

After the Altar Call

Confirming Your Faith

A Resource of the West Virginia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church

Thank you so much for giving this confirmation curriculum a look. As a writing team, we've enjoyed thinking about the things that middle schoolers should learn as they begin their discipleship journey. We discovered that is very broad territory and that narrowing the scope is challenging. So, just a bit about why we chose what we chose for these lessons.

We believe that disciples need basic tools for their journey. The basics that we landed on were scripture, spiritual practices and basic theological understanding. As students make first steps into membership, we believe that they need these tools in order to make their membership vows in an understandable way.

There is so much more to knowledge for a disciple to gain. And there are other things that we hope to add along the way. Ideally, we'd like an entire retreat weekend focused on the sacraments. It's in the dreaming/planning stages but nowhere near ready right now. There are also lessons on the history of the United Methodist Church and our founders and our structure, that are very important but do not appear here. We also have dreams of some of our own videos to be added to the "After the Altar Call" YouTube channel. Disciples are life-long learners and we hope to create some additional learning opportunities. Or, maybe you have something that you would like to offer for use by others in the Annual Conference.

We see these tools as dynamic and shared. Our intention was to offer our best thinking for you, and to receive feedback along the way to make it better. So, please be in conversation with us. Ask questions. Tell us what works and what doesn't. This resource is free for your use and reproduction as you need to in your local setting. We trust that this isn't final yet – that we will be adding along the way from your thoughts and ours.

Thank you so much for your interest in this resource and partnership on the discipleship journey.

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Introduction

After the Altar Call: Confirming Your Faith (AtAC) is a resource that can be used in churches both large and small. It is meant to be used with youth who are of middle school or junior high age as a means of helping them prepare to make a profession of faith before the rest of the church. AtAC is a curriculum that is based around four components: reading Scripture together, learning practices that can help one grow in faith, learning about the big picture of God's story of salvation, and time to discuss and wrestle with faith and what it means to follow Christ. AtAC is a free resource put together by the Confirmation Curriculum Team of the West Virginia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. Use it freely, share it, and adapt it to your own context in whatever way you see fit.

Ideally, this curriculum is to be used with a mentor/mentee model, though it can still be readily used with a couple of adults and a small group of kids. A mentor/mentee model is a model that is less like a teacher/student model, and more like one where the adult (mentor) and youth (mentee) move together, side-by-side through a faith formation process. While the adult is responsible for familiarizing him or herself with the curriculum and the teaching points for each session, each session is meant to be largely experiential, where the mentor and the mentee equally participate in the activities and discussion. The mentor is not responsible for having prior knowledge all the information or for having all of the answers to any questions that are asked, but is instead to search and wonder alongside the mentee. Each youth desiring to make a profession of faith or explore the possibility of doing so should be paired up with an adult willing to go on the journey with them.

The curriculum seeks to not only impart knowledge about faith in Christ and God's story of salvation, but also practices that can aid the Christ-follower in strengthening his or her relationship with Christ. Each week, there will be time to study Scripture together, as well as time to try out a different spiritual practice. Some of these practices may be new to all participants, mentor and mentee alike. Some practices may appeal more to different people. We ask that you try out these assortments of practices to begin building a repertoire of spiritual disciplines that will help aid in personal and communal devotional life. Many of these practices are more contemplative in nature and encourage inward reflection, prayer, and discipline.

This curriculum is formatted in such a way that the *italicized* portions may be repeated verbatim during each session. This is done in order to aid mentors in facilitating the teaching components. You may, of course, adapt the material into your own words if you are comfortable.

You will also be able to find any of the videos suggested for use on the WVUMC Youtube Channel at <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLv3iYw7rGiBgUsVvXtNsRkdCCrQ4IKutm>. You may also find the channel by searching Youtube for "After the Altar Call WVAC." By clicking on the channel, you will find the playlist of videos.

Introductory Session: Getting Acquainted/What Confirmation is

For this first session, you will want to get to know one another on a deeper level. These conversations can happen between mentor/mentee, or they could be a conversation with the whole group, depending on the number of youth you have participating.

Supplies needed:

- Bible
- Beach ball with questions written on it
- paper
- markers
- pens or pencils
- Scripture workbooks
- computer and internet connection (*optional*)

Beach Ball Activity (10-15 min)

Begin with a simple “Get to Know You” game like beach ball game. Purchase an inexpensive beach ball and inflate it. Prior to the session write all kinds of statements using permanent marker on the beach ball like:

My favorite subject in school
 The coolest place I have traveled to
 My favorite color
 My favorite holiday
 If I were an animal, I'd be...
 If I could have a super-power, it would be...
 Where I was born
 My favorite food
 A hobby I have
 If I could go anywhere in the world, I'd go to...
 If I could meet one famous person, it would be...
 If I could live during any time period in history, it would be...
 My favorite book or movie



Toss the beach ball back and forth/around the room to all participants, mentors and mentees alike. When you catch the ball, look at the statement closest to your right thumb and answer it! Then toss the ball on. Spend time noticing any common answers or experiences you share, and have fun finding out more about each other!

Digging Deeper (15-20 min)

Now that you have had a little bit of time to begin to get to know one another, take some time to share your experiences of faith and church. Use the following discussion questions to help you talk about your faith experiences.

1. *What is your earliest memory of what God is like?*
2. *What is your first memory of the church?*
3. *What do you love about God? What do you think God loves about you?*
4. *What significant faith experiences have you had (ie. a time where you felt close to God, that God heard your prayers, that you saw the love of God in a powerful way, etc)?*
5. *Create and decorate faith timelines, including things like when you were born, when you were baptized (if you have been), first time you remember praying, going to children's church for the first time, graduating from children's church, serving as an acolyte or other worship leader, making a decision to follow Jesus, etc. Include other significant events like moving, starting elementary or middle school, being adopted or other family changes, joining a new church, etc.*

Share your faith timelines with one another and look for experiences you might share.

What is After the Altar Call? (10-15 min)

Sharing faith stories and struggles is a significant piece of what After the Altar Call: Confirming Your Faith is about. Some congregations call this process of faith formation "Confirmation." Other congregations may not have any particular name for it. If you are a congregation that calls this process Confirmation, you may find the following resources helpful, and you may even want to pause now and view the two "Chuck Knows Church" videos about Confirmation with the participating youth.

UMC resources on what Confirmation is:

Confirmation: <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/at-what-age-are-children-confirmed>

Chuck Knows Church- Confirmation Pt 1:

<http://www.chuckknowschurch.com/archive/43confirmation>

Chuck Knows Church- Confirmation Pt 2:

<http://www.chuckknowschurch.com/archive/76confirmation-part-2>

Whether or not you choose to use the “Chuck Knows Church” videos, you can continue with a discussion around these questions:

1. *What do you want to learn in this process?*
2. *What questions do you have about faith?*
3. *What has led you to participate in After the Altar Call?*

The Place of Grace

We need to take a minute to look at the place of grace in this faith formation process. Ask, “Have you heard the word grace before? What do you think it means? Acknowledge all responses. Youth may define grace as the prayer said before a meal thanking God for the food. If this is the only answer they have, that is ok. You can let them know that thanking God for what he provides is a partial definition of grace, but grace is much more than that. “The concept of grace underlies the material laid out in After the Altar Call, and the life-long journey of any Christian. Grace is a really important idea in United Methodist Church, and it can be defined as “the love and mercy given to us by God because God wants us to have it, not because of anything we have done to earn it.”¹ The grace of God is something that is always around us and always working in us, even before we are aware of it. It is something that restores our relationship with God and continues to work in our lives to make us more like Christ. There are three aspects of grace: prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying.” Those are big words, so youth may look confused. While knowing the aspects of grace is important, it is more important to get the big picture—that God is always at work around us and in us.

If you have internet access, you could show this episode of Chuck Knows Church where he introduces the three aspects of grace: <http://www.chuckknowschurch.com/archive/67grace>

Otherwise, say, “The term prevenient grace describes the way that God has been at work in our lives before we are even aware of it. Often we can look back and see where God was working, though we couldn’t see it at the time. Take a look back over your faith timelines to look for instances where God has worked in your life. In some of those cases, you might not have realized at the time what God was doing. That’s prevenient grace!” Take a minute or two to re-share any of those instances/events on your timelines that you think show prevenient grace.

“The second aspect of grace is justifying grace. This is the grace that is give through Jesus Christ by dying on the cross to restore our relationship to God. An easy way to remember justifying grace is to break the word down like this: just-if-I’d, as in just as if I’d never sinned. Justifying

¹ This definition of grace is found at <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/our-wesleyan-heritage>, where you can also read more about our theological heritage in the United Methodist Church.

grace is the grace that covers or cancels our sin and allows us to get in a right relationship with God because of Jesus Christ. When we decide to trust in Christ and seek forgiveness, we are experiencing justifying grace."

"The third aspect of grace is sanctifying grace. Sanctify essentially means to be made holy. In other words, this type of grace is the grace that continues to change us into the people we were created to be; to live and to love more like Jesus."

Each week, you may see or experience things that remind you that God is always working in us and around us, whether we notice it or not. Be on the lookout for grace! It will show up everywhere: in our Scripture readings, in our learning time and activities, in in your daily life!"

The Format

The final piece of this introductory session is to give a brief outline of what the rest of the sessions will be like. Each session will follow the same format:

1. **Read**/discuss part of Gospel of Mark (10-20 min)
2. **Practice** some type of spiritual discipline (10-20 min)
3. **Learning** segment/learning activity (15-30 min)
4. **Discussion**/reflection time (15-30 min)

Sometimes the **Learn** and **Discuss** sections will blend together, but each session will follow this basic pattern. The curriculum will cover 7 themes over the course of the following 10 weeks: Creation, Crisis, Covenant, Christ, Church, Calling, and Completion.² These themes will help give a better picture and scope of God's story of salvation and our place within it. Next week, we will begin with creation, so get ready to create!

Closing

At the end of your time together, pass out the Scripture workbooks so everyone has one, youth and adults alike. Between now and your next session, ask everyone to read the first chapter of Mark and to ponder this question: *What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? Come back prepared next time to have conversation around this question which will introduce us to reading the Gospel of Mark.* Show participants where they can find the Gospel of Mark in the Bible so there is no embarrassment if they don't know where it is, or how to navigate the Bible.

Take time to pray together. You may want to talk about joys or concerns first, or you may simply want to pray for your upcoming time together.

