United Methodist Women

Purpose

The organized unit of United Methodist Women shall be a community of women whose purpose is to know God and to experience freedom as whole persons through Jesus Christ; to develop a creative, supportive fellowship; and to expand concepts of mission through participation in the global ministries of the church.

The Vision

Turning faith, hope and love into action on behalf of women, children and youth around the world.

Living the Vision

We provide opportunities and resources to grow spiritually, become more deeply rooted in Christ and put faith into action.

We are organized for growth, with flexible structures leading to effective witness and action.

We equip women and girls around the world to be leaders in communities, agencies, workplaces, governments and churches.

We work for justice through compassionate service and advocacy to change unfair policies and systems.

We provide educational experiences that lead to personal change in order to transform the world.
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Let Your Light Shine Mosaic

Enlarge the template/grid above by four to eight times. The 12 squares represent the 12 months of study. The group will use this template to create a mosaic.

Ask: How do you or can you reflect God’s light as a unit?

• As a group, pick out a word or words from the program that best reflect what was learned during that month.
• Using scissors or pinking shears, cut out a paper heart and write the word on the heart.
• Using a glue stick or tape, add the heart to the template square for that month.
• Continue to build your mosaic throughout the year. At the end of the program year, post your mosaic on the wall for inspiration and challenge.
Introduction

God’s first creative activity was creating light and separating it from darkness to make sense of the existing chaos. In Genesis, the formation of the earth follows the creation of light. In Revelation, when creation is restored, we are told that God will be our light. As we pay attention to light in the arc of Christian history, what does light mean for us? Light helps dispel darkness, reveals injustice, brings hope. Where have we seen God’s light shine in and around us? How can we shine a light on issues in our world that cause anxiety on a daily basis? How can we expose evil and bring abundant life to neighborhoods and those on the margins? Where are we seeing God’s presence in the midst of darkness? What spiritual disciplines nourish/bring light to our souls?

Through 12 monthly programs we will explore biblical passages on light from the Old and New Testaments. We will seek encouragement from the biblical understandings and be challenged to be God’s light in the world as Christ’s disciples. We will also be reminded to shine a light on issues that crush and marginalize God’s children. We will be empowered to question and oppose systems and powers of darkness and evil. We are emboldened by the Light of Life and the Word that give us hope to practice justice in the world.

Features

Below is an overview of the structure of the monthly programs. Read through the programs well in advance and be sure to prepare the necessary resources and materials to make each gathering a valuable experience for all. Most of all, the programs offer flexibility and can be adapted to the needs of your unit or circle meetings. See the Build Your Program overview on next page.

MONTH/TITLE

Each month’s program has a title that offers you a quick reference to the theme of the Bible study, which always centers on light in the Bible, and the topic of the program.

OBJECTIVE

The objective will give you a summary of the program and the goals for participants.

PREPARATION

This section will help leaders prepare for the program. Refer to this section for the resources and materials you will need to collect ahead of time, and a list of the volunteer leaders and readers you will need to call on.
LETT YOUR LIGHT SHINE MOSAIC
Over the course of the monthly and special programs, the group will work together to create a mosaic that answers the question: How do you or can you reflect God’s light as a unit? See the previous pages for the template and instructions.

BIBLE STUDY: INSPIRE AND IGNITE
Each program includes a Bible study that explores passages through the prism of light. Time for reflection and discussion are provided through small circles.

BRIDGE: INFLUENCE AND SHINE
This section offers activities that serve as a bridge and help us connect the dots between the Bible study and call to action.

ACT: IMPACT AND SHARE GOD’S LIGHT
Here you are invited to engage in action and advocacy with United Methodist Women. You can use the opportunities and strategies suggested here, or develop your own strategies for ongoing work.

PRAYERS, HYMNS AND CLOSING LITANIES
The programs include prayers and hymns that are related to the current month’s Bible study theme and offer an opportunity for centering and community worship. The closing of each program is a communal prayer.

APPENDIX
This section consists of handouts for some of the activities in the programs, making it easy for the leaders to photocopy and distribute them.

BUILD YOUR PROGRAM
You are encouraged to do the full program to learn and gain a good understanding of each topic. The full program will take 45 minutes to an hour. The approximate time allotted for key segments is indicated after the segment headings. However, if you have less than an hour, use the Build Your Own Program feature in the Preparation section of each program to note the segments you want to use and those that would be most helpful for your group.

Special Programs
A Pledge to Mission and A Call to Prayer and Self-Denial programs are included in the Program Book. They are also available for download from the United Methodist Women website: unitedmethodistwomen.org.

Allow God’s light to break through your lives as you engage and mobilize for justice in the world.


About the Authors

Janet Wolf

The Rev. Dr. Janet Wolf has lived in Nashville, Tennessee, since 1968. After working for 12 years as a community organizer around poverty rights, she received her MDiv from Vanderbilt Divinity School and was ordained as an elder in The United Methodist Church in 1988. She served as a pastor of rural and urban congregations for 12 years, and was then appointed beyond the local church as a professor in a historically black college. She co-founded a DMin program in prisons, public policy and transformative justice and was both a student and a professor in the first cohort. In July 2012, Janet was appointed to work with Marian Wright Edelman and the Children's Defense Fund, focusing on public theology and nonviolent, direct-action organizing to disrupt and dismantle the cradle-to-prison pipeline. Janet is a partner with several think tanks inside prisons and a co-facilitator with insiders in courses on death row and in maximum security.


