Intergenerational, Adults

Leader preparation: “The Summons” (tune: Kelvingrove) is a simple tune with a powerful message. Obtain a music recording of “The Summons.”

Supplies:

- song: “The Summons” by John Bell (tune: Kelvingrove); video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V0aAkOe87mo&feature=related>; lyrics <http://www.spiritandsong.com/compositions/30338> (for each person)

Teach the first verse of “The Summons.” With younger children, you may wish to teach them by lining out the song, singing or saying a line and having the children repeat after you.

Discuss the five questions from the first verse (three parts are in the last question) using the following.

- *Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?* What kind of relationship is needed for you to follow someone?
- *Will you go where you don’t know and never be the same?* People of all ages experience change throughout their life, whether a new daycare or new job or new home. Where is Jesus calling you that will change you?
- *Will you let my love be shown?* How does your ministry show Jesus’ love?
- *Will you let my name be known?* How do you share Jesus with others? How do you live so people know your faith is central in your life?
- *Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?* Honor that all of us, all ages, are on faith journeys. Honor that as we grow in Christ’s love, Christ grows in our love. The relationship works both directions. How can you continue to grow in Christ’s love?

Close by singing the song.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Prayer of Confession (Easy Preparation)

Age Levels: Younger and Older Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: This activity focuses on Mark 1:14–20.

Supplies:

- pencils
- “Prayer of Confession,” Attachment: Activity 7

- (optional) *The New Century Hymnal*, hymn 835

Read Mark 1:14–20 to the group. Ask people to silently reflect on times when they have felt or heard Jesus say “Follow me” and they did not follow. Invite them to spend a few minutes in silence as they contemplate that question. Explain that admitting one’s mistakes or shortcomings to God is called confession. Confession helps us acknowledge failure and disappointment, seek forgiveness, and clear our heart to hear God more readily. Hand out copies of “Prayer of Confession.” Invite the group to read it together. Invite people to write their own confession on the bottom of the “Prayer of Confession.”

8 Pentecost

Age Levels: All Ages

Leader preparation: Obtain the artwork “Pentecost from the Rabbula Gospel.” You do not need to be in the liturgical season of Pentecost to use this activity.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Pentecost from the Rabbula Gospel” (Anonymous), https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1102072326?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37962&store_id=1401
- (optional) chairs

Invite people to spend time viewing the artwork “Pentecost from the Rabbula Gospel.” This is an early Christian representation of Pentecost, and the style may be unfamiliar to participants. Invite them to sit in a circle, with or without chairs. If you have a large group, divide this part into smaller groups. Have each person take turns naming two gifts of ministry that each person in the group has. Ask everyone to put their hands in the shape of a flame over their head. Celebrate the gifts in the circle. Ask everyone to notice where the flame of the Holy Spirit warms them this week because that may reinforce an existing ministry or warm them up for a new direction.

9 Dreams

Age Levels: Older Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: Read 1 Kings 3:3–15.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Dreams or visions are mentioned in the Bible over one hundred times. Usually when we communicate with God, it is through worship, prayer, service, or being outdoors. Usually we are conscious. In 1 Kings 3:3–15, Solomon was dreaming. Read the passage to the group. Reflect together on when you have discerned a course of action upon awakening from a dream or vision. Ask the following questions.

- Was the dream from God?
- How could you discern that?

Consider how we use the word “dream” to indicate a conscious vision or lofty

goal, as in Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. Reflect on the conscious dreams and lofty visions that most empower your group using the following questions.

- How did you discover your gifts of ministry?
- Do you know how you received them?
- What are your larger dreams for yourself?
- What are your lofty visions for loved ones?
- What are your dreams for your church?
- What are your visions for the world?
- How can your gifts help fulfill or lay the foundation for your dreams and visions?

This week have participants reflect, at least once a day, on dreams, both conscious and unconscious, and how those dreams instruct one's ministry.

Reflect

What did you discover about gifts of ministry in this Exploration? How do you need to support the people in your group? Do you need to refer them to a chairperson or the pastor? How can you best lift up where God is calling you and where God is calling your group?

Attachment: Activity 7

Prayer of Confession
by Maren Tirabassi

Gentle and holy God, we acknowledge to you, to one another, and to ourselves that we are not what you have called us to be. We have stifled our gifts and wasted our time. We have avoided opportunities to offer kindness, but have been quick to take offense. We have pretended that we could make no contribution to peace and justice in our world and have excused ourselves from risk-taking in our own community. Have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and help us to live our lives differently, we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, whose call to follow haunts our every prayer. Amen.

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Discovering Gifts of Ministry



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Setting

Discipleship is an attentive series of choices that create a pattern of faithful action over a lifetime. Many times people experience God calling them in new and different ways. Sometimes they experience God affirming their current ministry. In the UCC, a popular phrase is that one should “never place a period where God has placed a comma.” Gracie Allen’s comment became part of the “Stillspeaking” campaign. The phrase reminds us that discipleship is not static and that we need to remain alert. God speaks and speaks and speaks. Are we listening?.

About this Exploration

Jesus extends the invitation to “come, follow me.” We are asked to trust that our gifts, talents, and interests may be used by God for the ministry that is before us. We are not asked first to learn more or begin afresh in order to be noticed by Jesus, but rather to hear the Spirit’s call and come just as we are. Through this invitation we are encouraged to place our confidence in God, who is able to work through our open hands and hearts that are offered to the church, community, and world. If we have doubts about our abilities or qualifications, we can be encouraged by the countless Biblical stories that remind us that God always chooses and uses the “least of these.” Come, let’s follow!

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Jeremiah 15:15–21
Matthew 9:9–13, 18–26

Leader Preparation

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

Prayer: Jesus, heal me as you did the woman bleeding. Bring me new life as you did the girl. Encourage me to deepen my faith so my faith may make me well. Cultivate in me the joy of discipleship. Amen.

Session Development

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

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Litany: Joy and Delight of My Heart (Easy Preparation)

Age Levels: All Ages

Leader preparation: Review the activity and write your own litany. This could be a group or an individual project. Write the verse on a sheet of paper or a writing surface. The finished litanies could be used in other sessions, and they could be used in worship.

Write the following verse on a sheet of newsprint or a whiteboard:

Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts. (Jeremiah 15:16)

Supplies:

- prepared newsprint or whiteboard with Jeremiah verse
- paper
- markers

Display the newsprint or whiteboard with the Jeremiah 15:16 verse. Ask the following questions and have a brief discussion

- When has God's word been a joy and the delight of your heart?
- How is finding and ingesting God's word part of discipleship?

Explain, if necessary, that the Bible is not literally eaten. Disciples try to live the word of God so faithfully that it's difficult to separate the disciple from God's word. Have the group divide into small groups of two or three people. Invite the small groups to create a litany with the response "Your word is a joy and the delight of my heart." The theme of the litany is discovering our gifts of ministry as we live as disciples. Tell them to write at least four entries. Invite the groups to share their litanies.

2 Game: On the Island

Age Levels: All Ages, Intergenerational

Leader preparation: Read Matthew 9:9–13, and remember that Jesus' call to ministry includes everyone. Reflect on the ways in which inclusivity and cooperation are gifts of ministry. With young children, consider using a translation or paraphrase of the Bible, such as the *Contemporary English Version* or *The Message*. Outline a large square "island" using masking tape or chalk on the floor of the space. The "island" will need to become smaller for each round of the game. Become familiar with the game instructions in the activity.