² Edie, Fred P. *Book, Bath, Table, and Time: Christian Worship as Source and Resource for Youth Ministry*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 2007. Print

Session 1: Creation

In session 1, you will begin to explore the theme of creation. You will use Genesis 1-2 as a basis for exploring themes such as God creating all things, humans being created in God's image, and the goodness of creation. This is also the first week that you will follow the basic pattern of Read, Practice, Learn, and Discuss.

Supplies needed:

- Bibles
- pens or pencils
- Scripture workbooks
- Journals or paper for the SOAP Bible Study Method
- Play Doh, self-hardening clay, or baking clay

Read: Mark 1:1-45

Remind all participants that each week you will take the first 10-15 minutes together to talk about their reading and reflections from over the course of the previous week as found in the Scripture workbooks. Today, discuss the following:

1. *Did anything in this passage jump out at you for the first time?*
2. *How do you feel about reading through the Gospel of Mark?*
3. *What did you read that may have challenged you in some way?*
4. *What do you think it means to be a disciple of Jesus?*

Practice: SOAP Bible Study Method

The SOAP Bible Study Method³ is a practice that you can use in a time of personal Scripture reading. It can help give focus and direction to the study of Scripture, especially if personal reading of the Bible is new to you. Choose a part of your reading from Mark to use as you practice SOAP Bible Study. Invite your mentee to read aloud if they feel comfortable doing so. If not, then you can read. Use the steps below to lead the youth through the process.

S for Scripture

After hearing the passage aloud, read it again silently to yourself. When you are done, look for a verse that particularly spoke to you that day, and write it in your journal.

³ SOAP Bible Study Method is easy to find in the public domain. For more information you can visit <http://www.soapstudy.com/>

O for Observation

What struck you and caught your attention in what you read? What do you think God is saying to you in this scripture? Ask the Holy Spirit to teach you and reveal Jesus to you. Paraphrase and write this scripture down in your own words.

A for Application

What is this text saying to you, today? What do you hear God asking you to do or be? Write down what you hear God saying to you through the Scripture.

P for Prayer

Write out a prayer, talking to God. Your prayer may be asking God to help you apply the Scripture to your life, or it may be a prayer talking to God about how you are feeling, what you are thinking about, or what you are struggling with.

After everyone has completed the SOAP Bible study, share insights, things you heard from God, and what you thought about the practice. *Is it something you'd like to try again? Did you find it helpful?*

Learn: Creation

Today's theme is CREATION. Creation does not simply refer to Genesis 1 and 2 and the two creation accounts that are found there. Instead, the focus is on the idea that God has created all things and people, and that God continues to bring about new creation. We will, however, use Genesis 1 to help us think about creation. We will explore several topics linked to the concept of creation:

1. God has created all things

Read Genesis 1 together. Make observations about the kinds of work God does and the things he created. Is there anything you find surprising in Genesis 1? Have you ever had a time where you felt like you really experienced the beauty of God's creation? Where were you? What was it like? Do you have any pictures of that time or place you could share?

2. Being created in God's image

Revisit Genesis 1:27. What do you think it means to be created in the image of God? Acknowledge all answers that may be given. To be created in the image of God can mean many things: we too, are given creativity, like God; we are given the charge to care for creation; we are co-creators with God; we understand the impulse toward love; we are able to reason and think; but in short, to be created in the image of God reminds us that we are loved and valued by God, and that God has a special plan for us. We are the only creatures created in God's own image. To help them think about our value to God, discuss the following

questions together. What is something you have worked hard to create? How do you feel about these creations? What have you done to preserve them?

3. The goodness of that which God has created

Continue to examine Genesis 1 together. How does God feel about his creation? What does he call it? What does he mean by that? What does this mean for how we should see one another and the rest of creation?

Discuss:

Today's discussion portion will take the form of a guided meditation using the Play Doh or clay that you have supplied. Begin by giving a ball of Play Doh or clay to each participant, yourself included. This is not an activity to rush through. When the meditation calls for a pause, do so for at least a couple of minutes. Use the following for a guided meditation experience:

"Begin by holding the clay between your hands. Start to press your fingers into it, roll it around between your palms, and warm it up to make it easier to work with. PAUSE

Imagine that you are the piece of clay and that your hands are God's hands. Continue to work with the clay. Let it begin to take some kind of form as you imagine God forming you. PAUSE

As you continue to work with the clay, think about the goodness of God's creation. Maybe a particular image or symbol comes to mind that you want to begin forming your clay into. PAUSE

As your clay begins to take shape into the image that you are shaping it, consider the ways in which you reflect the image of God, and the ways in which you think God would describe you as good. PAUSE

Spend a couple more minutes finishing up your creation."

Call the time to a close, and take some time to share your creations, and the reflections you had while you were shaping them. *What images came to your mind? Why? How do you feel about God creating you? Are there any other thoughts you want to share?*

Closing

At the end of your time together, remind everyone to continue their personal reading and study of Mark's Gospel, and highlight what chapter(s) you will talk about next time.

Take time to pray together. You may want to talk about joys or concerns first, or you may simply want to pray for your upcoming time together.

Session 2: Crisis

In session 2, you will begin to explore the concept of sin. This can be a particularly tricky topic to discuss with anyone, let alone middle schoolers. The important takeaway for this session is that sin is not simply a list of bad behaviors; rather, it is a state of being in which we are separated from God.

Supplies needed:

- Bibles
- pens or pencils
- Scripture workbooks
- Chair, broom, and masking tape for optional game

Read: Mark 2:1-3:34

Discuss the questions found in your Scripture workbooks:

1. *Did anything in this passage jump out at you for the first time?*
2. *How do you think God might be calling you to do something new?*
3. *How do you think God might be calling your church to do something new?*
4. *If we read the passage closely, it doesn't seem that Jesus is doing something new just to make changes—it seems that Jesus was making actual improvements from the social norms. Can you see and explain the difference?*

Practice: Ignatian Examen

While the Ignatian Examen⁴ might have a complicated sounding name, it is actually a simple practice of reflection: of naming the high and low points of the day or week, of looking for the places where you noticed God working or being present, and of prayer.

To begin this practice together, start with a brief prayer asking God to help you slow down and open yourselves up to noticing and listening. You might pray something like, *“Dear God, we ask you to help us quiet our minds and our hearts for a few minutes as we look back on our day and as we look to you. Help us to see you better. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.”*

After you have opened the time in prayer, you can use the following prompt to guide the practice of the Ignatian Examen:

⁴ For more on the Ignatian Examen, check out <http://fulleryouthinstitute.org/articles/ignatian-examen>

"We begin the practice by taking some time to think back over the past day (or week, depending on the time frame you want to use). Starting at the beginning of your day (or week), ask yourself these questions: Where did I go? What did I do? Who did I see? What did we talk about? At this point you are just recalling the events of your week in order. Take a minute or two to finish thinking back over it.

After you have silently observed and recalled the events of your day, take some time to reflect on how you felt going through your day or your week. Ask yourself these questions: What was the high point of my week, where I felt the happiest or most alive? What was the low point of my week, where I felt the most empty or drained?"

Take a few minutes to share your highs and lows of the week with one another, and then continue with a couple more reflection questions:

"Continue to think about your day (or week) and ask yourself these questions: Where was I able to show love or care for others? Where did I fail to show love when I could have?"

Depending on your mentee, he or she may not be able as readily willing or able to share these answers out loud, so you will have to use your own judgment on whether or not you decide to pause and share these reflections together. This kind of self-reflection may be a very new concept to a middle schooler, so they may not be very self-aware or able to articulate these kinds of answers well. That is ok. The whole idea is to at least introduce them to a process of inward spiritual reflection. As the mentor, you should be prepared to go first and share if you decide to share at this point. Then continue on to the final question:

"Finally, looking back on your day (or week), where did you see God or feel closest to God?"

Again, this may be a hard question for a youth who is not used to any kind of personal reflection, so you may just share your own experience with them, to help them begin to get a sense of what it means to look for God in one's day.

End with prayer, again asking God to help you see God more clearly over the course of the next week and to help you love more like Christ. You could say something like, *"Dear God, thank you for being with us. Help us to see you better over the next week and to love others the way Jesus loves us. Amen."*

Before you move on to the **Learn** piece, just take a moment to ask what your mentee thought about the practice of the Ignatian Examen. *Had you done anything like it before? What struck you about the experience? What did you take away from the practice that you might try again?*

Learn: Crisis

Today's theme is CRISIS, or the problem of sin. Sin is CRISIS because it not only puts our relationship with God in crisis, but our relationship with others and the world as well.

Ask the kids to come up with their own working definition of sin. Write down words or phrases that they use. It's good to start with wherever they are. Many will likely focus on sin as behavior: things we shouldn't do. It is good to acknowledge that this is a piece of understanding what sin is, but that there is more to it.

Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr is often credited with saying that "Sin is the only empirically provable Christian doctrine." What he means is that all we have to do is look around the world, turn on the local news or open up a newspaper to recognize that there is something really wrong. When we seek to understand the nature of sin, however, there are two concepts we need to grasp: sin and sinning.

Sin is the state of our being. **Sinning** is the harmful things we do. We commit sins because we live in a state of sin. Sin is the name used to describe the state of the broken relationship, at its most fundamental, between God and humanity. We are not sinful because of the bad things we do; rather, we do bad things because we live in a state of sin. We put ourselves before God and other people.⁵

***Optional Game: THE GRAVITY GAME⁶**

Stand a volunteer on a chair, holding one end of a broom or pole. Another volunteer stands on the ground, behind a line drawn a meter in front of the chair, holding the other end of the pole.

Explain to the volunteers that they must not let go of the stick, but by pulling and twisting, the first volunteer is to try and pull the second over the line. At the same time the second volunteer has to try and pull the first off the chair. Try this couple of times with different volunteers of similar height and weight.

The person on the chair will usually lose. This is because the volunteer on the floor has the extra benefit of gravity, a powerful force pulling downwards. The Bible also describes sin as a powerful force, pulling us down, and separating us from a relationship with God.

Turn to Genesis 3 and the story of Adam, Eve, and the entrance of sin into the picture. Read the chapter out loud together, and then talk about the following:

⁵ For reading about this concept of sin in greater detail, see Root, Andrew, and Kenda Creasy Dean. *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011. Print.

