United Methodist Women

Program Book
2017–2018

Sacred Spaces:
Encounters with God and Neighbor
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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.
Sacred spaces are not only places of religious significance but sacred because of the interactions that take place between God and humans there. In the Bible, some of these encounters occur in physical locations. For example, Moses met God in the burning bush and God asked Moses to remove his sandals because the ground had become hallowed through God’s presence. The encounter resulted in God calling Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. For others, like Jacob and Hannah, that God encounter happened in their inner beings. Each encounter helps the person to see God clearly. When we interact with God, we learn something about ourselves and we discover God’s purposes for our lives. So, too, our encounters with people become sacred when we consider that humans bear God’s image and are recipients of God’s love and grace.

The programs will explore sacred spaces where you can experience God and neighbor. As Christ’s disciples, we are entrusted with creating spaces of wholeness and abundance for all.

Features

Take a moment to review the following features of this year’s program book and make the programs your own!

Title/Month
Each program has a title for quick reference to help you plan the program’s promotion for that month.
Objective
The objective gives an overview of what participants can expect from the program. You can use this objective to promote the program among women in the church who do not regularly attend meetings and to invite other friends.

Preparation
This section will give you a list of materials you will need to collect and actions you will need to take prior to the program, including who should be asked to help lead the program.

Centering
Setup: A focal point for each program is provided. This might be suggestions for a type of place to meet or for some item(s) to be set up in the center or front of the room. Alternatively, you may decide to create PowerPoint slides depicting similar images. It is just important to place the focal point in a place where everyone can see it. The suggestions for this are simple. Add cloths and other items as appropriate.

Sound: Each month suggestions will be made for “a sacred sound” you can use to complement the theme of the month. Match the sound to the theme when you can, but you might also decide to use the same sound for each program.

Art for Reflection
Each program includes a coloring page. You have permission to copy these pages. The purpose of this coloring activity is to pause and listen. You may have women work on the art as they listen to scripture or distribute the art pages at the end of the program so that women can color as they reflect on scripture at home.

Turning to the Bible and Time for Reflection
This section includes readings from the Bible, reflections and questions. Reflections are written to expand the interpretation, knowledge or application of the scripture presented. You may summarize the reflections and present them in your own voice, or you may choose to read the entire section. Either way, do your best to connect our real lives to what the Bible says.

Allow 7–10 minutes for this section.
Experience Hall
This section will allow you to explore the topic using hands-on activities for a multifaceted learning experience.

Allow 15 minutes for this section.

Call to Action
This section invites you to participate in action and advocacy with United Methodist Women. You can use the opportunities and strategies listed here, or develop your own for ongoing work.

Allow five minutes for this section.

Prayers, Hymns, and Closing Litanies
Programs include prayers to encourage us to be open to encounters with God and neighbor. Closing litanies are designed to sum up the program. Songs and hymn suggestions are listed; you may use these or choose your own.

Allow five minutes for this section.

Appendix
You will find handouts with supplemental scripture readings for each program listed by month in the appendix. These optional handouts may be copied and shared with those who wish to deepen their biblical understanding of any of the program topics.

Special Programs
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: www.unitedmethodistwomen.org.

May these programs encourage you to have life-changing experiences with God and neighbor so that new sacred spaces may be created for all people.
Julie Taylor

Julie Taylor is the executive director of the National Farm Worker Ministry, a faith-based organization that brings support to U.S. farmworkers as they organize for better wages, decent living and working conditions and safety. She spent 13 years on their board before taking this position in September 2015. Prior to that Taylor worked for United Methodist Women, first as the executive for child and family advocacy. In this position, she directed United Methodist Women’s initiative on domestic violence, in partnership with United Methodist Men, and addressed public education, child labor, farm worker conditions, reproductive justice and older women’s concerns. Taylor’s most recent role with United Methodist Women was serving as the executive for spiritual growth; her responsibilities included resourcing spiritual growth, fostering spiritual and theological foundations for the work of United Methodist Women, assisting with leadership training and helping to produce the spiritual growth studies each year. She received a master’s degree in Christian spiritual formation and leadership from Spring Arbor University, MI, and has a bachelor’s degree in Christian education from Asbury University, KY. Originally from Eclectic, AL, Taylor currently lives in Raleigh, NC.
Shanta Bryant Gyan

A lifelong United Methodist, Shanta Bryant Gyan is a writer, editor and communications strategist based in the Washington, D.C., area. Gyan has worked with leading international organizations, where she writes and develops resources, such as advocacy guides, policy briefings, manuals and marketing materials. She also has extensive experience in website, newsletter, newspaper, and magazine writing and editing. She was previously the program director of communications for the General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church. She’s been a writer for response magazine and United Methodist News Service and she has served as a communications consultant to United Methodist Women and the General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church for more than 20 years. She launched her career as a reporter for the All Africa Press Service, a newswire published by the Nairobi, Kenya-based All Africa Conference of Churches.