Alisha Gordon

The Rev. Alisha L. Gordon is a well-sought-after writer, teacher, scholar activist and public theologian who uses the many intersections of her life as an entry point to engage in ministry around the world. A native of Decatur, Georgia, Alisha attended Spelman College, where she earned a BA, and Candler School of Theology at Emory University, where she earned her MDiv with a concentration in religious education. Alisha served as the executive for Spiritual Growth for United Methodist Women and her work is always deeply rooted in the holistic development of women. She marries social justice and spiritual growth to the prophetic call for justice to help women see their full potential as mothers, daughters and sisters in an ever-changing social and political landscape. Alisha is now working as the executive minister of programs at the Riverside Church in New York City.
MONTHLY PROGRAMS
GOD SAID, “LET THERE BE LIGHT.”
AND SO LIGHT APPEARED.
(GENESIS 1:3; CEB)
SEPTEMBER 2019

IN [THE] BEGINNING, THERE IS LIGHT

OBJECTIVE

That United Methodist Women members will connect the sweetness of God’s goodness in creation to the beauty and wonder of beginning something new with other women engaged in God’s work in the world.
Preparation
Use the following lists to prepare for the program.

RESOURCES
• The United Methodist Hymnal
• United Methodist Women Bible (NRSV) or Common English Bible (CEB)

MATERIALS
• Computer/laptop, internet access, projector and screen
• Apple slices in a bowl, enough for each person to have at least one
  • Small bowl of honey
• Newsprint and marker or blackboard and chalk
• Mosaic template, posted on wall, plus scissors/pinking shears, colorful paper, glue stick/tape and pens

PARTICIPANTS
Ask individual women ahead of time to volunteer for the following roles:
• Welcome people as they walk through the door.
• Lead the Bible study, prayers and closing litany.
  • Facilitate activities.

ROOM SETUP
If possible, arrange chairs in a circle with a small round table in the middle to serve as an altar. Cover the table with a bright cloth and add at least one battery-operated candle to it. Ask participants to identify something or someone that brings light to them, and invite them to add representative symbols to the worship table each time you gather. Also invite them to write words from the program on colorful pieces of paper that answer the question—How do you or can you reflect God’s light as a unit?—then post them on the mosaic.

BUILD YOUR PROGRAM
Use this space to list the segments that you want to utilize in your program this month.
**Bible Study: Inspire and Ignite** *(10 minutes)*

**OPENING CIRCLE**

*Ask each participant to offer the name they want to be called and one part of creation for which they are most grateful—be concrete and specific, for example, a leaf dancing in the wind, held by an invisible thread from a spider; the smell of rain coming on a fall day. As they speak, each person will offer silent gratitude for the participant’s presence in this circle.*

**SCRIPTURE READING**

*Genesis 1:1–5*

*Read the scripture aloud two times.*

*Ask participants to offer one word from the scripture that captures their attention and write these on newsprint or the chalkboard so everyone can see them.*

**SING**

*“God, Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens,” The United Methodist Hymnal, no. 150*

**REFLECT**

*It is no wonder that when the Apollo 8 crew sent a Christmas message to earth in 1968, they read these verses from Genesis. Caught up in the wonder of their first lunar sunrise, astronauts James A. Lovell Jr., Frank Borman and William A. Anders found that these were the words that most powerfully communicated their awe and gladness, their joy and deep, holy hope.*¹

*Play the video: youtube.com/watch?time_continue=4&v=t3LIvb1Nzak.*

*Hebrew Bible scholars point out that the Hebrew words translate to “in beginning” rather than the phrase most of us are used to, “in the beginning.” The difference is a focus on a process, the ongoingness of creation and God’s creating, rather than one particular moment in time.*

*Womanist theologian and Hebrew Bible scholar Wilda Gafney writes that “A beginning” invites us into “multiple contextual ways of hearing, imagining and retelling” stories about this “spiraling creation.”² This is not an event to be referred to in the past tense. It is a wonder that is happening here and now.*

*Gafney also points out that the reference to God’s Spirit in this and many other biblical texts is decidedly feminine. And so Gafney writes, “She, the Spirit of God, She-who-is-also-God at the dawn of creation fluttered over the nest of her creation...”³*

*This is the same image used by James Weldon Johnson, African-American poet, novelist, editor and, in 1920, national organizer for the National Association for the Advancement*
of Colored People. In his poem “The Creation,” Johnson imagines God as a black mama bending over her creation, becoming utterly delighted with all she sees: “Then God smiled . . . And God said: That’s good!”

**DISCUSS**

- When was the last time you danced with pleasure, laughed out loud, delighted in the stunning beauty of God’s good creation?
- What might be the impact of imagining God as a black mother, kneeling over her creation, and She, the Spirit of God, hovering? How might it redefine your understandings of discipleship?