⁶ This game comes from <http://insight.typepad.co.uk/insight/2008/07/sin-and-forgiveness.html>

1. *What argument does the serpent make to Eve?*
2. *Why do you think she and Adam wanted to eat the fruit and decided to?*
3. *What were the consequences of that decision? What does this story teach us about sin?*

*St. Augustine, who was a church leader in the 4th century, defined sin as “being curved in on ourselves (curvatus in se).” In other words, we see and choose ourselves first. We are at the center of our own universes. To get a picture of what St. Augustine means, invite everyone to stand up and try to touch their heads to their stomachs. It can be a kind of awkward endeavor, and there will be varying degrees of flexibility. Ask: *What do you see?* There will likely be some variation of “my stomach” or “my legs” or whatever else, but it is almost always a part of themselves that they see first. This is St. Augustine’s definition of sin: being curved in on ourselves so we see ourselves before we see anything else.*

Discuss:

1. *What do you think about St. Augustine’s definition of sin?*
2. *Where do you see sin in our world?*
3. *Where do you see sin in yourself?*
4. *Thinking back to last session and the idea of the goodness of creation and human beings created in the image of God, how do you think sin relates to those concepts? What does sin do to us?*
5. *Where do you think grace fits in the picture?*

Closing

At the end of your time together, remind everyone to continue their personal reading and study of Mark’s Gospel, and highlight what chapter(s) you will talk about next time.

Take time to pray together. You may want to talk about joys or concerns first, or you may simply want to pray for your upcoming time together.

Session 3: Covenant

In session 3, you will explore the concept of covenant, or God's commitment to God's people even when people continue to live in a state of sin, focusing on themselves rather than God. The ideas that you will want to take away from this session are that God has always made and kept promises to his people, even when people fail, that God's covenant always has the goal of bring more people into a relationship with God, and that we are "blessed in order to be a blessing to others." Ultimately, God is persistent in his covenant with us, always finding a way to say yes to us, even when we keep finding ways to say no.

Supplies needed:

- Bibles
- pens or pencils
- Scripture workbooks
- Markers and card stock

Read: Mark 4:1-5:43

Discuss the questions found in your Scripture workbooks:

1. *What other stories in chapter 5 do you think might relate back to Jesus' parable of the sower and the seeds?*
2. *Which types of soil do you identify with the most?*
3. *Can you think of a time where your faith was challenged by life circumstances? How did you respond?*
4. *How is God speaking into your life right now? How can you respond faithfully?*

Practice: Breath Prayer

Breath prayer⁷ is a practice of prayer that can be done at any time in any place and is a good way of being in continual prayer. It is a short prayer that is prayed on the inhale and the exhale and is repeated over and over again. For some, this may be a helpful way of praying and can lead to a new level of focus and clarity in prayer life.

While there are not strict rules on breath prayer, using Scripture verses (and especially Psalms) as the basis for breath prayer is a good practice. Today, you will use a Bible verse as a breath prayer. You can use one of the following, or choose your own.

⁷ For a free and helpful resource on breath prayer, check out the following:
<http://www.soulshpherd.org/2006/07/breath-prayers/>

"Create in me a clean heart." Psalm 51:10a

"I trust in your unfailing love." Psalm 52:8b

"Search me God, know my heart." Psalm 139:23a

Use the following prompt to practice breath prayer:

1. *Once you've decided what Scripture you will pray, get into a comfortable position. That may be sitting, lying down, sitting cross-legged, or whatever you want. You may close your eyes, but you don't have to.*
2. *Begin to slow down your breathing. Concentrate on taking a slow inhale and exhale. As you breathe in, imagine that God's Spirit is the air entering your lungs. As you breathe out, imagine that all of the stress, struggles, and distractions are leaving you for a while.*
3. *As you slow your breathing, begin to pray your breath prayer. On the inhale, pray the first part. "Create in me...."*
4. *On the exhale, pray the second part. "a clean heart...."*
5. *Repeat this prayer slowly on the inhale and the exhale over and over again. Let the words sink in, clarify your mind, and help you focus on the transforming power of God in your life.*
6. *Spend a few minutes doing nothing but breathing and praying your prayer. After a few minutes, you can let the prayer begin to taper off and bring your attention back to where you are and the others around you. If you are leading the breath prayer, you will want to call everyone back to attention by saying something like, "Begin to focus again on your breathing, opening your eyes and becoming more aware of what is around you."*
7. *When it looks like they are alert and paying attention, ask: What was the experience like for you? What did you like about it? What did you find difficult? This week, try doing breath prayer sometime on your own. You may try it when walking to school, or between classes, or falling asleep at night.*

Learn: Covenant

Today's theme is COVENANT. Have you heard that word before? Where have you heard it? What do you think it means? Acknowledge any answers. Covenant is a word used for a special kind of relationship: one based around commitment and mutual promises to be faithful. You might hear the word covenant in reference to marriage. This is because marriage, itself, is a kind of covenant—one where two people make promises to be faithful to one another and to keep a special and unique relationship with only one another. Covenant means a very similar thing

when we talk about God's relationship with God's people. Today we are going to look at a few different passages in the Old Testament to get a better sense of what God's covenant with God's people is like.

Begin by reading together Genesis 9:1-17, where we find God's covenant with Noah and his descendants. You may want to make sure they know the context of this passage, i.e. that it is after the flood that has destroyed the earth. Talk together about the following:

- 1. What are some of the promises that God makes to Noah and his descendants?*
- 2. What does he ask of Noah and his descendants?*
- 3. What is the symbol of the covenant and why do you think God gives it?*

Move on to the next passage, Genesis 12:1-5, 17:1-22, where we find God's covenant with Abraham. Talk together about the following:

- 1. What are the promises that God makes to Abraham and his descendants?*
- 2. What does he ask of Abraham and his descendants?*
- 3. What does God say will be the result of the blessing of the covenant?*

If they do not note in the conversation the idea of being blessed in order to be a blessing to others, take time to point it out. We'll revisit this idea in the discussion section.

Look together at the final passage of Isaiah 59:20-21, 60:1-5, 15, 17-22, where we hear of God's continuing promises. Note that hundreds of years have passed between the covenant made with Abraham and these words. In that time period, God's people have continually screwed up and turned away from God, and yet God still speaks these words.

- 1. What are the promises that God makes to God's people?*
- 2. What images or promises do you find to be particularly hopeful or powerful?*

Activity: God's Promises Bookmark

Sometimes it is helpful to have consistent reminders of God's faithfulness in keeping God's promises to us. Take some time to create a Promise Bookmark. Cut the cardstock into bookmark-sized rectangles. Thinking back over some of the promises that you talked about today, choose an image or a phrase that is meaningful to you. Write the phrase or draw the image on your bookmark. Decorate it as you wish. Once you have created your bookmarks, exchange them with one another, and use them as bookmarks in your Bible,

so each week as you read the Gospel of Mark, you are reminded not only of the promises of God, but of the relationship you have with each other as you go through the process of Confirmation.

Discuss:

1. *As Christians, we are called to be a blessing to other people. What do you think this means? Who are people in your life who are in need of blessing? What can you do this week to offer a blessing?*
2. *In looking at the Scripture passages today, we looked at some things that God asked his people to do. What are some promises you think God would like you to make to God?*
3. *Where do you see grace in this concept of “covenant”?*
4. *God always finds a way to say “yes” to us. What does that mean to you?*

Closing

At the end of your time together, remind everyone to continue their personal reading and study of Mark’s Gospel, and highlight what chapter(s) you will talk about next time.

Take time to pray together. You may want to talk about joys or concerns first, or you may simply want to pray for your upcoming time together.

Session 4: Christ, Part 1

This week, you will begin to explore how Jesus saves us. Next session, you will continue to focus on Jesus through examining his works and teaching. The theme salvation builds upon last session's focus on covenant and God's yes to us.

Supplies needed:

- Bibles
- pens or pencils
- Scripture workbooks
- Paper and optional journals

Read: Mark 6:1-56

Discuss the questions found in your Scripture workbooks:

1. *Did anything in this passage jump out at you for the first time?*
2. *Can you think of a time when you were blessed because of your service for Christ?*
3. *Can you think of a time when you were rejected because of your service for Christ?*
4. *What are some ways we can prepare ourselves each day for whatever may come our way?*

Practice: Journaling

Today, the spiritual practice is journaling.⁸ This practice can take many shapes and doesn't necessarily follow a specific format. Journaling as a practice can involve doodling, writing thoughts or phrases that enter your mind, "thinking on paper," writing prayers, recording the events of your day, etc. There are no real rules about journaling, but for many people, it can be a helpful way to reflect on Scripture. For today's practice, choose a passage from the past week's readings from the Gospel of Mark to be the basis for your journaling. You may prompt the journaling with comments or questions like *"write down the verse or phrase that sticks out to you. What does that make you think about? Who does it make you think about? What do you feel like God is saying to you? What prayer does the Scripture cause you to offer up? Any of these are things you could write about."* Give 5-10 minutes for writing time, and then allow a few minutes of time to share any thoughts or insights any of you had.

⁸ For more information and ideas about devotional journaling, check out this article:
<http://devotional.upperroom.org/lent2013/journal>

Learn and Discuss: Christ, Part 1—Salvation

Today, the theme is of CHRIST, with a more particular emphasis on salvation: how Christ saves us. This ties directly back in to the themes of CRISIS and COVENANT. It may be good to rehash together the nature of sin. Recall together some of the ideas that you talked about in session 2, remembering that sin is a state of being that separates us from God. Then recall some of the ideas you talked about in session 3 related to covenant, remembering that God continues to find ways to say yes, even when we say no. This session is particularly challenging because of the depth of theological concepts. It is ok if both the mentors and the mentees struggle to fully understand. This session is meant only to help participants begin thinking about how Christ saves. The main takeaway from today's session should be that Jesus Christ is God's yes to us.

An important concept to emphasize is that Christ is God. Christ is the second person of the Trinity. The Trinity consists of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. You could spend years trying to find ways to talk about how God is three persons, but one God. In fact, the early church did spend years and years trying to figure out how to talk about the Trinity, and in the same way, how Christ could be fully God and fully human. Simply invite all participants to recognize God as Trinity and Christ as fully God and fully human as holy mysteries to ponder, recognizing that our ability to understand is limited. It is important to acknowledge that the beginning point for today's learning portion rests upon the central theological claim that Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully human.

You could say something like, "Today, as we talk about how Christ saves us, we begin with the belief that Jesus Christ is God. While next time we will look at the kinds of things that Jesus teaches, today we will be talking more about what Jesus accomplished on the cross and in his resurrection. The Christian Church has always held to the central belief that Jesus Christ is God, and that he is the second person of the Trinity, which is the fancy name we have for God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We also hold the central belief that Jesus was 100% God and 100% human while he was on earth. These are hard ideas to think about, and a lot of the time, our minds can't quite grasp them. It is ok if you feel like you don't fully understand. Part of our faith journey is about continually seeking to come to a greater knowledge and love of God."

