Knitted Together
for God’s Good Work

United Methodist Women
Program Book 2020–2021
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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Program focus

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Amount of pledge paid

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- Women’s History Month
- International Women’s Day
- World Water Day
- Palm Sunday
March 2021

Persistence in Mission

Objective
To study how women in scripture and in United Methodist Women’s history have been persistent in prayer and speaking up, and to find ways to develop connections in prayer and action for mission as United Methodist Women members.

BUILD YOUR PROGRAM Whether you’re meeting in person or virtually, use this space to list the segments with their times that you want to utilize.
Preparation

Use the following lists to prepare for the program. Prior to the program, ask readers and helpers to assist with the readings and activities in this program. Arrange the room so that all participants can see each other. Familiarize yourself with the virtual options available for the program: See “If Meeting Together Is Not Possible” in the Introduction and “Knitted Together Virtually” suggestions throughout the program.

Resources

• United Methodist Women Bible (NRSV)
• The United Methodist Hymnal
• Computer, projector and Internet connection if using the YouTube videos

Materials

• Yarn in festive colors for table decoration
• Construction paper “candles” made from white rectangles with yellow “flames” glued on top
• Markers and pencil
• Celebration squares that participants have knit in advance for the Knit Together project, or other supplies if your group is doing an alternative project

Prayer to Gather Us In (2 minutes)

God of Mystery and Awe, as a hiker steps onto a path and is drawn into the journey, so now we step out of the world and into your presence. Guide us on your paths of faith and prayer, draw us into your holiness; teach us how to live. Grant that our time apart with you may be a blessing to us and on our work in mission. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

Song Suggestion (3 minutes)

“Marching to Zion,” The United Methodist Hymnal, no. 733

Knitted Together Virtually: A round is a song that can be sung by two or more groups of people. Instead of singing this hymn together, divide the participants into two groups. The facilitator will act as choir director, indicating when Group 1 should start singing and then when Group 2 should begin—after Group 1 has already sung a few lines. Since you are not in the same physical space, participants will have to listen carefully in order to sing along with their assigned group. Continue singing until both groups are done with the hymn, or if time allows, both groups can return to the beginning and sing the hymn again.
Reflect Together on Scripture (20 minutes)

Read: Matthew 15:21–28

Faith and Persistence
An unnamed woman is motivated by her worry for her daughter to seek out Jesus and ask for mercy. Although she is not Jewish and does not reside in Israel, she knows about Jesus’ ministry and has faith in his ability to heal. She does not give up in spite of the many barriers put in her way.

The unnamed woman in this scripture passage is a double outsider. She is a woman, without power or privilege in the ancient world. She is a Gentile, without privilege in the Jewish culture. She is outside the power structure by two counts, so she must be twice as persistent in seeking out Jesus for help.

Her faith is made evident because when she finally reaches Jesus, she kneels before him. The words she speaks became a Christian confession in the early church, “Lord, help me.” Despite not being Jewish, she verbally acknowledges Jesus as the Messiah by calling him Lord and kneeling before him. This demonstrates her faith. This acknowledges his authority.

Her persistence is demonstrated in how she keeps asking questions, shouting when necessary. This is perhaps the most memorable aspect of this passage. No matter how many times she is put off, the woman persists in seeking mercy and healing for her daughter. First, Jesus does not answer her. Next, the disciples tell Jesus to have her sent away so that they don’t have to listen to her shouting. Then, Jesus tells his disciples that his work does not extend to Gentiles. Despite these three ways that her request is indirectly dismissed, she persists and comes right up to Jesus and kneels in front of him. Her actions question the status quo, defying the power structure of the day through her continued requests for mercy.

The woman is not resentful or argumentative in her approach to Jesus, but she does use her lived wisdom in her response to Jesus. When he tells her, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs,” she could have been offended or insulted. Instead, she perseveres and uses Jesus’ own illustration to demonstrate that it is not taking something away from others to extend mercy to her. Crumbs that fall from a table feed the pets below even as the people at the table continue to eat.

Always Seeking Mercy
This woman’s faith is like the faith of the psalmist, who continually praises God while asking over and over again for mercy. Take a few minutes and ask volunteers to read some or all of these Psalms aloud: Psalm 6, Psalm 10, Psalm 13, Psalm 22:1–26, Psalm 27, Psalm 40:11–17, Psalm 102:1–17, Psalm 130.
Action Rooted in Prayer
The witness of the woman in Matthew 15:21–28 is that she held firmly to her faith while speaking up. The link between prayer and action is one of the most important components of our work as women organized for mission. This link is the foundation for faith and speaking up for justice. United Methodist Women has always grounded their work in prayer and study. Members study scripture for personal transformation and to discern how God is calling them to work for the transformation of the world. As women pray, study and act together, they are knit together into a creative and supportive fellowship for the work of mission.

If time permits, read about Lucy Rider Meyer, who exemplified prayer-centered action.