**CLOSING CIRCLE**

*When the group is finished discussing the questions, ask them to name some women from their church, community or the world who represent justice to them.*

**Bridge: Influence and Shine (10 minutes)**

The Jewish High Holy Days, Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year), Days of Awe and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), normally fall in the month of September. In 2019 they begin on September 29 and continue into early October. Jesus would have been familiar with these celebrations. It is said that on Rosh Hashanah, the birthday of the world, the Book of Life is opened so that during the following Days of Awe we might practice gladness and wonder, remembering the goodness of God and letting go of all that prevents us from being who God created us to be. The Days of Awe are a time to reflect, make amends, start over. Then, on Yom Kippur, the highest and holiest day for the Jewish community, which comes at the end of the Days of Awe, we collectively confess our failures to be all that God created us to be. We seek to move from those failures into life, that our names might be entered once more into God’s Book of Life. We acknowledge our systemic sinning—all that we have done to diminish the goodness of God’s creation.

*Invite participants to share in the following:* In 2019, Rosh Hashanah begins at sundown on September 29. Invite the group to join in a celebration today that includes the Rosh Hashanah tradition of passing apple slices and a small bowl of honey; encourage each one to dip their apple slice into the honey saying, “For a good and sweet year.” Take time to inhale the scent of the apples as the slices are passed.
Act: Impact and Share God’s Light (20 minutes)

As we begin this time of sharing with one another, with the sweetness of God’s honey on our lips, let us rejoice “in beginning” this work of United Methodist Women together in this new program year! We have committed ourselves to four campaigns linked to our four justice priorities:

- **Just Energy for All** (Climate Justice priority): Works with companies and governments for clean, renewable energy through a just and equitable transition from fossil fuels.
- **Interrupt the School-to-Prison Pipeline** (Criminalization of Communities of Color and Mass Incarceration priority): Seeks to impact local decision makers to address the criminalization of children and youth of color and reduce racial disparities in school discipline.
- **A Living Wage for All** (Economic Inequality priority): Advocates for municipal and state legislation that builds the base for a living wage for everyone.
- **End Maternal Mortality** (Maternal Health priority): Calls on health care workers, lawmakers and advocates to fund maternal mortality review committees and implement recommendations in hospitals and communities.

The Purpose of United Methodist Women gives clarity to our work as an organization and grounds us, our mission and our calling. Let us recite the Purpose of United Methodist Women together:

**United Methodist Women shall be a community of women whose purpose is to know God and to experience freedom as whole persons through Jesus Christ; to develop a creative, supportive fellowship; and to expand concepts of mission through participation in the global ministries of the church.**

As we think back, let us practice gladness and wonder, remembering the goodness of God and letting go of all that prevents us from being whom God created us to be. Take a moment now to reflect on and possibly write down those things we need to let go.

*Pause for 60–90 seconds for reflection.*

And now, let us consider the year ahead. What will we begin? How will we be created anew in the year ahead?

*Pause for 60–90 seconds for reflection.*

As we move toward a future that is reflective of our mission and purpose, we continue to extend our reach:

United Methodist Women seeks to POSITION itself as a leading organization and trusted source of leadership.

United Methodist Women creates opportunities for members and partners to ENGAGE in our work, so we may increase membership, giving and impact.
United Methodist Women will MOBILIZE women to new levels of leadership and action to build a thriving organization to change the world.

As a local unit, you can support new beginnings through the following actions:

- Care for God’s Creation by learning about energy use! Find out the energy sources used for electricity and transportation in your home, church, municipality, city and state. How much comes from fossil fuels? What are the health and environmental impacts? How does this impact women, children, youth and marginalized members in your communities? Create a climate justice team within your unit. Use your unique United Methodist Women voice to protect God’s earth and people and push for clean, renewable energy that is just and fair. See: unitedmethodistwomen.org/climate-justice.
- Enroll to be a Mission u study leader! This is a great opportunity to get hands-on training on how to teach others about the missional focus of United Methodist Women.
- Purchase a book from the Reading Program and host a small-group book club. Invite women to bring shareable snacks to enrich your time together.
- Sign up to receive action alerts about the four campaigns at unitedmethodistwomen.org/action. You will receive the most up-to-date information about the issues you care about!

Endnotes

Closing Litany (5 minutes)

Divide the group in half by left and right sides of the room to read “A Statement of Faith of The United Church of Canada,” The United Methodist Hymnal, no. 883.

Left:  We are not alone,  
we live in God’s world.

Right: We believe in God:  
who has created and is creating,

Left: who has come in Jesus,  
the Word made flesh,  
to reconcile and make new,

Right: who works in us and others  
by the Spirit.

Left: We trust in God.

Right: We are called to be the church:  
Left: to celebrate God’s presence,  
Right: to live with respect in creation,

Left: to love and serve others,  
Right: to seek justice and resist evil,

Left: to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,  
our judge and our hope.

Right: In life, in death, in life beyond death,  
God is with us.

Left: We are not alone.

ALL: Thanks be to God. Amen.