Supplies:

- Bible
- music player
- musical recording of lively music
- masking tape or chalk

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

Call the group to the “island.” Read Matthew 9:9–13 to the participants. Explain that Jesus called a tax collector to follow him. Tax collectors were not accepted by everyone. The story reminds us that everyone has gifts and abilities and can follow Jesus’ way. Explain to the participants that the large square is a safe “island.” Around the island is a sea. When the music plays, it is safe to swim in the water. When the music stops, it means the tide has changed, and it is no longer safe to swim. Everyone must find a place on the island. Play the music and invite the participants to “swim” around the island. Stop the music and encourage the participants to gather on the island. Before beginning the music again, decrease the size of the island. As the island becomes smaller, the participants will need to cooperate to make sure everyone is safe. Gather on the island and say, “Everyone is included. No one is left out!”

3 We Belong to Christ

Age Levels: Older Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: Go to the website “We belong to Christ” (<http://www.ucc.org/vitality/what-matters/we-belong-to-christ.html>) and scroll down to the section “History Matters.” Familiarize yourself with “Brave Belonging” so you can share the story with the group. Invite an accompanist to play the music for “Lift Your Heads, O Martyrs, Weeping,” hymn 445 in *The New Century Hymnal*.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- hymn: “Lift Your Heads, O Martyrs, Weeping” by Károly Jenzensky (tune: Magyar), *The New Century Hymnal*, hymn 445
- accompanist

Ask two people to be readers for Jeremiah 15:15–21. Have one person be Jeremiah and read verses 15–18, and have the other person be the Lord and read verses 19–21. Ask the following questions.

- Why is Jeremiah having a rough time?
- What is God’s promise to Jeremiah?

Explain that the trials and tribulations of discipleship certainly didn’t begin or end with Jeremiah. Tell about “Brave Belonging.” Learn “Lift Your Heads, O Martyrs, Weeping.” The words were written by a survivor from the Hungarian Galley Slaves. Sing the hymn, and encourage the participants to be attentive to the words. Ask the group what the Hungarian slaves tell us about discipleship. Ask them how these stories and words inspire the use of their gifts.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Journaling: Healing (Easy Preparation)

Age Levels: Younger and Older Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: Practice the words to the short meditation so you are comfortable saying them. Practice the breath prayer. This activity should flow smoothly and calmly.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- white or light colored paper
- pencils, colored pencils, pens

Read Matthew 9:18–26 to the group. Give them a few minutes to read it silently. Ask the group who the healers are in your faith community. People may mention those in healing professions. Also include the people who can calm a colicky baby, soothe animals, anoint the dying with oil, use aromatherapy, and offer healing touch or healing prayer. Ask someone to read Matthew 9:18–26 again to the group. Have the group sit comfortably, close their eyes, and imagine themselves either as the woman or the girl. Use the following meditation to guide the group. Pause after each sentence.

- Imagine what you want Jesus to heal.
- Imagine where you need new life.
- Listen to what Jesus is saying to you.
- How are you responding to Jesus?

When participants are ready, invite them to open their eyes. Give them five minutes to journal their thoughts, draw a picture, write a song, or express themselves as desired. The journaling is personal and should not be shared with the larger group. Conclude by taking a deep breath together. Then, again, on the inhale, say, “Thank you.” On the exhale, say, “for healing.” Repeat the breath prayer two or three times.



5 Gifts of Ministry

Age Levels: Younger and Older Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: Review the activity and be familiar with Matthew 9:9–13, 18–26. Obtain the artwork “Farm Garden with Sunflowers” (c.1912) by Gustav Klimt. This activity could also be part of confirmation, leadership training, retreats, or a Pentecost intergenerational event.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- artwork: “Farm Garden with Sunflowers” by Gustav Klimt, <http://www.art.com/products/p15177883-sa-i3715775/gustav-klimt-farm-garden-with-sunflowers-c1912.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=55eedd136d4049bcaab8f63c70afd3e3&searchstring=klimt+farm+garden+with+sunflowers>

Read Matthew 9:9–13, 18–26 aloud. Give your group an opportunity to review it silently too. Break the story into smaller pieces using the following questions

- What did Jesus do in verses 9–13?
- Who are the other key figures and what did they do?
- What did Jesus do in verses 18–26?
- Who are the other key figures, and what did they do?

As a group discern the various gifts of ministry present in the Matthew passage (prophecy, healing, pastor, exhortation, mercy, faith, leadership, miracles, healing, and so on). Include Jesus’ gifts as well as the gifts of others. Note that all the choices are interconnected. Example: Jesus needed to offer and Matthew needed

to accept Jesus' invitation so the Pharisees could see them together and Jesus could respond to their complaint. Jesus offers, we follow, and we are included in Jesus' ministry. As in the Matthew passage, there is plenty of room for all the gifts of ministry.

Invite the group to view "Farm Garden with Sunflowers" by Gustav Klimt. Have them note the variety of colors, textures, sizes, shapes and how each detail is important for the entire composition. Ask them to identify a part of the painting that represents their gift of ministry. Give each person an opportunity to explain their selection. If the group is large, split into smaller groups.

6 Changing Lives

Age Levels: Older Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: You may use either Jeremiah 15:15–21 or Matthew 9:9–13, 18–26 for this activity. In the Jeremiah passage God affirms and changes Jeremiah's life so he can be a prophet. In the Matthew passage, Jesus changes lives by eating with a tax collector, reprimanding the Pharisees, healing a woman with hemorrhages, and raising a girl from the dead.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- website: "Our Church Is Changing Lives," <http://www.ucc.org/changing-lives/>

Explain that our gifts change throughout our life. Sometimes a person tells us that we have a gift, sometimes we discern it on our own, and sometimes a revelation seems to just fall into our lap. Our faith community and the support we receive from them is important to our ministry. Ask the participants each to name one person who helped them on their faith journey and to describe what they did. Listen attentively and celebrate the diversity of gifts: caring, hospitality, teaching, preaching, mission work, and so on. Show the videos you selected for the group to review. After each one, pause. Then ask: *How do you think this person experiences Jesus? Who do you think helped this person on his/her faith journey?* Close with a celebration of all the gifts God needs now and has needed through the ages. Celebrate that the UCC has a special place for all of God's children and every gift.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Partners in Ministry (Easy Preparation)

Age Levels: Younger and Older Children, Younger and Older Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: This activity may be adapted for any age or for intergenerational activities. Review and make your own example. For younger children, use a preschool Bible or summarize the story.

Supplies:

- Bibles

- construction paper or drawing paper
- markers, colored pencils, oil pastels

Read Jeremiah 15:15–21 to the group, and ask them to describe moments when they felt like Jeremiah and how God responded. Affirm how God did not leave Jeremiah. Jeremiah complains, compares God to a deceitful brook, and is extremely unhappy. God doesn't budge. God is in a partnership with Jeremiah. Note that God does not abandon the partnership when Jeremiah questions and complains. Explain that we have the joy of discovering our gifts of ministry because God has already gifted us. It's good to be reminded to whom we belong and how deeply God loves us.