To introduce the work of Christ, play a quick game together: Call out and write down as many other titles/names for Jesus that you can think of. Limit your time to 60 seconds and see what you come up with. Looking at your list of names, ask, *what do these names tell us about what Jesus is like?* For example, Prince of Peace is a title Jesus is known by. You might say that it tells us that Jesus is peaceful or that he brings peace to us.

Say, *"Today, we are going to talk about how Jesus saves us. What does it mean to you that Jesus saves you?"* Allow time for any responses. Responses could vary from uncertainty, to simple statements like, he died on the cross for my sins, or he promises we will live in heaven. You may

also get a slightly more in depth response like, Jesus took my place on the cross and took the punishment I should have gotten. If you get a response like this, you have a very good segue into the challenging theological topic we will be introducing today: atonement. Following are three major atonement theories⁹, or in other words, ways in which we can talk about how Christ saves us, and makes us “at-one” with God:

1. *Satisfaction/Substitutionary Atonement*—*This is the predominant way of understanding salvation in many protestant churches today, and probably one that you have heard, even if you have never heard the name, “substitutionary atonement.” In this understanding, Christ takes our place and pays for the sin for which we need to pay the price in order to be made right with God. Christ, as both God and human, is the only one who can pay this price. As God, he is the only one capable of breaching the gap between humanity and God, but as a human he is able to stand in our place, to receive the judgment that was reserved for us. Key idea: Christ substitutes himself in our place before God’s judgment.*
2. *Christus Victor*—*This is the primary way in which the church understood how Christ saves us for around the first 1000 years of Christianity. Christ is seen as the one who liberates us from sin and death. By dying on the cross and rising on the third day, Christ defeated sin and death and has broken the chains that have imprisoned us so that we can go free. Key idea: Christ is victorious over the forces of sin and death.*
3. *Moral Influence*—*This way of understanding Christ’s saving work on the cross is that in dying for us, Christ so perfectly demonstrates obedience to God and love for us. When we look at Christ, we are inspired by such a selfless act of love that we seek to imitate him. Key idea: In demonstrating perfect love, Christ influences us to strive to be more like him in how we love.*

If you have at least three people participating in this process including mentors and mentees, you should take a few minutes to act out each atonement theory, for the sake of those who are more visual and kinesthetic learners. You can encourage kids to be creative in acting these concepts out. The more they can get into it, the more likely it is that it will stick.

For Substitutionary Atonement, designate one person to represent Humanity. Choose another person to be Jesus. Choose a third person to be God the Father. Have God the Father stand in front of the person representing Humanity, who is sitting down in a chair, facing God. Ask God the Father to prepare to pass a sentence of judgment,

⁹ For a basic summary of the major ways in which Christians have understood atonement, you can read this article <http://dunbarumc.com/2011/03/07/so-how-exactly-does-christ-save-us-again/>. For a more in-depth and nuanced treatment of atonement theories, see this resource from Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary at http://www.plts.edu/docs/ite_models_atonement.pdf

pointing his or her finger at the person sitting. At that moment, ask the person who is Jesus to come over, help Humanity out of the seat, and then Jesus takes the seat instead. Now God the Father passes the sentence of judgment, but it falls on Jesus instead of Humanity.

For Christus Victor, designate one person to represent Sin/Death, and another person to represent humanity. Designate a third person to represent Christ. The person representing sin and death should hold the person representing humanity as prisoner. Humanity should be cowering while Sin/Death stands guard. Christ enters the picture, and Sin/Death goes after Christ. Christ should play dead (representing death on the cross). Sin/Death starts to celebrate, but then Christ stands up (representing the resurrection), walks over to Sin/Death, and defeats him or her. Sin/Death falls to the ground, and Christ extends his hand to Humanity, helping Humanity out of prison.

For Moral Influence, you can play a simple game of follow the leader or Simon Says to emphasize the idea that Christ's example of love is something that we are inspired to imitate.

Discuss:

1. *After exploring those three different ways of looking at how Christ saves us, which one resonates most strongly with you? Why do you think that is?*
2. *Do you think that it is possible to hold more than one idea about how Christ saves us? Why or why not?*
3. *What do you think Christ has saved you from? What do you think he has saved you for?*
4. *Where do you see grace in the conversation we've had today? Where do you see grace in your own life and your relationship with Jesus?*

Closing

At the end of your time together, remind everyone to continue their personal reading and study of Mark's Gospel, and highlight what chapter(s) you will talk about next time.

Take time to pray together. You may want to talk about joys or concerns first, or you may simply want to pray for your upcoming time together.

Session 5: Christ, Part 2

Today we continue with the theme of Christ, focusing on his life and teachings. We will specifically look at the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus had some important things to say about how God wants us to live, and he himself also showed us by example.

Supplies needed:

- Bibles
- pens or pencils
- Scripture workbooks
- Paper and optional journals
- A glass salt shaker and taper candle for each person
- Art supplies- paint pens, glue, glitter, gems, tissue paper

Read: Mark 7:1-8:38

Discuss the questions found in your Scripture workbooks:

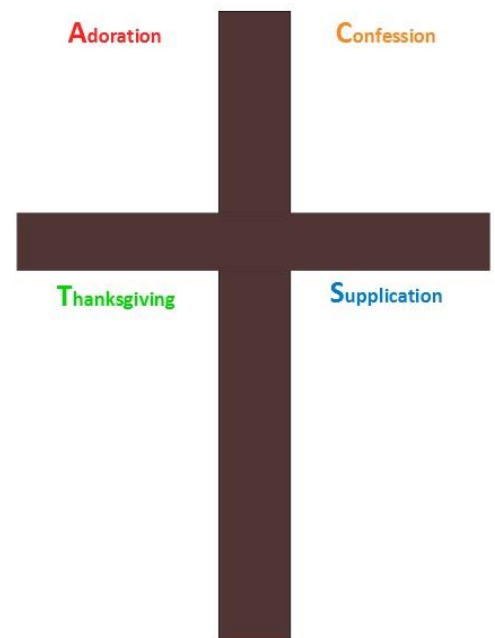
1. *Did anything in this passage jump out at you for the first time?*
2. *How does this passage of Scripture help shape your understanding of Jesus' mission?*
3. *How are you following Jesus in his mission?*
4. *How is your church following Jesus in his mission?*

Practice: ACTS Prayer

The ACTS Prayer is a popular way to formulate prayer, whether written or aloud. It goes beyond the typical extemporaneous prayer that we often default to when we ask God to do things for us or other people. Today, as you walk through the ACTS Prayer together, you will have an opportunity to offer up more than requests of God. ACTS is an acronym that stands for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.

If you have a whiteboard, or even just a piece of paper, you can begin by drawing a cross with headings like the one found to the right.

When we pray, we have a conversation with God. When we think about the conversations we have with friends and



family, we talk about more than just the things we want and need. We talk about things going on in our lives, we may talk about the things that we love about the other person. We may share when we've messed up or we are hurting. The same thing is true when we talk to God. The ACTS Prayer helps us to get beyond just asking God for things.

Ask all participants to draw the cross with the headings on a journal page, and then lead them through this exercise as you do it too.

Begin with Adoration. Write down things that you like about God. This could include words that describe what God is like: good, holy, loving, peaceful, etc.

After a minute or two, move on to Confession. Now, move over to the second block on the page, Confession. When we confess, we are telling God the places where we have hurt God, others, or ourselves, and we might also name the ways in which we are hurting. Write down those things that you need to tell God and ask forgiveness for.

After another couple of minutes, move on to Thanksgiving. Move down to the bottom left block, Thanksgiving. Take a few minutes to write down what you are thankful for this week or today. Thank God for those things, or events, or people, or whatever it is that you are thankful for.

Finally, move on to Supplication. Now move to the last block, Supplication. Supplication is just a fancy way of saying asking for what we need. Write down those things that you need to ask God for, whether it is for yourself, or for someone else.

Wind down after a minute or two. Invite everyone, mentors and mentees, to share something that they wrote in each category.

Learn: Christ, Part 2—Teaching

Today we continue with the theme of CHRIST, focusing on his teaching, especially the Sermon on the Mount. The major takeaway should be that Jesus teaches us to live in such a way that his love should shine through. You will look at a few different passages in Matthew 5 to see what kinds of things Jesus teaches. The **Learn** and **Discuss** pieces will be combined for this session and will include a hands-on craft.

Read the Beatitudes together in Matthew 5:1-12 and talk about the following:

1. *Compare Bible versions. One might say "happy" and another might say "blessed." What do you think Jesus means when he says "happy or blessed are those who..."?*
2. *What kinds of people are blessed? What do they have in common?*

3. *Work together to paraphrase the Beatitudes to help think more deeply about their meaning.*

Next, look at Matthew 5:21-30. Here, Jesus makes some very strong statements not only about our actions, but about our thoughts. Talk about the following:

1. *What surprised you in this passage?*
2. *What do you think Jesus meant? Did he literally mean we need to pluck out our eyes or chop off our hands? What do you think he wants you to do?*

Finally, look at Matthew 5:38-48, and talk about the following:

1. *What do you think Jesus is trying to tell us in v. 38-42? How does he want us to respond? What might that look like in our lives?*
2. *What do you hear Jesus saying about love? What do you think v. 48 means?*
3. *What do you hear Jesus saying to you?*
4. *Where do you find grace in these words of Jesus?*

As we move onto the activity, as an option, you may choose to continue talking about Matthew 6-7, using the same kinds of discussion prompts that you have over the passages of chapter 5.

Activity: Make salt shaker candle holders

Refer back to Matthew 5:13-16, where Jesus likens his followers to salt of the earth or a light on a hill. Both images indicate that we are meant to impact those around us, and to allow the love and teachings of Christ to be displayed through us. Together, as a fun activity, you will make salt shaker candle holders. You can inexpensively purchase glass salt shakers like those used in restaurants or cafeterias.

Removing the lids, you can then decorate the salt shakers using paint pens, glitter, tissue paper, gemstones, or whatever you would like. Once you have finished decorating, you can then take a taper candle, and lighting it, carefully drip some hot wax into the bottom of the salt shaker. While the wax is still hot, you can then place your taper candle into the salt shaker, pressing the bottom of the candle into the wax to help fix it to the candle holder. Another option would be to place some sticky-tac/mounting putty on the inside of the salt shaker to help stabilize the



candle. You now have decorative candle holders that can be reminders that Jesus calls us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world!

