

PLEDGE TO MISSION SERVICE 2018

Sacred Places with God and Neighbors

By Estella Wallace*

Objective

To recognize personal sacred spaces and expand support to include people in the community and around the world with whom we have a distant connection.

Preparation

As you prepare, know your audience and pray for discernment.

Focus: We pledge because we care and know that, collectively, our money and talents can do so much for mission around the world as well as in our neighborhoods.

Materials

Gather the following items to use during the program:

For the focus table:

- ✿ Copies of the program pages for each woman
- ✿ Four tea lights or votive candles
- ✿ Items/pictures or signs to symbolize the priority areas. The following topics are suggestions but you are not limited to them:
 - Climate justice
 - Mass incarceration

- Maternal and child health
- Economic inequality
- ✿ Items/pictures that represent home
- ✿ Items/pictures that represent the local area and community
- ✿ Offering basket
- ✿ Six-foot table with neutral-colored tablecloth
- ✿ Standalone cross that is tall or a standalone cross that can be raised
- ✿ Two pieces of string, yarn or thin cord (one 5 feet, the other 7 feet long)

Additional items:

- ✿ Bibles: United Methodist Women Bible (NRSV) and Contemporary English Version (CEB)
- ✿ Copies of pictures from *The Girl Under the Bridge* by Faye Wilson (optional)
- ✿ Copies of **response** and the Prayer Calendar that can be cut up
- ✿ Pledge to Mission Cards, found online at www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/donate/resources
- ✿ Scissors
- ✿ *The United Methodist Hymnal* and *The Faith We Sing*
- ✿ Two pads of small sticky notes in two different colors

Participants

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

- ✿ Call, text, or e-mail those who will attend to remind them that this is a pledge service and that pledge cards/gifts will be given at this gathering. Also to ask attendees to bring symbols or pictures of home, family and/or their neighborhoods.
- ✿ Read the scripture (two readers are needed).
- ✿ Lead songs and accompany singing and prayer time on a musical instrument.

Room Setup

The focus table may be placed as part of the circle of women or at the front of the meeting space. To set up, center the cross at the back of the table. Use the

5-foot string to create a semicircular area at the front of the cross where family items will be placed. Next use the 7-foot string to create a semicircle for neighborhood items. The final area, closest to the front of the table, represents the world. Divide this area into quadrants where a symbol/sign/picture of mission focus and a lit candle will be placed.

PROGRAM

Opening

Welcome the group and direct the participants to place the items they brought on the focus table in the area that best applies to the object.

Leader: I invite you to take a deep breath. Breathe in and breathe out. Let us center ourselves in silent prayer as we prepare our hearts for a time of sharing and reflection.

Pause.

Leader: Together, United Methodist Women members will be a community whose Purpose . . .

ALL: Is to know God and to experience freedom as whole persons through Jesus Christ.

Leader: Together we will,

ALL: Develop a creative, supportive, fellowship.

Leader: Together we will,

ALL: Expand concepts of mission through participation in the global ministries of the church.

Leader: Together we will,

ALL: Love God and our neighbor as we do ourselves.





Prayer (unison)

Gracious and generous God, we are here because you created us. We are in this time and place as women who seek justice for all. With knowledge comes responsibility. Uniting our resources allows us to help those in our communities and around the world. Thank you for this fellowship of women. Thank you for what you have entrusted into our care. Thank you for the ability and opportunity to share our gifts. By trusting in you we gladly share through our pledge so that others may have hope and opportunities through our gifts. In your precious name we pray, amen.

Sing

“Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 400

Bible Study and Reflection

First Reader reads Genesis 28:10–22 (NRSV).

Ask the group to reflect on these verses and discuss the following questions with a neighbor. Ensure everyone has sticky notes of the same color for their response to the first question.

- ✿ Where is your own sacred place, a place where you have wrestled with God and found peace? Was that place at home, in your community or out in the world? Place a sticky note on the focus table to represent where that space is located.
- ✿ Have you built a kind of monument to that sacred place?
- ✿ Is your thankfulness to God conditional, like Jacob’s? Do you expect protection, food, clothing and safety before you commit to God’s work in the world?

Second Reader reads Luke 1:26–38 (CEB).

Ask the group to reflect on these verses and discuss the following questions with a neighbor. Ensure everyone has sticky notes of the same color (the second color) for their response to the second question.

- ✿ An angel of the Lord came to Mary saying, “Rejoice, favored one!” How have you been favored by the Lord?
- ✿ Mary found that she had been chosen to do God’s work. What is the work God has given to you? Write it on a sticky note and place it in the corresponding space on the focus table.
- ✿ How do you live out the truth that “Nothing is impossible with God”?

Leader: Let us pray, Loving One, expand our vision and help us to love your people, your world, and our communities unconditionally. Let your will be done. Let us be as Mary, saying, “Let it be.” Amen.

We encourage you to make time for prayer while listening to appropriate musical selections. Reflect on how you can expand your sacred places or your pledge to include those that will benefit from your generosity.

Sacred Space: Encounters with God and Neighbor Through Our Work

Explore issues of **response** and the Prayer Calendar through the lens of sacred spaces. What common themes are found in the stories you read in **response**, the mission witness in the Prayer Calendar and in your own sacred stories? How do they relate to the stories of Jacob and Mary? What other biblical stories come to mind? Cut out pictures of women with dreams and stories similar to your own and place them in the corresponding area of the focus table.

As we add to the table what do we see?





What's Next?

Leader: So often we give to large organizations and cannot see where our gifts are used. Through United Methodist Women, we connect our own stories with similar stories from around the globe. We know that when we pledge to United Methodist Women, our money goes directly to help women and children all over the world. We may never meet those we support; yet we feel the connection through United Methodist Women. As you prayerfully fill out your pledge card imagine those whose lives will be touched by your gift.

Allow time to fill out the pledge cards.

PRAYER (unison)

Generous and gracious God, we give you thanks for the sacred stories in our scriptures and in our lives. We ask for the wisdom to remember that we have been given much. We ask for the faith required to give freely without expectation of thanks and praise. Today, we have remembered those sacred places of encounter in our lives and are grateful that we might provide a similar space for others. Give us grateful hearts that we might shine your light. Amen.

Leader: While singing our closing hymn, please come forward and place your envelope in the basket on the focus table.

Sing

“Give Thanks,” *The Faith We Sing*, no. 2036

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