Gyan received a B.S. in journalism from Boston University and pursued graduate studies at the American University in Washington, D.C.
Creation: A Sacred Encounter with God

Objective

To reflect on the sacred encounter between God and humanity in creation and to explore ways to become a supportive multigenerational community of United Methodist Women members.

Preparation

Materials

Gather the following items to use during the program:

- Blank colored index cards
- Buttons
- Colored markers
- Copies of the coloring page and colored pencils for each participant (optional)
- Terra-cotta pots, 8½ inches in diameter
- Mint seeds
- Craft glue
- Ribbon (in a variety of colors)
- Scissors
- Soil and small shovels or spoons for scooping it
- Tablecloth to protect work surface from dirt

Participants

Before the meeting, ask individual women to help with the following roles:

- Welcome people as they walk through the door.
- Lead the opening and closing prayers.
- Lead the Bible study, reflection and other activities.
Centering

**setup:** Consider holding your meeting at a picnic area in a local park or community garden or in your church courtyard, if available. If you hold the programs in a person’s home, their garden, patio or other outdoor space could be used in milder weather. If the meeting is indoors, create a focal point, such as a bouquet of flowers, a potted plant, a scenic painting or photo, a collection of natural items like shells or greenery or pine cones, etc., in the front or center of your meeting space. Alternatively, you may decide to create a PowerPoint presentation of inspirational nature photos.

**sound:** For this month’s sacred sound, bring in the sound of wind, waves, a flowing stream or crickets. If you have a smartphone, you may be able to find a recording of these sounds in one of the many free white noise apps that are available. If you cannot locate an appropriate soundtrack, fill a large pitcher with water and pour it into a bowl during the “Pause for the Sacred Sound,” so that participants can enjoy the sound of rushing water.

**Program**

Sing

“In the Garden,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 314, first verse only

Pause for the Sacred Sound . . .

Turning to the Bible

What has been your most amazing experience with nature?

*Allow a moment for everyone to reflect and then invite them to share the experience in a few words with the large group. Allow only a few minutes for this exercise.*
Answers could include experiences such as rainbows, waterfalls, whale or dolphin/porpoise watching, fireflies/lightning bugs, mountains, butterflies, waves, childbirth, flowers, etc.

*If you choose, invite everyone to work on their coloring pages as they reflect on the following scripture.*

**Read the Creation Story**

*Genesis 1:1–31*

**Time for Reflection**

*Summarize or read the following:*

Genesis 1 tells us that everything that God created was good!

Chapters 2 and 3 of Genesis bring the creation story closer to us.

*Invite someone to read Genesis 2:4–9; 2:19; 2:22. Afterwards, repeat the excerpted parts below for emphasis:*

- “The Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east . . .” (Genesis 2:8).
- “So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air . . .” (Genesis 2:19).
- “And the rib that the Lord God had taken from man he made into a woman . . .” (Genesis 2:22).

This is a God who loves deeply. This encounter between God and humanity is sacred and loving. Can you think of things you have formed with your hands? A craft? A meal? A gift? A flower arrangement? Something you built?

These memories help us connect to God’s strong attachment to creation, and they are a reminder of how God formed us and all of creation. God’s ability to create something from nothing goes beyond our comprehension and calls us to
a sense of awe and love for the sacredness of all God has made. It also helps connect us to creation, so we can see our small role as co-creators with God in our efforts to build, design, assemble, plant, tend or love.

Genesis 3 tells us about the first sin, the fall of humanity, when our choices resulted in excluding ourselves from God’s sacred companionship. It also gives us another glimpse of the sacred space shared by God and creation.

Ask someone to read these selected verses (Genesis 3:8; 3:9–13). When they are finished, repeat the excerpted parts below for emphasis:

- “They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden” (Genesis 3:8).
- “But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ . . . ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?’ . . . ‘What is this that you have done?’” (Genesis 3:9–13).

Can you recall a time when you were disobedient to God and acted in ways that led to separation from God?

God’s disappointment here is palpable, but so is the love. Verse 3:21 says God made garments for Adam and Eve. What a caring, loving thing to do. Their nakedness did not affect God, but God responded to how it affected them. As a result of their sin, God cast Adam and Eve out of the garden but God did not kill them, despite the warning in verse 2:17. This is God’s first demonstration of forgiveness and it showed how God made a way for humanity to continue despite their disobedience.

In this encounter with God, we see an immense love and commitment to the sacredness of creation. In it we take solace that God’s love, while not ignoring our sin, helps us transcend it. It is in this special relationship that we are restored, and the work of grace is begun. God continues to seek us. Cast out from Eden, the gardening would be harder but it would not be impossible.

Have you known the relief and restoration of forgiveness?
Creation connects us to our Creator and offers us the opportunity to encounter God in that sacred space. In the midst of everything created, we are sacred and the sacredness of the earth helps us hear God speaking to us and to all of God’s “good” work. That is why recognizing the majesty of our Creator in creation is a spiritual discipline that we should practice frequently.