Lucy Rider Meyer founded the Chicago Training School for Home and Foreign Missions in 1885 in order to provide a strong educational foundation for female mission workers in urban settings. Meyer persisted during a time in which women were often not able to access the education necessary to serve the needs of the poor in growing cities. She raised the first $3,000 for the Chicago Training School through small donations, as many women were only able to give a nickel at a time. Students at the school began with prayer and Bible study. Classes in theology, church history, medical training and preschool education methods were taught in the afternoons. Two days each week students were sent out to visit families in the neighborhood, many of whom were immigrant families. The students prayed before they stepped out the door of the school, ready to help with either physical or spiritual needs. The impact of Meyer’s emphasis on piety and social work resulted in thousands of women being equipped to persist in prayer and speaking up for justice. The graduates of the Chicago Training School founded schools, clinics and orphanages, served as missionaries in more than 25 countries, and were part of the first group of women recognized as deaconesses in the Methodist church. Persisting in prayer and speaking up is a powerful foundation for the work of women organized for mission.

Experience Together
Hand each participant a paper “candle.” Ask them to write a word or name on the candle as their prayer. As they do, tell them to recall how candles are lit on Christmas Eve. First one candle is lit in the darkness, one person takes the light and shares it with another, then that person shares, until the whole room is bright with candlelight. Similarly, our prayers enable us to shine the light of God’s mercy in the world. Lighting another person’s candle never takes light away but instead doubles the light. God’s mercy is empowering like this, extending beyond our expectations. Post your prayer candles in your gathering room.

Optional: Watch Segment 1: “Stepping Out of Their Places” on the United Methodist Women DVD.
**Knitted Together Virtually:** Instead of making paper candles, ask participants to bring a candle and matches and a sticky and write their prayer on a sticky note in bold capital letters; they can dim their lights if they like. After reminding the group how candles are lit on Christmas Eve, the facilitator will light her candle first and hold it up as she says her prayer word out loud. Then, she will virtually pass along her flame by calling out the name of one of the participants, who will light her candle, read her prayer, and “pass the flame” to the participant to her right on the screen. The candle lighting will continue until every woman has lit her candle and read her prayer, creating a virtual circle of candlelight and prayer to shine the light of God’s mercy and justice on the world.

**Act Together (15 minutes)**

Day of Giving celebrates the founding of United Methodist Women on March 23 with gifts made to the Legacy Fund, a permanently invested endowment. Earnings from the endowment will forever be a source of income for United Methodist Women. Our gifts to the Legacy Fund build a strong foundation so that future generations will be in service with and as advocates for the rights of women, children and youth.

**Ways to Give:**

**Online:** unitedmethodistwomen.org/legacyfund

**Phone:** 1-800-278-7771 (9 a.m. to 5 p.m., EST, Monday–Friday)

**Check:** United Methodist Women,
475 Riverside Drive, 15th Floor,
New York, NY 10115:
Attn: Legacy Fund/Day of Giving in memo section

**Text-to-Give/ Mobile Phone:** 41444 and enter “Legacy 150” in the message box
Knit Together for Your Community Project
(5 minutes, or as long as you want to stay!)

Add celebration squares to your Knit Together project. Use colors that signify celebration or remind you of United Methodist Women.

As you add the squares, recall the history of the fisherman’s gansey, a single-color knit pullover sweater worn by British fishermen. These pullovers were knit by the fisherman’s family, tightly woven and elaborately patterned, in Guernsey wool. Often young women who were learning to knit were assigned the easier parts, with mothers and older sisters knitting the patterned stitches, shoulders and neck. In this way, the work was shared among the group, resulting in a garment that protected the wearer from cold winds and water spray as they worked. The combined work of the women helped to teach younger women, passing on essential skills, and helped to bind the family together in a common project.

Your Knit Together project can also provide opportunities for skilled knitters to work alongside novice knitters, as well as opportunities for prayer together. If you have not yet invited someone to sit and knit with you, find a woman who is not yet in United Methodist Women and invite her to knit with you, to pray with you, and to join in the work of women organized for mission.

Closing Litany (3 minutes)

One voice: Let us cry out to God, who created us for justice and joy.
Many voices: We are God’s people, who must be about the work of mission in our day. Come, Lord Jesus!

One voice: We thank you Lord, for prayer and study that challenge our assumptions.
Many voices: We thank you Lord, for your Word that breaks open our hearts, that leads us to see with your eyes, that inspires us to be more persistent in speaking up.

One voice: We thank you for our foremothers, who stepped out of their places for the sake of mission.
Many voices: We thank you for their witness and their work. We thank you for the opportunity to lay a strong foundation for the women yet to come, women who will also witness to your love and grace.

One voice: We thank you for the company of the saints, who sing with you in glory.
Many voices: Strengthen our resolve to persist in prayer and action. We are witnesses to your mercy and splendor. We will not keep silent. We will speak up! Amen.
Beyond the Program

- Persisting in prayer can be challenging. Have you ever partnered with another woman to help encourage each other in daily prayer? What resources have you found helpful in daily prayer (print devotionals, daily prayer books or apps, podcasts, the Prayer Calendar, Bible studies in response magazine or spiritual formation studies)?
- Lucy Rider Meyer made Bible study the foundational course for missionary women in the Chicago Training School. How have your Bible studies helped you to be aware of the needs in your community? How have your Bible studies helped you to be ready to speak up for justice?
- Invite a deaconess or home missioner to speak to your group about their spiritual and educational formation. Ask them about their work and how being part of a strong spiritual community has helped them to be persistent in faith and action for mission.
- Alternatively, watch a YouTube video by one of our deaconesses:
  - Fran Lynch: youtube.com/watch?v=240Y9QwUoa8
  - Clara Ester: youtube.com/watch?v=YgtHgE6TlvE

Endnote