Closing

At the end of your time together, remind everyone to continue their personal reading and study of Mark's Gospel, and highlight what chapter(s) you will talk about next time.

Take time to pray together. You may want to talk about joys or concerns first, or you may simply want to pray for your upcoming time together.

Session 6: Church, Part 1

This week, we will begin talking about the community of faith, the Church. Today you will look at the idea of the Church being the kingdom of God in the world. We will look specifically at some of the parables that Jesus uses to describe the kingdom to gain a better understanding of what the Church, the Body of Christ, is meant to be like. In the next session, we will look at the concept of the Church as the gathered, worshipping community, emphasizing the practices of communal worship.

Supplies needed:

- Bibles
- pens or pencils
- Scripture workbooks
- Paper and optional journals
- Assorted seeds and dry beans
- Heavy posterboard or cardboard
- Liquid glue

Read: Mark 9:1-50

Discuss the questions found in your Scripture workbooks:

1. *Did anything in this passage jump out at you for the first time?*
2. *How do you think you misunderstand the power of God's kingdom sometimes?*
3. *How do you think your church might understand the power of God's kingdom sometimes?*
4. *What are some ways you and your church can live out the power of God's kingdom in a positive way?*

Practice: Lectio Divina

That's a complicated sounding Latin name pronounced something like: LEX – E – oh – Duh – vee – nuh.¹⁰ There are four parts of this practice of reading scripture. The Latin words for these steps are:

¹⁰ Additional resources for using Lectio Divina with teens can be found at:
<http://www.soulshpherd.org/2012/07/lectio-divina-guides/>

- Lectio (reading the scripture)
- Meditatio (reflecting on it)
- Oratio (respond or dialogue with God about the scripture)
- Contemplatio (resting from your mental work while being held in God's loving care)

You can use this practice with any passage of scripture, alone or in a group. Select a passage of scripture for your reflection, settle into a quiet place and prepare to spend 15-20 minutes moving through the steps. Let the students know the scripture being used. Find it in bibles together or pass out copies of the reading for each person. It will be less distracting if everyone has the same version of scripture.

Read the scripture aloud. Don't try to use inflection or dramatic reading. In fact, a flat reading of scripture with no particular emphasis will help the student to be more aware of the word or phrase that seems important for that particular reading, rather than being guided by the reader's inflection or tone. Say, before reading, *listen for a word or phrase that stands out for you and write them in your journal or on piece of paper.*

Reflect on the scripture as it is read for a second time. Say, before reading, *What seems important from these words for this reading? What words come to your attention? Why do you think that they might be important at this time? Feel free to write words or sketch thoughts that come to mind after the second reading.*

After some time in silence, you can invite some sharing around the thoughts that have come to mind for participants. Sometimes the thoughts will be very different. Sometimes they may be surprisingly the same. Take time to listen without direction or judgement to the things students are hearing from God.

Respond as the scripture is read for the third time. Say, before reading, *allow yourself to begin a conversation with God about thoughts that come to mind regarding the scripture. Ask for God's wisdom and the Spirit's insight to your questions. Allow the confessions or prayers or challenges that come to your mind to be offered to God.* After spending about three minutes in silence, invite the group to offer God prayers about the things that have come to mind during these readings. This can be done silently.

Rest in God's presence following these individual prayers. Remember God's loving care for you and trust in God. Invite everyone to a few moments of silence after offering prayers to God to simply rest and be still. End the time of lectio divina by reflecting on the practice together.

1. *What did you like about this experience?*
2. *What did you find to be helpful?*
3. *What did you find to be difficult?*

Learn: Church, Part 1—The Kingdom of God

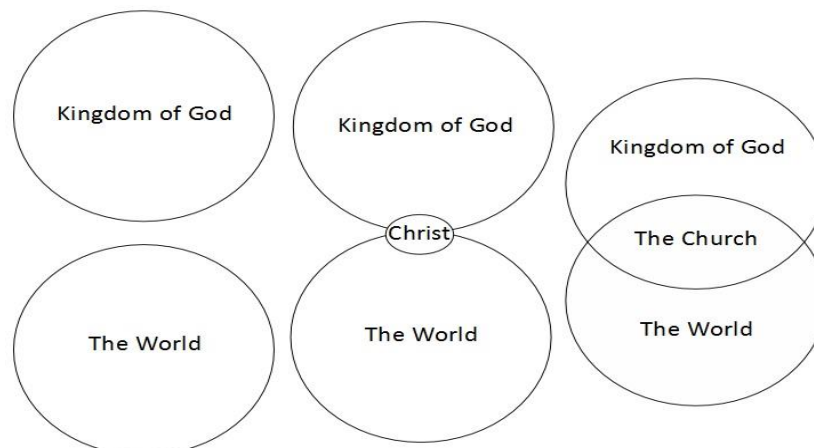
Today, we explore the theme of CHURCH, focusing on the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God includes more than just heaven. It is also present through the Church, even though it is incomplete. Begin by reading together Luke 17:20-21. Take a few minutes to discuss these questions, acknowledging any kind of answer given:

1. *What do you think Jesus means when he says, “the kingdom of God is in your midst (or among you)?”*
2. *What is the kingdom of God?*

Now that you have begun to talk about what the kingdom of God is, you have likely heard a response or two to the question “what is the kingdom of God” that indicates an understanding of the kingdom as heaven. Heaven is a good starting place to think about what the kingdom is like, because we tend to understand heaven as a place where there is no more pain or hurt, and that everything is good and right there. Jesus’ statement that the kingdom of God is in our midst, however, indicates that the kingdom of God does not only mean heaven. In some way, the kingdom of God is also already here.

The diagram below may help us begin to understand how the kingdom of God is in our midst. The diagram is read from left to right, loosely corresponding to the world before Christ, the world when Christ came, and the world after the birth of the Church. The left pair of circles depicts the kingdom of God as one that is fully separate from the world. It demonstrates the gap between the brokenness of our world and of the goodness and perfection of the kingdom of God. The two do not overlap at all. The middle set of circles depicts Christ as the one who brings the kingdom of God to meet the world. Christ is the point of intersection. The right pair of circles depict the way in which the Church, as the Body of Christ guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit, helps make the kingdom of God a reality in our world.

Look at the diagram together.



We will look at a couple of Christ's parables about the kingdom of God to help us better understand the middle pair and right pair of circles, and to get a better idea of what God's kingdom is like. In the parable in Matthew's gospel, you might notice that he uses the phrase "the kingdom of heaven" instead of "the kingdom of God." They mean the same thing.

First, we will look at Matthew 13:31-32.

Discuss together:

- 1. What or who do you think the mustard seed represents?*
- 2. As the mustard seed grows into a plant, what kinds of things do you think it provides? What is it good for?*
- 3. If a parable is a story that helps tell a deeper truth, what do you think this parable is telling us about the Church?*

Now we will look at Luke 14:12-24.

Discuss together:

- 1. What struck you in this parable?*
- 2. Who was invited to the banquet? Who came?*
- 3. What do you think this parable tells us about the kingdom of God?*
- 4. What should we, as a church, take away from this?*

Even though there are many more parables that you could look at to delve deeper into understanding the kingdom, these two are a good starting point. The first one emphasizes the idea that Christ, the mustard seed, brings the kingdom, which then grows. The kingdom provides shelter and nourishment to all who would come to its shade, like the mustard shrub does. The second one emphasizes that everyone is invited to be a part of the kingdom, especially the weak and vulnerable. If these two main ideas did not come up in your conversation, make sure you bring them up briefly.

Discuss the following:

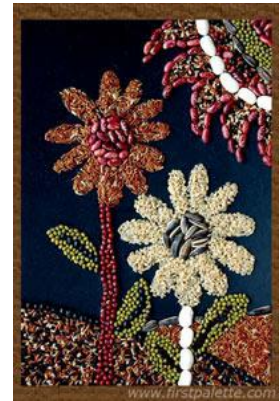
- 1. After reading these two parables, how would you describe the kingdom of God?*
- 2. How can we, in our church, do a better job of living in God's kingdom?*

3. *Where have you seen evidence of God's kingdom in the last few weeks?*

Activity: Create Seed Mosaic

The seed is a commonly used image in Jesus' parables. The seed symbolizes growth and life, both of which are characteristics of the kingdom. Together, you will create a seed mosaic representing the kingdom of God. You have had opportunity today to think about what the kingdom is like, and you have many different images at your disposal.

Talk together about an image you might use to depict the kingdom. It might be a plant, or a plate and cup, or a table, or anything that you come up with. Draw an outline of your image on the posterboard or cardboard. Then, using different kinds of seeds and beans, glue them down onto the posterboard to create your mosaic.



The example to the right can be found at http://www.firstpalette.com/Craft_themes/Food/Seed_Mosaic/Seed_Mosaic.html, along with more detailed step-by-step instructions of how to create a seed mosaic.

When you finish, you may want to keep your mosaic in your meeting place, or you may want to share it and what it represents in worship on Sunday morning, if that is appropriate in your particular worshipping community.

Closing

At the end of your time together, remind everyone to continue their personal reading and study of Mark's Gospel, and highlight what chapter(s) you will talk about next time.

Take time to pray together. You may want to talk about joys or concerns first, or you may simply want to pray for your upcoming time together.

Session 7: Church, Part 2

This week, our focus will be on how we worship as the gathered community of faith. We will talk about why we gather, the things that we do when we gather, and we will also touch briefly on the two sacraments, Holy Communion and Baptism.

Supplies needed:

- Bibles
- pens or pencils
- Scripture workbooks
- Paper and optional journals
- list of clues for optional worship scavenger hunt
- United Methodist Hymnal
- Internet and tablet/computer

Read: Mark 10:1-11:33

Discuss the questions found in your Scripture workbooks:

1. *Did anything in this passage jump out at you for the first time?*
2. *Are you willing to give up everything to follow Jesus?*
3. *What are some things that might come between you and Jesus?*
4. *Are there things that come between the church and Jesus? If so, what might a church need to leave behind in order to follow Jesus?*

Practice: Guided Meditation

Guided meditations are invitations to use your imagination to more fully experience a scripture reading. Rather than seeing scripture through a two dimensional lens of words on the page, the hearer is invited to imagine the scene where a passage takes place – to feel a crowd press in around Jesus, or sit in the grass of a meadow where a shepherd might be. A hearer can be asked to use their senses to bring the story to life – the smell of animals, the taste of bread, the rough feel of fabric. Any of these can be valuable in assisting students to engage the scripture more deeply to hear the word of God.¹¹

¹¹ An additional guided mediation experience can be found here: <http://devozine.upperroom.org/spiritual-practices/imagine-using-guided-imagery-scripture/>

Students should find a comfortable listening spot. This can include sitting at tables, lying on the floor or grass, eyes opened or closed in a place with few distractions where they can listen and use their minds to imagine. Encourage students to take a few deep breaths as you pause to begin. You may want to play soft music in the background, or perhaps total silence is more fitting for your group.