Have people to select a piece of paper and then outline both of their hands on the page. On one hand, have each person either write or draw the gifts he or she has received from God. On the other hand, have each person list his or her gifts to God. Ask them how they can partner with God, hand in hand, with one another. Encourage the group to take home the hand picture and place it somewhere where they see it daily, or ask them to photograph it and put the image on their mobile device or computer desktop. Ask participants to reflect, at least once a day, on their gifts of ministry and their call to discipleship. Every day, they can reflect on this question: *How are God and I walking hand in hand?*

8 Music: I Sing a Song

Age Levels: All Ages

Leader preparation: The hymn “I Sing a Song” (tune: Grand Isle) at the turn of the twentieth century was in *Everyday Hymns for Little Children*. This is a camp and Sunday School favorite for many people, usually over 35 years old. Many young adults and children may have not yet learned this hymn. Some congregations include it in their All Saints Day worship service, but it's a discipleship song as well. Invite an accompanist to play the hymn.

Supplies:

- hymn: “I Sing a Song of the Saints of God” by Lesbia Scott (tune: Grand Isle), *The New Century Hymnal*, hymn 295, <http://www.hymnsite.com/lyrics/umh712.sht>
- (optional) accompanist

Hand out copies of *The New Century Hymnal* and have people turn to “I Sing a Song of the Saints of God.” Ask several people to read the verses aloud. Ask the group what gifts of ministry are mentioned in these verses. Acknowledge that part of the world's living saints are the members of your group. As a group, identify one gift per person, including yourself. Discovering gifts of ministry is a challenge and a privilege for Christians. Sing the hymn together.

9 Perseverance

Age Levels: Younger and Older Youth, Adults, Intergenerational

Leader preparation: Both Jeremiah 15:15–21 and Matthew 9:9–13, 18–26 have examples of perseverance and faith in the face of overwhelming odds. Jeremiah was not respected, Jesus heals a woman suffering from long-term hemorrhages, and Jesus brings a girl back to life. Ponder what you have overcome in your life. Review the activity. This activity could also be used as part of confirmation, worship, a justice discussion, or a retreat.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- video: “Korea’s Got Talent: Sung-bong Choi,” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BewknNW2b8Y&feature=player_embedded#at=266
- lyrics: “Nella Fantasia,” <http://www.resourcesforlife.com/docs/item3712>

Divide into two groups. Ask one group to read Jeremiah 15:15–21 and the other group to read Matthew 9:9–13, 18–26. Invite both groups to discuss the role of perseverance in the Bible texts. Gather as a large group and discuss the role of perseverance in a faith journey using the following questions.

- Who in the passage persevered?
- How do you know they persevered?
- How has God persevered?

Show the video “Korea’s Got Talent: Sung-bong Choi.” Ponder what this young man has overcome. Ask the group to reflect deeply every day on where they need to persevere in their faith, aware that God is already journeying with them. During the week have them also notice where children are or are not protected in the community.

Reflect

“I sing a song of the saints of God, faithful their whole lives through, who bravely labored, lived and died for the God they loved and knew.” This is the first sentence in hymn 295 of *The New Century Hymnal*. How are you and your group faithful? What did you learn that was new? How are your gifts of ministry enhanced by guiding this group?

Discovering Gifts of Ministry



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Setting

Worshipping congregations are places where ancient biblical texts are infused afresh with the Holy Spirit. The discipline of reading scripture is ancient, but the believer's call is specific to the believer's time and location. Isaiah knew about legislative advocacy and working to change political structures, but he did not know about Facebook, Twitter, or reality television. There are many examples in faith communities of updated traditions, such as the chalice used in communion or the baptismal font. Many congregations enjoy Chrismons during Advent and Christmas, which are reminders of the Christian story told through ancient symbols. Traditions ground believers, and interpreting those traditions, with integrity and reverence, keeps them relevant in communal life.

About this Exploration

Faithful Christian practices encourage a communal awareness that God calls, nurtures, and blesses the use of our gifts to strengthen God's work in the world. Our understanding of this partnership with God is always emerging. Traditional gifts, such as preaching, hospitality, music, and caring may be demonstrated in ways recognizable since ancient days. Christian tradition may also be informed and evolve to include modern forms of expression such as social media, video, legislative advocacy, and more. No matter the era or tradition, gifts of ministry are grounded in a desire to minister with and on behalf of Christ.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Isaiah 49:1–7
Luke 10:38–42

Leader Preparation

Read Isaiah 49:1–7 and Luke 10:38–42 at least twice. Give yourself time so scripture can settle into your heart while you are engaged in your daily life. Ponder which faith traditions are essential to you, which are less important, and the reasons behind your answers.

Prayer: Eternal and everlasting God, guide my heart and actions so that in all I do I honor you and your son, Jesus Christ. May I always be attentive to the Holy Spirit's presence in my life. Amen.

Session Development

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

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Chosen (Easy Preparation)

Age Levels: All Ages

Leader preparation: Review the activity and create an image.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- light colored paper
- colored pencils

Read the two Bible Focus Passages, Isaiah 49:7 and Luke 10:42, to the group. In the New Revised Standard Version, the word “chosen” is used in each verse. Ask the group these questions.

- How is the word used in each passage?
- What are the differences and similarities between God choosing someone and someone choosing God?

Distribute paper and colored pencils. Ask the participants to create an image or design that indicates how God has chosen them. Leave the directions open ended so people can choose how to respond. Invite people to share their drawings.

2 Changing of the Stoles

Age Levels: Younger and Older Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: Review the activity, which focuses on Luke 10:38–42. Familiarize yourself with the website “Covenant Service,” which is the covenant service used by congregations and associations when a pastor is returning from active duty as a military chaplain and resuming responsibilities in the local church setting. Covenant services are traditional and contemporary. Think through the roles you have in your life and when you act like Mary or Martha.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- “Covenant Service,” <http://www.ucc.org/ministers/pdfs/Order-for-Reaffirming-Covenant-Church-and-Chaplain.pdf> (copy for each person)
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Begin by asking people what roles they have in their life. Roles are usually positive (Christian, partner, parent, employee, friend, child). They can also be negative. Record the various answers on a sheet of newsprint or a whiteboard. Ask these questions.

- What are the symbols used in our roles?
- What happens when our roles change, which often means a symbol changes? (Wedding bands, paycheck, unemployment benefits, disability, birth or death certificate, graduation certificate, new driver’s license)
- Which role changes were accompanied by a worship service?

Explain that in the UCC there is a special covenant service that was written as a result of a specific change in a congregation—when a pastor returns to the lo-

cal congregation from active duty as a military chaplain. Hand out copies of the “Covenant Service,” and invite people to read or act out the service, stopping in each section to highlight the challenges and gifts referenced directly and indirectly. Pay attention to the changing of the stoles.

Engage the group in conversation.

- Why is the changing of the stoles so important to the pastor, the family, the military community, and the worshipping community?
- What gifts of ministry are needed by the congregation in this setting?
- What gifts are needed by the pastor?
- How was a traditional service adapted for a contemporary need?

③ We Are a Church of Extravagant Welcome

Age Levels: Younger and Older Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: The UCC is a church of extravagant welcome. It’s more than a slogan. The UCC was the first denomination to ordain women, the first to ordain African Americans, and the first to be open and affirming. The UCC became extravagantly welcoming in response to its understanding of Jesus’ call, but also because people, prophets in their time, helped expand the UCC’s vision of hospitality. Familiarize yourself with the website “We Are People of Extravagant Welcome.” Print copies of the articles on “Virginia Kreyer” (under “People Matter”) and “Four-Year Old Lee, Finally Welcomed” (under “History Matters”).