Prayer
The joy of your presence is in the magnificence of your creation, O God. It is too awesome for words to express, and yet we try. Thank you for making your love obvious in all that you have made. We see this beauty and goodness in ourselves as well. You have made all of creation sacred. We are sacred. In nature, we encounter your presence and it sanctifies us. In the air, we breathe your Spirit. In the water, we taste your goodness. In the earth, we smell your nurture. In the skies, we see your splendor. In the wind, we hear your presence. In each other, we feel your love. All of creation screams of your grace. Amen.

NOTE: For additional readings about how creation connects us to God see the Appendix for this program.

Experience Hall
Reflect on the creation story in chapters 2 and 3 of Genesis. Discuss how God made the world and everything in it. Make a connection to the creation story by sharing that God expects us to care for creation and for others.

How can we be like Christ and show love and concern for others? How can we be co-creators with God in our efforts to plant, tend or love?

For the program, intergenerational groups can decorate terra-cotta pots and grow mint from seeds during the fall season. In the spring, after the mint plants have blossomed, the group can give the plants and the recipe for mint tea to the residents of a retirement center or to the sick or shut-ins from their congregations. Each participant should follow the steps below to plant the mint and reflect on today’s study:
1. Put soil in the terra-cotta pot. As the group adds the soil, they can share personal reflections on the creation story.

2. Plant the seeds in the pot. Ask group members to make a connection between gardening and the creation story.

3. Write the mint tea recipe on a colored index card and decorate it.

Afterwards, the group can discuss where they will give the gift of the mint plants and tea recipe.

Each person will take home a mint plant, which should be placed by a sunny window and watered regularly over several months. In the spring, each member of the group can decorate their pot with colorful paint and ribbons. The decorating could be done individually at home, or you can set aside extra time during a monthly program to do it together.

Dedicate a day for a group trip to deliver the potted gifts. By offering the gift of a mint plant, your group will connect others to God’s creation and enable them to have an encounter with God.

Write on the Colored Index Cards:

Side One:

**Mint Tea Recipe**

- 12–14 fresh mint leaves
- 1 cup water
- 5 teaspoons sugar or honey

**Directions:** Crush the mint leaves and place them in the water. Bring the water to a boil. Pour the boiling water and mint over the sugar. Let steep for five minutes. Strain the tea into a cup. Enjoy!
Scripture: Genesis 2:4b–9

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground—then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Call to Action

Building a community and fellowship of women of all ages who will know and serve God is the foundation of the United Methodist Women Purpose statement. An intergenerational ministry can be a perfect opportunity for newly retired women, teen groups and other groups in your church to share fellowship, build friendships, and engage in nurturing and caring for God’s creation together through a community garden.

In the beginning, God created a garden. In our Bible study, we reflected on how nature connects us to God and offers an opportunity to express our faith and interact with God’s creation. Newly retired women and teen groups can recognize the “majesty of our Creator in creation” by starting a community garden.

The community garden could involve planting vegetables or fruits to be consumed by the congregation and surrounding community or a flower garden to
beautify the church grounds. By committing to start a community garden, new retirees, teen groups and others can meet once or twice a week to learn gardening skills and experience the tremendous joy and satisfaction of tending a garden and nurturing it until it produces the fruits of their labor. Through gardening, the fellowship will become co-creators with God and foster deeper connections across generations as they work side by side to plant, water, weed and share in God’s bountiful harvest.

Deepening Our Commitment

Apply United Methodist Women’s 13 Sustainability Principles to Program Book gatherings.

As United Methodist Women, we are called to protect and serve God’s creation. United Methodist Women members are invited to apply the organization’s 13 Sustainability Principles to your gatherings.

United Methodist Women have outlined 13 principles for planning sustainable gatherings. When we plan a gathering using sustainability principles, we faithfully commit to doing our part to protect God’s sacred spaces.

You can access a practical guide to the Sustainability Principles on the United Methodist Women website (www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/sustainability) to help your group incorporate the 13 principles into gatherings for the 12 monthly programs. Your group can aim to select one principle a month and apply it to organizing your gatherings.
Closing Litany

Leader: Creator of All, our time together has helped us focus on nature where your presence is made more manifest.

ALL: In your creation, O God, we see your face, your very being. When we do, we recognize how very small we are and how connected we are with all of creation. We also recognize that we are sacred and beloved by you.

Leader: The earth is sacred too. Its grandeur is a call to your majesty.

ALL: We celebrate the sacredness of this world’s air, water and land. Ours is a call to care for the environment and each other.

Leader: In the sacredness of creation we are pulled closer to you, O God.

ALL: Help us to take time to look at the world around us, to look for your face, to feel your Spirit, to hear your grace, to smell your provision, to taste your goodness.

Together: Amen.