Sometimes people notice that their thoughts drift away from the instructions of the speaker. Acknowledge to your students in advance that sometimes happens. When that happens, the listener can decide whether to follow the drifting thoughts, perhaps the Spirit is guiding them there, or gently bring their thoughts back to the speaker. There is no wrong way to practice guided meditation. The important part is to notice what happens and to listen for God's voice bringing new awareness through the experience.

What follows is a guided mediation on a portion of the gospel of Mark from Mark 10: 13-16.

Invite students to find a comfortable place to listen to the scripture being read through once.

Then say, *"Imagine this scene with Jesus and the disciples, parents and children.*

Where is Jesus? Is he seated or standing?

Are they outside along the road, or in a field or in someone's home?

As the people bring the children to Jesus, imagine their faces. Are they happy? Excited? Anxious? Why do you think they want Jesus to touch their children?

The disciples speak sternly to the people bringing their children. What do they say? Can you imagine their faces?

Then Jesus speaks. He sounds indignant. Imagine his voice and his face. How does his speech make the disciples feel and look? How do the people and the children respond?

After Jesus speaks, Jesus takes the children in his arms, lays hands on them and blessed them. How do the children respond to Jesus? What does this look like? How do the children feel? How do you feel? Can you imagine yourself as one of those children – taken in Jesus' arms and blessed? How do you feel?"

Invite students to open their eyes and remember their experience with the scripture.

1. *What was it like?*
2. *What did you feel that was new or different?*
3. *How did God speak to you through this?*

Learn: Church, Part 1—The Worshipping Community

***Optional Activity: Worship Scavenger Hunt**

If you have several youth participants and have access to your church's sanctuary (and the rest of the building), this could be a fun way of beginning the teaching time. Create a list of clues about various objects or locations in your sanctuary. Depending on your group size, you could have groups with 2-3 youth. Send them on a hunt around your church to find the various objects or locations. If your youth have cell phones with cameras, have them take a group picture with the answer to each clue. Below are some examples of a list of clues you might use:

Whenever we use this, we make a splash (baptismal font)

Additional question: what do we use this for?

Radiant light pours through them (stained glass windows)

Where the Word is proclaimed (pulpit or lectern)

Additional question: what is this called?

Where we set a heavenly feast (altar or communion table)

Additional question: what have you seen displayed here?

Displays of beauty (altar flowers, banners, or other decorations your church might use)

A sign of the light of Christ (candles on the altar)

Divine dishware (communion cup and plate)

Additional question: what are these dishes called? (paten and chalice)

Depending on your church architecture and sanctuary style, you may create your own clues. Give the youth 10 minutes to find the answers to as many clues as possible, and take pictures of their group at each answer as evidence. When they come back, enjoy sharing the pictures with one another!

Teaching and Discussion:

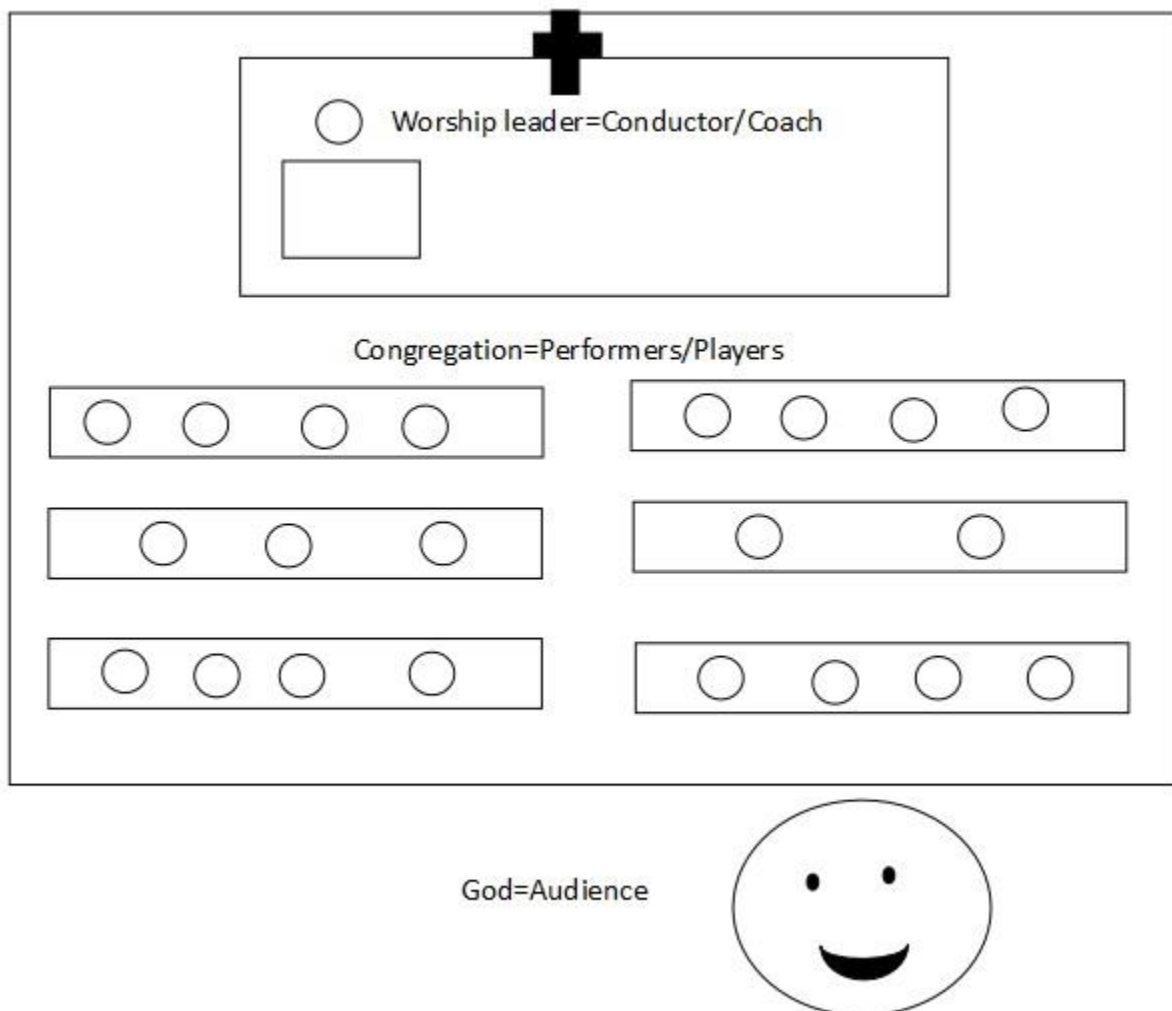
Today, the theme of CHURCH continues with a focus on the worshipping community. When you finish the activity, or if you choose not to do the activity, you can move into these discussion questions:

1. *What is your favorite part of worship?*

2. What parts of worship do you wonder about?

While the definition of worship is not one that is limited to the hour on Sunday where we gather together, the times when we gather together as a community of faith to worship God are important. While worship is something that can help us grow in faith, it is about more than what we get out of it. Worship is for God. As the community of faith, we come together to do "liturgy," which, in Greek, means "the work of the people." In other words, worship is an act that we do together as God's people for God. Sometimes we think that we are the audience in worship when we sit in our seats, and we listen to the preacher or the choir or the band. We can tend to think that worship is something that we merely attend or watch.

Instead, worship is something that we all do for God. The below diagram gives a better picture of what worship is like:



In this diagram, we see that the worship leader, who is often the pastor, is more like a conductor or coach, leading the orchestra, calling the plays, directing the action. The whole congregation are the players. They are the ones making the music, carrying out the action. God is the audience, looking on, enjoying the “work of the people.”

Discuss the following:

1. *In your experience of worship, have you felt more like an audience, or more like a main player?*
2. *Are there areas of worship that you would like lead or explore more?*

When we gather in worship, there are several things that we usually do together. Some we do weekly, some we do monthly or occasionally. Those things are:

*Sing
Proclamation of the Word
Prayer
Confession
Communion/Lord’s Supper*

Which of these things do we do regularly? Why do you think we do them?

When we sing, we are making an offering up to God. St. Augustine is often thought to have said, “When we sing, we pray twice.” What do you think he meant by that?

1. *What is singing like for you in our church?*
2. *Which songs do you like the best? Why?*

Proclamation of the Word happens in two significant ways: through the reading of the Bible, and through the sermon, which usually offers an interpretation of the passage or passages that were read and a challenge to hear how God is speaking to each of us through the Bible and the message. When we proclaim the Word in worship, we remind one another of God’s work throughout history, as well as in our own lives. We challenge one another to cling to God’s promises and to allow God to work in our lives, as individuals, and as a community.

1. *Why do you think it is important that we read Scripture together in church?*
2. *What do you like about listening to sermons? Describe one that was memorable to you. What made it memorable?*

We have talked about different types of prayer as we have practiced it in different ways during our spiritual practices time. Often, in worship, one person will offer up prayers on behalf of the whole community. Sometimes this might follow a time of naming joys and concerns.

1. *What kinds of things do you hear in the prayers during worship?*
2. *Why do you think we include prayers in worship?*
3. *Why do you think we pray?*

Confession is also a practice that we often do. While we do not always confess personal sin aloud, we do often share in a communal confession. Turn to page 12 in the United Methodist Hymnal and read through the prayer of confession together. Then discuss the prayer.

1. *What kinds of things are we confessing in this prayer?*
2. *What do you think is the purpose of confession?*
3. *What is God's response to our confession?*
4. *What is our response to confession?*

In a couple of weeks, we will revisit the concept of confession as our spiritual practice.