Supplies:

- Bibles
- articles: “Virginia Kreyer” (under “People Matter”) and “Four-Year Old Lee, Finally Welcomed” (under “History Matters”), <http://www.ucc.org/vitality/what-matters/we-are-people-of-extravagant.html>

Read Isaiah 49:1 to the group, and ask them who Isaiah includes. Read part of God’s response in Isaiah 49:6. Ask the group who God includes. Being welcoming, being hospitable, is an ancient gift and tradition of ministry that is practiced and needed today. Ask these questions of the group.

- Who is welcomed in your congregation?
- How are they welcomed? (Members and nonmembers of all ages)
- When have you or your congregation needed to rethink your welcome?
- How did the rethinking create different actions? (Building accessibility, toilets for preschoolers, changing tables in bathrooms, signs in Braille, large print bulletins, kitchen counters at different heights)
- How does a denomination expand its welcome?

Explain that in the UCC, Rev. Virginia Kreyer and a four-year-old named Lee changed local congregations, who then challenged the denomination. Divide into two groups, and hand out copies of the articles. Ask one group to learn about Rev. Kreyer’s challenge and the other to learn about Lee. Ask each group to report back to the larger group. After both summaries, ask the group where they think the UCC needs to expand its welcome today. Conclude by saying that the UCC is a church of extravagant welcome, but it can only live the slogan if individual members practice extravagant welcome locally and challenge the denomination when it needs to be more inclusive.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Masithi Amen, Siyakudumisa (Easy Preparation)

Age Levels: All Ages

Leader preparation: Learn the song “Masithi Amen Siyakudumisa,” hymn 760 in *The New Century Hymnal*. Invite an accompanist to play the song. You may want to add rhythm instruments. This is a lively song that can be learned quickly.

Supplies:

- hymn: “Masithi Amen Siyakudumisa” by S.C. Molefe, South Africa, *The New Century Hymnal*,” hymn 760, <http://www.smallchurchmusic3.com/Lyrics/D01/S01235.php>
- (optional) accompanist
- (optional) rhythm instruments
- markers and newsprint

Songs of praise are found throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. List the songs of praise from scripture known by the group. Some examples may be Magnificat, Hannah’s Song, Psalms, and so forth. Teach the hymn “Masithi Amen, Siyakudumisa,” a popular praise song from South Africa. You may want to add rhythm instruments. After singing, discuss worship music.

- How has worship music changed with the globalization of the Christian faith?
- How is the gift of music traditional and current?

Conclude by singing the Doxology, a traditional praise song, and “Masithi Amen, Siyakudumisa.”

5 Call Me Malcolm

Age Levels: Older Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: The movie *Call Me Malcolm* will need to be scheduled outside of the gathering time, perhaps after worship, an afternoon or an evening. The movie is available through Netflix (<https://www.netflix.com/>), the website “Call Me Malcolm” (<http://www.ucc.org/lgbt/callmemalcolm.html>), and probably through your Association or Conference’s resource library. A “Brief Discussion Guide” about the movie may be downloaded from the UCC’s website. You may use Isaiah 49:1–7 or Luke 10:38–42 for this activity. Preview the film, and decide whether high school youth may join the adults. Decide whether you want to serve snacks..

Supplies:

- movie: *Call Me Malcolm*
- DVD player and television screen or laptop with projection
- (optional) “Brief Discussion Guide,” <http://www.ucc.org/assets/pdfs/malshort.pdf>
- (optional) light snacks for movie showing

The UCC is a leader in the rights of the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered) community. The church has been inspired by Isaiah 49:1–7 to be inclusive of all sexual orientations and to be the “mouth like a sharp sword.” The UCC has been like Luke 10:38–42, with radical hospitality and by working diligently to

be attentive to Jesus' call. The film *Call Me Malcolm* was distributed in 2004 as the UCC's first feature film for theatrical release. In the UCC, being a "light to the nations" often means not playing it safe. Make sure everyone knows that the movie is about an actively serving UCC minister who is transgender. The film is about the journey of self-awareness, and it is also about faith, a person's understanding of God's relationship with everyone, community responses to violence and discrimination, and abundant hope and love transcending every challenge. It is also about congregations, seminaries, individuals and a denomination trying to answer God's traditional call for justice and hospitality in the early twenty-first century. Show the movie and use the "Brief Discussion Guide" as you wish.

6 Discovering Gifts

Age Levels: Older Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: Review the activity, pondering which painting best reflects the ways you have been called to ministry. Decide whether you want to read the communion prayer or if you want the group to read it aloud. You will need either to copy or project the prayer or to gather copies of *The New Century Hymnal* if you want group participation. This activity would work well with confirmation, discernment of call, new Christians, and new church officers.

Supplies:

- artwork: "Vision After the Sermon" by Paul Gauguin, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1102072326?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37962&store_id=1401
- artwork: "Banjo Lesson" by Henry Ossawa Tanner, <http://www.art.com/products/p10286254-sa-i677605/henry-ossawa-tanner-the-banjo-lesson.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&cui=6ce32fa19f9d47aaa58758970c9f0162&searchstring=banjo+lesson>
- "Communion Prayer," Attachment: Activity 6
- optional) *The New Century Hymnal*, p. 18

Display the two pieces of artwork side by side. Give the group at least two or three minutes to look at the pictures. Note that sometimes we discover our gifts of ministry through a struggle with God, as in the Gauguin painting. Point to the Gauguin painting, and ask the group where God is in the picture and where they see themselves.

Explain that sometimes we wrestle and fight because we are often called to serve reluctantly. Other times, we are called in a way that's comfortable, warm, and inviting, as in the Tanner painting. Point to "Banjo Lesson," and ask the group where God is in the picture and where they see themselves.

Invite the group to stand next to the artwork that best represents how they have discovered their gifts of ministry. Allow each group to meet around the image and to share why they chose that painting. Conclude by reading aloud the "Communion Prayer," where worshippers thank God "for all people of faith in every generation who have given themselves to your will."

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Benediction (Easy Preparation)

Age Levels: Multiage, Intergenerational, Older Children, Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: Review the activity and write a benediction.

Supplies:

- paper
- pencils and pens
- "Prayer of Benediction," Attachment: Activity 7
- (optional) *The New Century Hymnal*, hymn 875

Ask the group the following questions about benedictions.

- What is a benediction?
- Who usually says it?
- What is the tone or mood of a benediction?
- What is the benediction's purpose?

Distribute copies of *The New Century Hymnal* or the "Prayer of Benediction." Lead a discussion with these questions.

- How would you pray and live so you are a miracle?
- For what tasks would you pray?
- What do you need to wonder at yourself and the richness of life?

Invite everyone to write a personal benediction and use it at the end of every day for at least one week. Suggest that they reflect on what gifts you can use so your actions can be part of a miracle.

8 Environmental Justice

Age Levels: Younger and Older Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself with the website "UCC Justice" and each of the four Immersion Centers listed there. When reviewing the activity, note that Pilgrim Firs has a focus on the environment, but environmental justice is a component of the other three centers. At Centro Romero, for example, care of the earth is an advocacy that emerged from working with immigrants. Ponder how ministries have developed in your life and in the life of your faith community.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- website: "UCC Justice," <http://www.ucc.org/justice/issues.html>
- four computers or laptops for small group use

Read aloud Isaiah 49:1–7. Focus on verse 6, where God is speaking to Isaiah: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” This passage has been challenging faithful communities and individuals for centuries. Ask them how they think one raises up the current believers while also helping God’s salvation reach to the end of the earth.