Finally, the sacraments are a special part of worship. Basically, for something to be a sacrament, it means that they are an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace. In other words, they are things that we can taste and see and touch, but God works through them in a special way. The two sacraments in the United Methodist Church are Holy Communion and Baptism. In these two practices, we ask the Holy Spirit to work in and through the elements: the bread and juice in Communion, and the water in baptism. Usually, if you listen to the pastor pray before you share in Communion, you will hear him or her say, "Pour out your Holy Spirit on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the Body and Blood of Christ..." or if you listen to the prayer of thanksgiving over the water used in baptism, you will hear "Pour out your Holy Spirit to bless this gift of water and those who receive it..."

Holy Communion is not only something we do in worship that reminds us of what Christ has done for us, it is also a way that God works to draw us closer to God, to heal us, and to transform us. When we eat the bread and drink the juice, God is doing work that we cannot always see or understand. Watch together the Chuck Knows Church video on Communion at <http://www.chuckknowschurch.com/archive/24communion>

Share together:

1. *What is your first memory of Holy Communion?*

2. *What is your favorite part of celebrating it?*

Baptism is something we do once in our lives. It is a sign of God's love for us. Whether you were baptized as a baby, or as a child, or if you are still waiting to be baptized, it is a sign of what God has done, is doing, and will do in our lives. A good way of thinking about baptism is like thinking about adoption. You may know someone who has been adopted, or maybe you yourself have been adopted! When someone is adopted, they are brought into a family. They receive a new birth certificate and a new name. When you are adopted, however, you live with your family for a time before the adoption is made legal or official. Usually after 6 months of already being in the family, you go before a judge who finally declares you to be officially adopted. And yet, you have already been a dearly loved member of the family well before that day you go before the judge. Baptism is a little bit like that. It is like God says to us, you are already a part of my family, but today, let's celebrate with everyone in the family that you are my child! Watch together the Chuck Knows Church video on baptism here:

<http://www.chuckknowschurch.com/archive/47baptism>

Share together:

1. *If you have been baptized, what do you remember about your baptism? If you were too young to remember, have your parents shared with you any stories or pictures about your baptism?*
2. *Have you seen anyone be baptized before? What was it like? What happened in the service?*
3. *What does it mean to you to be God's child?*

Closing

At the end of your time together, remind everyone to continue their personal reading and study of Mark's Gospel, and highlight what chapter(s) you will talk about next time.

Take time to pray together. You may want to talk about joys or concerns first, or you may simply want to pray for your upcoming time together.

Addendum for laity teaching about the sacraments

Rationale

An Elder presides over the Sacraments in the UM Church and a Deacon may serve to assist the Elder in that role, both share much the same formal theological education when it comes to understanding Communion and Baptism. Licensed Local Pastors with the United Methodist Church also preside over Communion and baptism within the bounds of their appointment, however they do so with a different pedagogical background that is not inferior to the Elder and Deacon, simply different. Within our tradition, there is not clear line about who should wear the mantle of “teacher” when it comes to explaining – as best anyone can – the meaning and celebration of the Sacraments in the UMC. One could easily expect that it is the Elder’s responsibility or a responsibility that can be shared between Elder and Deacon. However, there is absolutely nothing to prevent *any member* of the church from serving in the role of teacher about the Sacraments.

This document assumes that the role of teacher may be filled by any person, lay or clergy, but that this person must have some shared background on the understanding of Sacraments in the United Methodist Tradition to allow them to teach with integrity. The references listed below are not intended to teach everything that a teacher may need to know, and in those cases where the teacher may be uncertain about answers to questions that arise in the modules concerning Baptism and Communion, the teacher should have a “ready reference” in the form of a Deacon, Elder, or Local Pastor to turn to for advice.

How to Use This Guide

This guide consists of two reading lists. The first is considered “Minimal Readings before Teaching the Sacraments” and the second is a “Further Reading List.”

A teacher should take the time to read the “Minimal Readings”. Further suggested readings are included as additional resources. Then schedule a time with an Elder, Deacon or Local Pastor to discuss the material and any questions it raises. These discussions should not take more than an hour but may extend to two if desired. The Deacon, Elder or Local Pastor should work to help the teacher grasp the very basics of our tradition and not confuse or confound the teacher with too much theological jargon. Also, the teaching Elder, Deacon or Local Pastor should realize that at times the official teaching on these subjects may disagree with personal understanding. For the sake of integrity within the office of clergy and the covenants made with one another at ordination or licensing, the official teaching of the church should be the position taught.

Minimal Reading List for a Teacher of Sacraments in the United Methodist Tradition

For Baptism:

The United Methodist Book of Worship, pages 81 through 85

For Communion:

The United Methodist Book of Worship, pages 13 and 14, and pages 27 through 30.

This Holy Mystery, by Gayle Carlton Felton, pages 7 through 13.

Further Readings

This Holy Mystery, A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion, by Gayle Carlton Felton (in its entirety).

By Water and the Spirit, Making Connections/Identity & Ministry, by Gayle Carlton Felton

Sunday Dinner, by William H. Willimon

Remember Who You Are: Baptism, a Model for Christian Life, by William H. Willimon

Session 8: Calling, Part 1

This week, we will be talking about what it means to follow Jesus and the cost of being a disciple. It is not an easy journey, and not everyone is able to follow. We will look at a couple of gospel encounters to think about the cost of following Jesus, and the cost of not following Jesus.

Supplies needed:

- Bibles
- pens or pencils
- Scripture workbooks
- Paper and optional journals
- Internet and tablet/computer

Read: Mark 12:1-13:37

Discuss the questions found in your Scripture workbooks:

1. *Did anything in this passage jump out at you for the first time?*
2. *What do you think of Jesus' parable in 12:1-12? Can you explain what you think it means?*
3. *What are some questions you have about Mark 13?*
4. *How can you be ready? How can you live with urgency and diligence that Jesus might return any day and any hour?*

Spiritual Practice: Your Choice

Think back over previous weeks and the various spiritual practices that you have tried out. Pick one that you enjoyed and do it again!

Learn and Discuss: Calling, Part 1—The Cost of Discipleship

This week, the theme is CALLING. We will be looking at a couple of encounters in Scripture that show us what it means to be called by Christ, and the cost of following (or not following).

Start by watching this free video resource by Igniter Media on Youtube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oWCaXXKcHWE>. This video will get participants thinking

about the concept of following Jesus. After you watch it together, ask for thoughts or reflections on what they saw.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor who resisted Hitler and the Nazis, wrote in a famous book called "The Cost of Discipleship," "When Christ calls a man [person], he bids him come and die."¹² This is a hard statement. What do you think he might mean by that? Take a few minutes to wonder aloud together at what Bonhoeffer might mean.

Look together at Luke 14:25-33. *Jesus makes some pretty big demands of those who want to follow him. Luke 14:26-27 are intense statements. Discuss the following*

1. *What do you think Jesus means when he says we have to hate our families and even our own lives?*
2. *What does it mean to carry our own cross?*

Luke 14:28-33 talks about knowing the cost of what lies ahead and being prepared to pay it. Jesus even goes so far as to say if we are unwilling to give up our possessions, we cannot be his disciples. Discuss the following:

1. *How do you understand these statements?*
2. *What do you think some of the costs of following Jesus are?*

Turn now to Luke 9:57-62. *In this passage, Jesus encounters 3 would-be disciples, who show interest in following Jesus, but ultimately, they choose not to for various reasons. Read the verses together and examine Jesus' response to each would-be disciple. Discuss the following questions for each encounter:*

1. *What is Jesus asking of the would-be disciple in his response to their requests?*
2. *What is the obstacle here?*

End your teaching time by discussing the following:

1. *For you, what makes you want to resist following Jesus?*
2. *What things might you need to leave behind?*

¹² Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. trans. Chr. Kaiser Verlag Muenchen. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster. 1995. Print.

3. *What do you think Jesus might be calling you to do, right now?*
4. *How can you answer that call?*

Closing

At the end of your time together, remind everyone to continue their personal reading and study of Mark's Gospel, and highlight what chapter(s) you will talk about next time.

Take time to pray together. You may want to talk about joys or concerns first, or you may simply want to pray for your upcoming time together.

Session 9: Calling, Part 2

In this session, we will continue with the theme of calling, specifically looking at how we, as members of a community of faith can live out our call to discipleship. We will explore calling through the lens of the membership vows as they are found in the United Methodist Hymnal. Whenever we celebrate professions of faith or new members, we are all given the opportunity to affirm our commitment to God and to the church through our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness. Today, we will look at those 5 areas.

Supplies needed:

- Bibles
- pens or pencils
- Scripture workbooks
- Paper and optional journals
- United Methodist Hymnals

Read: Mark 14:1-16:8

Discuss the questions found in your Scripture workbooks:

1. *Did anything in this passage jump out at you for the first time?*
2. *How do you identify with the story on resurrection morning?*
3. *What can you take away from your reading of Mark's Gospel?*
4. *What book of the Bible will you choose to read next?*

Spiritual Practice: Your Choice

Think back over previous weeks and the various spiritual practices that you have tried out. Pick one that you enjoyed and do it again!

Learn: Calling, Part 2—Vows

As Christians called United Methodist, we are called to become a particular kind of covenant community. You'll remember that we talked about covenants in week three. "Covenants are promises to be faithful to one another and keep a special and unique relationship with one another." (Week 3, pg.15)

As United Methodist, we believe that discipleship takes a special and unique shape in our covenant community. When each disciple takes their covenant vow of membership, they accept their calling to be United Methodist. That vows includes this question:

“Will you be loyal to The United Methodist Church, and uphold it by your prayers, your presence, your gifts and your service and your witness?” (UMH, UM Publishing House, pg. 48, 1987ish)

This covenant relationship as United Methodists is described in a particular way. What does it mean to join this covenant?

Upholding the church by prayers

What does it look like in our everyday lives to become a disciple who prays? We’ve learned many prayer practices together on this discipleship journey. A disciple’s understanding of prayer is continually growing and changing as one moves on toward maturity. One step might be to set a goal for development in prayer. How can you move from where you are now in your prayer journey into deeper conversation with God in prayer? What steps would you have to take to get there?

If you wanted to be stronger so that you could play better football, you would begin weight training outside of football season. You might consult a trainer to develop a workout plan. You might find a partner who would encourage and support you when you train. If you would do that for football, what could you do for your spiritual life, to grow stronger in your covenant to pray?

Together, discuss the following:

1. *Name one step you’d like to take in your prayer life.*
2. *Name one person who could support you in this.*
3. *How will you share this step with this person?*

Upholding the church by presence

It’s difficult to participate in the life of a family, a sports team or a club if you’re never present. Its important to show up – even if you think you could get away with skipping out on a particular day. There is always competition for time and energy and often seems like there’s something better to do. But disciples who agree to this covenant believe that showing up and being part of the life of the community is important. When you don’t show up, you miss part of the history of the community and you miss what God might be doing in another’s life.

Discuss together the following:

1. *What do you mean when you promise to be present?*
2. *Who could you invite to be an accountability partner with you regarding your presence?*

Upholding the church by gifts

This probably seems like the most impossible promise a middle schooler can make. After all, most people your age don't have jobs or an income. So, what gifts could someone making this covenant offer?

God gives gifts to every person. We call them spiritual gifts. Everyone doesn't have the same ones and the exciting part of any group is noticing the gifts that are present and the way that they express themselves to make exciting things happen. That's the other reason that presence is so important. When people aren't present, some gifts are missing. You've been with the other folks in your class long enough now that you can probably name some of the spiritual gifts of others. Who is an encourager? Who is a leader? Who helps interpret scripture and speaks so clearly that everyone understands? These are all examples of spiritual gifts.

You can share an experience of inviting class members and mentors to write notes describing the spiritual gifts you see in one another and exchanging them. Or you could take this spiritual gifts inventory as a way to find out more:

<http://www.cokesburystudents.com/files/cokesburystudents/COKESBURY%20Youth%20Spiritual%20Gifts%20Test.pdf>

Then discuss the following:

1. *What spiritual gifts do you think you have?*
2. *How would you like to try exercising your gifts?*
3. *Who do you think could help you?*

Upholding the church by service

When we covenant to uphold the church by our service, we share the important Protestant belief in the "priesthood of all believers." There are so many ways to serve Christ in the church and the world that there is no lack of opportunity for Christians to make an effort to help others. Maybe our church needs someone to help with the website or Facebook page, to run the sound system or pick up bulletins after service. Maybe our community needs helpers to serve food at a soup kitchen or stock shelves at the food pantry or help afterschool tutoring. Any place a person of faith shows up to help others is an opportunity to serve. How can we serve?

Discuss together the following:

1. *How are you currently serving the church and/or the world?*
2. *How would you like to serve?*
3. *Who do you think could help you?*

Upholding the church by my witness

Do your neighbors or your classmates know that you are a follower of Jesus? Would they reach out to you if they wanted to hear the good news? If so, would you be ready to share in a moment's notice? Witnessing may be a bit intimidating, but it's really just knowing your own story of your journey with God in such a way that you can tell it simply and honestly to someone else who is curious. The best way to share the gospel is by living a life that reflects good news, show others that we care, and inviting those around us to join us for worship or a special event at church. It might be surprising that someone you know has never been invited to be part of a community of faith and would join you willingly.

Discuss together the following:

1. *Who are you willing to share your faith in God with?*
2. *Who do you know who does not yet know God who you will commit to pray for?*

Activity: Vow-writing

Sometimes, when people get married, they write their own vows that they are making to one another, based on the traditional vows found in the marriage liturgy. Take some time now to write your own personal vows based upon the ones we just talked about. In what ways will you offer yourself through your prayers, your presence, your gifts, your service, and your witness? Both mentors and mentees can take this opportunity to write vows. You may choose to include a sharing of these vows in your Confirmation worship service as an additional means through which youth can make a profession of faith. Adult mentors could also share theirs as a reaffirmation of faith!

Closing

You have finished reading the Gospel of Mark. Next week, you will spend a few minutes at the beginning of your time reflecting back over the whole book, so encourage participants to think back over Mark and make note of things they learned or things that have stuck with them from reading.

Take time to pray together. You may want to talk about joys or concerns first, or you may simply want to pray for your upcoming time together.

Session 10: Completion

In this final session, we will explore the future promise that God holds for us and for the world through the death and resurrection of Christ. While the kingdom of God is something that we can experience in part now, today, we are considering the kingdom of God in its completion, which we will one day experience.

Supplies Needed:

- Bibles
- pens or pencils
- Scripture workbooks
- United Methodist Hymnals

Read: The Gospel of Mark

Reflect on the experience of reading the Gospel of Mark by discussing the following:

1. *Were there particular encounters with Jesus that have stuck with you the most?*
2. *How has your picture of who Jesus is changed or grown through reading Mark?*
3. *What was it like to read a book in the Bible as a whole?*
4. *Where did you find hope?*
5. *Where did you find challenge?*
6. *What new ideas or thoughts has the Gospel of Mark prompted in you?*

Practice: Confession

The Bible tells us that we can make confession to Jesus Christ (1 John 1:9) and we can make confession to one another (James 5:16). It is a bit scary to think about, I know! As we enter into a time of discussion about death and the afterlife, sometimes it can be sobering to consider our fate, the meaning and purpose of our existence, and whether we are becoming the people God has called us to be. During our time of confession you will not be asked to confess your sins in the group, but we encourage you take time to confess your sins together through recitation of our communion liturgy on page 12 in the UMH (Confession and Pardon). The good news about confession is that it leads to pardon—the forgiveness of our sins. The reason the Church has historically practiced confession is to remind us that God offers forgiveness for our sins. Therefore, if we as mere mortals can offer peace to one another that God forgives, how much more is God exclaiming “you are forgiven!”

Together, read through the confession and pardon on page 12 of the hymnal out loud. After you have had a time of confession and pardon together as a group, take a few moments and confess your sins before God. Lead participants in a time of silent reflection by posing these questions: *Do you trust Christ for salvation? Do you have assurance of your faith in Jesus Christ?* Take a few moments to have a private and honest conversation with God.

After your personal time with God, take a few moments with participants and share fears you might have, how you have grown in your faith during confirmation, and if you have made a commitment to Christ. Also take some time as a group to share how you might continue to grow in your faith individually and together.

Learn and Discuss:

Today's theme is COMPLETION. Through Christ's death and resurrection, we too, have the future promise of life with God, where we, and the whole world will be made complete. Typically when we hear those two words, death and resurrection, used together in the same sentence we think of Jesus—particularly during holy week when he was crucified and Easter Sunday when he was raised from the dead. It is good if Jesus is the first thing that comes to our mind when we hear the words "death and resurrection"; after all, in John's Gospel, Jesus calls himself "the Resurrection and the Life."

Read John 11:17-27 together.

After Jesus' friend Lazarus has been dead for four days and his sisters, Mary and Martha, are grieving for their loss, Jesus makes the outrageous claim that changes the whole discussion about death and resurrection. Specifically, Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25-26a, NRSV). Discuss together:

1. *Can you explain Jesus' promises in these verses?*
2. *How might these verses give you comfort?*

During Jesus' conversation with Mary and Martha, the two sisters refer to a future resurrection as their hope for seeing their brother again. Jesus affirms a future resurrection from the dead, but what seems to be the more important point that Jesus wants to make is that resurrection is not just a what, it is a who! In other words, our hope for life and justice is not really in a future event, but in Jesus Christ, who we can have a relationship with in our present life. Like Lazarus, it is the life that we experience in God through Jesus Christ on a daily basis that gives us hope for life to come.

Unfortunately, when we talk about death and the afterlife, too often our own personal fate eclipses God's ultimate plan to restore all things. Did you know that God has future plans for the world? Do you ever wonder why bad things happen and why good people suffer? The Bible tells

us that one day God will set everything straight. God is not allowing evil to reign with a blind eye! One day evil, injustice, and death will all be destroyed, and every person will have to give account for their life, whether good or evil. Therefore, even though we have hope that when we die we will go to heaven, our ultimate hope is that God will restore all things on earth and God's kingdom will reign on earth without end (Revelation 21:1-2).

We will briefly look at two stages of the afterlife. First, we will discuss what happens when we die as individuals, and second, we will discuss when God's final plan is fulfilled and the righteous are raised to life.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:8 together.

Here Paul explains that when we physically die we become absent from our bodies but we continue to live in the presence of Christ. Paul's teaching gives us hope that when we die there is an afterlife. Perhaps the clearest example in Scripture of what happens when we die is found in Luke's Gospel when Jesus is being crucified.

Read Luke 23:43 together.

Jesus promises a thief who is being executed beside of him "Today you will be with me in paradise." Jesus' words give us hope that when we die there is no waiting period. By God's grace we are ushered from this life into the very presence of God in heaven. Likewise, Jesus explains to his disciples the night before his death that he is going away to prepare a place so that they can be together.

Read John 14:1-6 together.

1. *How does what Jesus is saying give you hope for the future?*

Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 together.

1. *What does Paul tell us about "the end"?*
2. *How do you think this passage explains ultimate justice?*

There are several places in the New Testament that talk about a future resurrection. In fact, the Bible begins discussing a future resurrection in the Old Testament. We have already briefly discussed the mentioning of a future resurrection in the story of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus; so let's take a moment and read through a few other passages and discuss what stands out.

Quickly read through Daniel 12:1-3, Mark 12:18-27, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, and Revelation 20:4-6.

1. *What sticks out to you from these passages?*

1 Corinthians 15 is perhaps the clearest and most detailed passage that discusses the future resurrection and God's plans for the world. It includes a very important detail in the historic

Christian faith: the return of Christ. The Bible is fairly clear that no one knows when Christ will come again, but that we are to always be ready for his return (Mark 13:32-37). Paul explains that the great resurrection will take place when Christ returns. At that time he will also vanquish evil—and we are told in 15:26 “The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” The power that death has over creation will be no more—and as Revelation explains, those who are raised to life will not be touched by death any longer. In essence, when Christ returns death will die and righteousness, justice, and peace will reign forever!

Ultimately the great resurrection is connected to several important doctrines of the church. Resurrection is connected to the doctrine of creation because it affirms that what God originally created is still good and that God wants to redeem creation, not replace it. Also, resurrection is closely connected to our understanding of sin and salvation. Resurrection reminds us that death does not have the last word, but the life that God originally intended will be set into motion through the restoration and reconciliation of all things.

Take a few minutes and watch and discuss death and resurrection with Chuck!

<http://www.chuckknowschurch.com/archive/resurrection-short-2>

1. *We talked about some deep ideas today about death and resurrection. What gives you hope for the future?*

Closing

Today was your last session, so it is fitting to end with a celebration! Have cake or finger foods, or whatever you might choose to do to have a fun party celebrating the work that God has done and will continue to do! You might take some time to reminisce about enjoyable experiences or things you learned together.

End your time with prayer—prayer for one another, prayer for the church, prayer for the upcoming worship service where participants will make a profession of faith. Thank you for going on this journey. It is one that continues for a lifetime!