Explain that this activity focuses on how the UCC is responding in the evolving area of environmental justice. Divide into four small groups. Direct each group to a computer and to the website “UCC Justice.” Assign each group one of the following Immersion Centers: Centro Romero Center (California), Franklinton Center at Bricks (North Carolina), Public Policy Center (Washington D. C.), and the UCC Environmental Justice Center at Pilgrim Firs (Washington). Ask each group to review the information for its location and to prepare a few brief comments for the remainder of the larger group. When everyone has finished reporting, ask participants how they think, as individuals and as a congregation, they can develop new ministries inspired by biblical and ancient texts. *During the week reflect how you are influenced to pursue your ministry (social media, newspaper, friends, social networking). Reflect on how you use your gifts to care for all of creation.*

9 UCC Statement of Faith

Age Levels: Younger and Older Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself with the website “UCC Statement of Faith.” You may want to e-mail the seventh stanza of the “UCC Statement of Faith,” beginning “You call us into your church,” to your group during the week, as a reminder and a prayerful meditation.

Supplies:

- website: “UCC Statement of Faith,” <http://www.ucc.org/beliefs/state-ment-of-faith.html>
- *The New Century Hymnal*

Hand out copies of *The New Century Hymnal* and have people turn to the “UCC Statement of Faith,” #885. Note that statements of faith are often updated generationally. Ask people to take turns reading aloud each section or stanza. Give people time to review it silently. Then ask these questions.

- Which parts of this affirmation are most meaningful to you?
- Which parts are related to gifts of ministry?
- Which gifts are individual and which gifts are congregational?
- What does this stanza mean to you?

You call us into your church
to accept the cost and joy of discipleship,
to be your servants in the service of others,
to proclaim the gospel to all the world
and resist the powers of evil,
to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table,
and to join him in his passion and victory.

What gifts of ministry are needed to live this affirmation?

Conclude by asking everyone to reflect on the cost and joy of discipleship during the week, as well as the many ways they are servants to others. Ask them to continue using the selected stanza as a personal meditation. The Christian challenge since ancient times is how to remain faithful in proclaiming the gospel and resisting the powers of evil, while living the sacraments, daily.

Reflect

How is each person in your group a light to the nations? How are you a light? Where are there tensions in the group? Do you need to spend time with anyone during the week, to listen, to comfort or to encourage?

Attachment: Activity 6

Communion Prayer

Service of Word and Sacrament II, Communion Prayer, B

Holy God, our loving Creator, close to us as breathing and distant as the farthest star, we thank you for your constant love for all you have made. We thank you for all that sustains life, for all people of faith in every generation who have given themselves to your will, and especially for Jesus Christ, whom you have sent from your own being as our Savior. We praise you for Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection, and for the calling forth of your church for its mission in the world. Gifted by the presence of your Holy Spirit, we offer ourselves to you as we unite our voices with the entire family of your faithful people everywhere:

Holy, holy, holy God of love and majesty, the whole universe speaks of your glory, O God Most High. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of our God! Hosanna in the highest!

FROM *THE NEW CENTURY HYMNAL*, PAGE 18, OR *UCC BOOK OF WORSHIP*, PAGE 69.

Attachment: Activity 7

Prayer of Benediction

Jesus said, "You ought always to pray and not to faint."

Do not pray for easy lives;

 pray to be stronger women and men.

Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers,

 but for power equal to your tasks.

Then, the doing of your work will be no miracle—

 you will be the miracle.

Every day you will wonder at yourself and the richness of life

 which has come to you by the grace of God.

FROM *THE NEW CENTURY HYMNAL*, PAGE 18, #875, UNATTRIBUTED.

Discovering Gifts of Ministry



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Setting

The UCC has a dynamic social justice presence. The UCC usually “arrives early” as a leader in pairing faith and action, hospitality and witness. The UCC also has many instances when a change in context has meant a change in mission, a repurposing of God’s word for contemporary needs. Jesus didn’t reject people or their gifts. Neither does the UCC. And that call requires vigilant discernment.

About this Exploration

Each of us is like a “letter from Christ,” as Paul says, sent to bring hope and healing wherever there is need. In all contexts, there are opportunities for us to share our gifts of ministry in a variety of ways, be it at home, at school, in the workplace, in the neighborhood, and at church. Over our lifetimes, the diversity of our gifts can emerge and grow, and may change, as we move into new places and spaces in our lives. Trusting that God can work through us right where we are is an exciting way to realize that the Holy Spirit is all around us.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Nehemiah 2:11–20
2 Corinthians 3:1–6

Leader Preparation

Read Nehemiah 2:11–20 and 2 Corinthians 3:1–6 at least twice. Reflect on how these passages may speak to your group. Then review the activities, selecting options that engage and expand their awareness of their gifts, God’s presence in every life, and the UCC’s ministries related to these passages and mission.

Prayer: God who draws all into one community, create in me an open heart and an awareness of your presence in every person, every animal, and every cell. May my gifts witness to your love. Amen.

Session Development

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Heart (Easy Preparation)

Age Levels: Younger and Older Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: Ponder what captures your heart. Is your church “the church of your heart”? Why or why not?

Supplies:

- Bibles
- website: “Is This the Church of My Heart” from “Mission Moment,” <http://www.ucc.org/stewardship/mission-moments/pdf-mission-moments/feb-08-mm.pdf>

Divide into two groups. Have one group read Nehemiah 2:11–20 and the other group read 2 Corinthians 3:1–6. Ask each group to read the assigned passage first aloud, then silently, then aloud again. Invite the participants to reflect on what word or phrase most speaks to each person. Consider what gifts of ministry are being sought. Return to the large group and invite people to share their what they have learned.

Note that each passage includes the word “heart,” Nehemiah in verse 12 and 2 Corinthians in verses 2–3. Ask the group how “heart” is used in each passage. Explain that the UCC attracts members and friends from various faith traditions and denominations. Many people refer to the UCC as “the church of my heart.” Read aloud “Is This the Church of My Heart.” Then lead a discussion with the following questions.

- When heart and faith are united what are the possible results?
- How can those results inspire you?
- How can those results inspire a congregation?

2 Music: I’m Gonna Live

Age Levels: All Ages

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself with the hymn “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me” (tune: I’m Gonna Live), and review the activity. If you are uncomfortable leading the song, ask someone to accompany or lead the others.

Supplies:

- hymn: “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me,” African American spiritual (tune: I’m Gonna Live), http://www.hymnary.org/text/im_gonna_live_so_god_can_use_me?tab=about
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Ask the group to consider where God can use them. Record their suggestions on a sheet of newsprint or a whiteboard. Learn the hymn and add verses based on the group’s list. Invite the participants to create motions for the group’s two or three favorite verses. If desired, use this spiritual and the motions during worship.

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

We Thank God by Working for a Just and Loving World

Age Levels: Older Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: Create your own recipe. You may want to monitor the pace of the activity. The first part can be completed in 8–10 minutes, with the remainder needing at least 10 minutes.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- article: “What Matters for Us” under “We Thank God by Working for a Just and Loving World,” <http://www.ucc.org/vitality/what-matters/we-thank-god-by-working-for-a.html>
- index cards or recipe cards
- pens

Read 2 Corinthians 3:1–6 aloud. Ask the following questions.

- How does God act so the faithful respond by serving others?
- How did the faithful respond?

Invite the participants to think of an example in your congregation where the church has strived to be just and loving. Use these questions in discussion.

- How did the congregation discern that call?
- What actions have been or continue to be taken?

Share the article “What Matters to Us.” Highlight the first sentence of the last paragraph: “The UCC connects caring and acting, gratitude and giving, peace and justice, service and advocacy in a life of prayer and justice.”

- What does this say about the UCC?
- What does it say about UCC members?

Invite people to get into pairs or groups of three and select a justice issue or local need that is important to them. Distribute recipe or index cards and pens. Ask the participants to create a recipe of what is needed to remedy the challenge. A recipe is not a strategic plan. It’s a way to think through steps, to discern what mixes well together, and to note existing and missing ingredients. A recipe is a good starting place, which can be adapted. Encourage participants to list as many “ingredients” as possible. Perhaps the issue needs community awareness through education or a marketing campaign, fundraising, legislative advocacy, coordination of efforts by similar organizations, and involvement of youth. Perhaps the issue needs one person’s time to find a loving home for a stray animal. Don’t judge the issue based on complexity. Invite the group to share their recipes and a few of the main ingredients.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Letters of Christ (Easy Preparation)

Age Levels: All Ages

Leader preparation: Review the activity and write a letter that you can share with the group.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper or note cards
- pens
- small strips of paper
- basket, bag, or small container
- prepared sample letter

Have the participants, including yourself, write their names on a small piece of paper and place the paper in the bag, basket, or small container. Read aloud 2 Corinthians 3:1–6. Ask the group what they think this passage is about. Ask them what they think it means to be a “letter of Christ.” Invite the group to send another person a letter telling them how *that person* is a letter from Christ. Invite each person to draw a name from the container (draw again if a participant gets his or her own name). Have each write a short letter to that person whose name is drawn, indicating how that person is a letter of Christ. Share your prepared example. If you have young children in your group, you may want to pair a child with an older person and have the child dictate his or her letter. When everyone has finished their letters, exchange the letters and let the participants read the letters to themselves.



5 Building or Repairing Walls

Age Levels: Older Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: Obtain “Sisters in the Wind” by Ethan Hubbard.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- artwork: “Sisters in the Wind” by Ethan Hubbard, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1102072326?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401

Invite a volunteer to read Nehemiah 2:11–20 to the group. Have a discussion of the passage using the following questions.

- What happens in this passage?
- Who is guiding Nehemiah?
- What are the responses to Nehemiah’s call?
- Who will Nehemiah credit with success?
- What are some physical walls that need to be rebuilt in your community?
- What are some metaphorical walls that need to be rebuilt?
- What has God put in your heart as a gift of ministry?

Invite the group to view “Sisters in the Wind” by Ethan Hubbard. Ask everyone to imagine themselves as one person and the other person as God. Ask them to stand and strike a pose similar to the preferred sister, fully aware that God is standing next to them. Tell them that there will be a short period of silence followed by questions that they are to consider, but not aloud. After the period of silence, ask the following.

- What are you viewing?
- What are you hearing in the wind?
- What wall is God asking you to build or rebuild?

6 Spirit of the Living God: Building Community

Age Levels: Older Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself with the ten slides on the UCC website “10 Thoughts on the Practice of Encountering Others: Community.” In Nehemiah 2:11–20 God asks Nehemiah to rebuild the city wall. In 2 Corinthians 3:1–6 Paul asks that we view ourselves as letters written with the Spirit of the living God, building tablets of the human heart. In both passages community is being built. Think of how community is being built in your geographic area, physically and spiritually.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- website: “10 Thoughts on the Practice of Encountering Others: Community,” <http://www.ucc.org/feed-your-spirit/your-life-better/10-thoughts-on-the-practice-of-encountering-others-community/>

Invite one volunteer to read Nehemiah 2:11–20 and another volunteer to read 2 Corinthians 3:1–6 to the group. Ask the group what they think is the role of the community in each passage. Explain that Kate Huey, a member of the UCC national staff, wrote ten thoughts on the practice of encountering others and creating community. Before showing the slides, ask the group which gifts of ministry they think Kate Huey needed to create these slides. Suggestions may be reading, understanding, writing, photography, marketing, and Web design. Show the website “10 Thoughts on the Practice of Encountering Others: Community,” and move through the ten slides asking a different person to read each one aloud. Pause to give people time to reflect, either silently or aloud, and then ask the following.

- What did you learn about encountering others?
- Where do you hear or feel the Spirit of the Living God calling you?
- What gifts of ministry will you need?
- Why is the community important in mission or justice work.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Prayer (Easy Preparation)

Age Levels: Younger and Older Youth, Intergenerational, Adults

Leader preparation: Review the activity and write a prayer. For younger youth select one or two prayers.

Supplies:

- *The New Century Hymnal*, pages 860–863
- paper
- pens

Explain that writing prayers, helping people express their needs while drawing closer to God, is a gift of ministry. Ask the group who in your congregation writes prayers. Hand out copies of *The New Century Hymnal* and have the group turn

to pages 860–863. Explain that the hymnal has four different styled prayers for “Those in Need” and “Justice.” Either divide into four groups, asking the same questions for each prayer, or work together as a large group. Read the prayer and then pose the following questions for discussion.

- What is the writer of the prayer asking us to seek or do?
- What gifts of ministry will be needed to fulfill the prayer?

Invite each person to write a prayer interceding for those in need or those needing justice. If desired, people may read their prayer. The prayers may be used in worship. Encourage each person to read his or her prayer or a prayer from *The New Century Hymnal* daily.

8 Blueprints for Ministry

Age Levels: Older Youth, Intergenerational, Adults

Leader preparation: If your congregation has blueprints of the church, ask if you may borrow them for your gathering time. If you have an architect or a contractor in the congregation, ask that person to help explain the drawings. Take a look at the website “UCC’s Church Building and Loan Fund” (<http://www.ucc.org/cblf/>). The UCC Church Building and Loan Fund helps establish new churches, renew existing properties, and provides Capital Campaign assistance. Consider this activity for members of church council and your Building and Grounds committee.

Supplies:

- blueprints of your congregation’s building
- invited architect or contractor

Explain that when discussing gifts of ministry, usually people speak about the proclamation of the Word, teaching, evangelism, caring and healing ministries, hospitality, financial generosity, and music or creative arts. Seldom do people mention designing houses of worship, maintenance, buildings and ground repairs and renovations. Capital campaigns are often viewed as a necessary evil and are often begun in the wake of a crisis (roof leaking, need a new furnace). The UCC has a Church Building and Loan Fund that encourages congregations to be proactive in the use of their building and in renovations. The Fund and its staff help match building needs with ministry needs and with dreams of new ministries, including input from architects and assistance organizing capital campaigns.

Gather the group around your congregation’s blueprints. Invite your guest to help explain the plans and talk about the physical space of the church. Invite the participants to ask the guest questions.

Celebrate the gifts of architects who incorporate design with necessities like doors, windows, plumbing, electrical, and green space. Ask the group to consider the following.

- What do the blueprints say about the congregation?
- How has the use of the building changed to match changes in ministry?
- Through the blueprints can you determine the congregation’s different gifts of ministry throughout its history?

- Has your congregation ever had a capital campaign?
- If so, how were the monies used?

Encourage the participants to discern which gifts of ministry were needed to build different spaces they are in during the week and which gifts are needed to maintain those spaces. Encourage them to be grateful for other people's gifts that you need so you can use your gifts of ministry. Celebrate the interdependence of gifts.

9 Give a Little Bit

Age Levels: Younger and Older Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: The UCC Volunteer Ministries offers options for youth and for adults, short term and long term. Take a look at the following websites: "Volunteer Ministries," "2011 New Orleans Mission Trip Memoirs," "Leaving New Orleans," and "Twin Maps: Final Feature." Decide which websites you want to share with the group. "Volunteer Ministries" is the UCC site to discover many of the volunteer opportunities, which include housing, food stipend, and health insurance. "2011 New Orleans Mission Trip Memoirs" contains journal entries from a project in New Orleans, Louisiana. Select your favorite entries. "Leaving New Orleans" is short in length. "Twin Maps: Final Feature" is about two brothers who decided to video record their experiences discovering mission opportunities across the country.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- website: "Volunteer Ministries," <http://www.ucc.org/volunteer/>
- website: "2011 New Orleans Mission Trip Memoirs," <http://www.ucc.org/volunteer/volunteer-stories/2011-new-orleans-mission-trip.html>
- website: "Leaving New Orleans," <http://www.ucc.org/volunteer/volunteer-stories/leaving-new-orleans.html>
- website: "Twin Maps: Final Feature," <http://www.twinmaps.com/post/409608-twin-maps-final-feature>

The UCC has volunteer ministry options that are for a few days or a year. Most are in the United States. Show any of the listed websites. Then pose the following questions.

- How has your congregation supported UCC ministries? (Youth or inter-generational mission trips, disaster relief, working at conference or synod events)
- Has your congregation supported UCC ministries financially, physically, prayerfully or all three?

Explain that Richard and Maxwell Brooks became UCC mission partners for one year following graduation, armed with a sense of adventure, the support of the denomination, a camera, and a desire to make a film. At the 2011 General Synod in Tampa, Florida, they showed the film they made and discussed their year. Share the video "Twin Maps: Final Feature" with your group. Enjoy learning about UCC volunteer ministries. Lead a discussion using the following questions.

- Which UCC ministry interested you the most?
- Where would you personally feel most called to serve?
- Where might the congregation be called to serve?

Invite the group to reflect on how they might volunteer or support UCC volunteer ministries—during a vacation, organizing a church group to serve, fundraising, hosting a group, and so on. Pray, asking God’s guidance, about how their gifts can give a little bit to other UCC organizations.

Reflect

What did you learn from your gathering time? Which ideas were affirmed? Which ideas were challenged? Is any follow up needed for you or any in the group?

Discovering Gifts of Ministry



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Setting

Because God is “still speaking,” the future will be dynamic. It will require human discernment of God’s will, individually and communally. The future will require the gifts of every member under the UCC’s diverse umbrella of extravagant welcome. It will require us to listen not only to one another but also to all of creation.

About this Exploration

We are not who we once were. We adapt and change along with the shifting circumstances we experience. Gifts of ministry develop throughout the duration of our lives. Our gifts are revealed, acquired, and developed as we encounter the present and are led toward expanding hope for the future. When we engage our gifts of ministry we join with God in making that hope reality, and we become the people God calls us to be.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
1 Samuel 3:1–20
Philippians 4:1–13

Leader Preparation

Read 1 Samuel 3:1–20 and Philippians 4:1–13. Consider reading them aloud and recording them so you may listen when you exercise or take a break. Review the nine activities and determine which ones will challenge and affirm your group. Enjoy leading this Exploration.

Prayer: Creator of the galaxies and ocean depths, you are my guide today and tomorrow. Give me the courage to embrace your love and grace so I may share and witness them with all of creation. Be now my vision, my light. Amen.

Session Development

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Never Place a Period (Easy Preparation)

Age Levels: Older Children, Younger and Older Youth, Adults
Leader preparation: Read 1 Samuel 3:1–20 and Philippians 4:1–13.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint

“Never place a period where God has placed a comma,” said the comedian Gracie Allen, and her comment has become part of the UCC’s “God is Still Speaking” campaign. In their mind’s eye most UCC members can see posters, T-shirts, bulletin designs, and bumper stickers with a red background, black lettering, and a large, bold comma. Many UCC members use “still speaking” in normal dialogue, as if this were a word in the dictionary. Invite volunteers to read 1 Samuel 3:1–20 and Philippians 4:1–13 to the group. List the places in both passages where you can “hear” God saying, “Don’t even try placing a period here.”

2 Trust, Then Risk

Age Levels: Older Youth, Adults
Leader preparation: In both passages, 1 Samuel 3:1–20 and Philippians 4:1–13, God asks believers to take risks. To take a risk you usually need to trust something—yourself, your skills, the other party. Review the activity and during the week ponder what you need to take a risk. Obtain “Diamond Peak, Nevada, USA.”

Supplies:

- Bibles
- artwork: “Diamond Peak, Nevada, USA,” <http://www.art.com/products/p13950276-sa-i2807680/diamond-peak-nevada-usa.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=55eedd136d4049bcaab8f63c70afd3e3&searchstring=diamond+peak>

Invite volunteers to read 1 Samuel 3:1–20 and Philippians 4:1–13 to the group. Then pose the following.

- Where do believers act as if they already trust God?
- Why is God believable?
- Is trusting God important in a faith relationship? If so, why?
- What does trust allow you to do?

If no one has offered that trust allows you to risk learning a new skill or exploring a different gift of ministry, add those ideas to the discussion. Invite the participants to view “Diamond Peak, Nevada, USA.” Ask them to put themselves mentally on the snowboard, feeling the sun, the weight of the clothing, the cold air, the suspension. Give them a few minutes to experience the image, and then ask them the following questions.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities using one activity from each category.
 - To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities using at least one activity from each category.
- Where is God in this image?
 - Where are you?
 - During which part of your life could this image represent your relationship with God?
 - How are your gifts and those of the snowboarder similar? (Prepared for action, right equipment or skills, confidence)
 - How does trusting God allow you to take risks?

We Listen for a Stillspeaking God

Age Levels: Older Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself with the article “Through the Air Waves, Listening for God’s Voice” under “History Matters” on the website “We Listen for a Still-speaking God.” Sometimes we focus on large issues and forget that a pattern of everyday kindness or consistent discipleship can lead to amazing results.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- “Through the Air Waves, Listening for God’s Voice” under “History Matters” on the website “We Listen for a Still-speaking God,” <http://www.ucc.org/vitality/what-matters/we-listen-for-a.html> (copy for each person)

Read Philippians 4:1–9 to the group. Then have participants respond to the following.

- How is God still speaking in this passage to you?
- How is God still speaking in your congregation?
- Where have you struggled in the work of the Gospel?

Distribute copies of the article “Through the Air Waves, Listening for God’s Voice.” The article is about the 1965 Supreme Court case *United Church of Christ v. Federal Communication Commission*. The UCC heard God speaking, initiated the court action, and prevailed. Ann Aldrich argued the case for the UCC; she later became the first female federal judge in Ohio. Invite the group to read the article and consider the following questions.

- How was God still speaking in the UCC then? (Justice, Civil Rights, gender equality, advocacy)
- What issues are emerging that need a Christian presence today?
- How is God still speaking now?

Discerning & Deciding Activities



Game: Moving Forward Together (Easy Preparation)

Age Levels: All Ages

Leader preparation: This game is sometimes called “Welded Ankles.” The game requires cooperation, trust, creativity, and communication. Select a starting place and a finish line. Make the distance challenging, but not overwhelming. Watch

the pace on this activity. The Bible passage portion can be completed in 5–8 minutes. You will need most of the time for the game. While this activity works for any age, it is difficult when there is wide variety of heights, as in an intergenerational gathering. If using in an intergenerational setting, place people of similar heights together and create separate teams or lines.

Supplies:

- yarn, rope, or strips of fabric
- scissors

Divide into four groups and give each group one of the following passages in Philippians: verses 4:1–3, verses 4:4–7, verses 4:8–9, and verses 4:10–13. Ask groups to report what Paul thinks is important for Christian community and what gifts of ministry are needed. Invite each group to stand in a line, side by side, shoulder to shoulder. Have group members place their feet comfortably at shoulders' width, but touching the side of the neighbor's foot. Tie the touching leg's together just above the ankle. Have each group move to the starting line and point out the finish line. Explain that this is not a race, but an experience of cooperation. Depending on your space, each group may need to take turns going from start to finish. Celebrate and debrief by reflecting on the following.

- Which gifts of ministry were needed to cross the finish line?
- How does this game apply to the Philippians passage?

5 The Language of God

Age Levels: Older Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself with the video "The Language of God" on the website "Stillspeaking Videos."

Supplies:

- Bibles
- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- video: "The Language of God" on the website "Stillspeaking Videos," <http://www.ucc.org/god-is-still-speaking/ads/>
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Read Philippians 4: 4–9 to the group. Invite the group to identify one major word or concept in each verse. Record their responses on a sheet of newsprint or a whiteboard. Show the video "The Language of God" at least twice. It is less than two minutes in length and it has a lot of content and images. Then pose the following.

- Which image is most powerful? Why? (Allow each person to answer, if desired.)
- How is the concept of God expanded or diminished?
- Which gifts of ministry are highlighted in the video?
- Which parts of ministry are practiced by your congregation?
- How can the images help us let our gentleness be known to everyone?

6 Affirmation of Ministry

Age Levels: Younger and Older Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: Speak with your pastor and ask if the “Affirmation of Ministry” service, from the *UCC Book of Worship* (pages 433–38), could be part of the worship service. An adaptation of this service is to ask people to present their gifts in writing on a card and then ask them to place the card on the altar or communion table. This works well if every person’s ministry is being affirmed. Review the activity and create a list of gifts that each person in the group (including yourself) shares with the congregation, so you are prepared to add them in the “Presentation” section. Reflect on how you and how the congregation honor gifts of ministry.

Supplies:

- “Affirmation of Ministry” service from the *UCC Book of Worship* (pages 433–38) (for each pair of participants)

Ask the group to consider the following questions.

- How are gifts of ministry recognized in this congregation?
- Which gifts are recognized?
- Which gifts of children and youth are recognized?
- Which gifts of people who do not attend regularly are recognized? (Homebound members, military, folks who work on Sunday)

Listen carefully because some congregations create a hierarchy of gifts where leadership, teaching, and musicians are recognized but gardeners, prayer partners, and casserole makers are not. If this is happening in the conversation, guide the dialogue so everyone is included. Hand out copies of the “Affirmation of Ministry” service. Select a leader for each section of the “UCC Affirmation” and read through the “Affirmation of Ministry” service, adding your group’s information at the end of the “Presentation” section. Ask the group to consider how your congregation might respond if everyone’s gifts of ministry were affirmed.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Rejoice (Easy Preparation)

Age Levels: All Ages

Leader preparation: Read the activity and create your own design.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper
- drawing supplies, such as colored pencils, markers, crayons
- decorative items such as, stamps, ribbon, stickers, glitter
- glue

Read Philippians 4:4–7. Ask each person to create images, illustrations, sayings, or a poem to help her or him remember the passage. Keep the instructions permissive. What brings joy and peace to someone is highly personal. Ask folks to share, as desired. Instruct them to take home the image and place it somewhere prominent. Each day reflect on the image, the Philippians passage, and which gifts of ministry they used.

8 Discerning Vocation

Age Levels: Older Youth, Adults

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself with the seven slides on the website “7 Steps to Discerning Your Vocation.” Consider how you have used or not used these suggestions in your life. You may use either 1 Samuel 3:1–20 or Philippians 4:1–13. Also consider this activity for college students and young adults, as well as people considering a career change or a life transition, such as families whose youngest child is leaving for college or military service.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- computer with internet access
- digital projector
- website: “7 Steps to Discerning Your Vocation,” <http://www.ucc.org/feed-your-spirit/your-life-better/7-steps-to-discerning-your-vocation/>

Read the selected Bible passage, either 1 Samuel 3:1–20 or Philippians 4:1–13, to the group. Ask them how this passage might guide a person who was discerning a new vocation or a new direction in life. Enjoy the discussion. Show the group the website “7 Steps to Discerning your Vocation.” Explain that there are seven ideas for the group to consider. View each slide and pause, seeking comments on how the suggestions would help as they discern their gifts of ministry. Provide the participants with the website address so they may review the suggestions on their own.

9 Music: One Spirit of Love

Age Levels: All Ages

Leader preparation: Listen to the song and be prepared to teach the refrain. If music is not one of your gifts, invite a musician to assist with this activity.

Supplies:

- song: “One Spirit of Love” by Paul B. Svenson (©1987/2011 Dad’s Songbook Music LLC – All rights reserved, used by permission www.dadsongbook.com); video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBg80JaNJ1M>
- Attachment: Activity 9 ministry-ucc-future-activity9.rtf
- music player

As a group, learn the refrain to “One Spirit of Love.” Use the song as a meditation. Invite two people to read each verse, one sentence per person. Pause between sentences for quiet reflection. Invite everyone to sing the refrain. Repeat with verses two and three. If desired, learn the melody for the verses. Encourage the participants to find a way to celebrate the gifts from within themselves during the week. Tell them to be challenged by the ways they can turn the world around.

Reflect

“Be now my vision, O God of my heart; nothing surpasses the love you impart—You my best thought, by day or by night, waking or sleeping, your presence my light.” (*The New Century Hymnal*, hymn 451, first verse) If your life personifies these hymn lyrics, then your gifts of ministry will abound. Thank you for leading this faith practice.

Attachment: Activity 9

One Spirit of Love

♩ = 89
Muted strum
Light Reggae Feel

Paul B. Svenson

G 4 G D Em

1. Ma - ny are the won - ders of God ma - ny
2. Some will be the tea - chers of life some the
3. Li - ving as the bo - dy of Christ and the

Em/D C D G

doors o - pen wide ma - ny roads that are still un -
prea - chers of love some the fa - thers and some the
heart of the earth and the hands that will break new

C D G D

tra - veled Ma - ny are the gifts that we share
mo - thers Some will be the ones who will care
gro - und Cel - e - brate the gifts from with - in

Em Em/D C

ma - ny bur - dens we bear ma - ny
some will li - sten and share serv - ing
now its time to be - gin God's -

D G C D

my - ster - ies still un - ra - veled
God as they serve each - o - ther
peo - ple can turn the world a - rou - nd now!

C D G G7 C D G

CHORUS Ma - ny gifts One spi - rit of love one spi - rit of love

C D G F C D G

Ma - ny gifts One spi - rit of love one spi - rit of love

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