

2017 CHRISTIAN HOME MONTH

PLANNING RESOURCES FOR CONGREGATIONS & CONFERENCES



Families: Many Forms, Living Faithfully! Called to Love

The *Christian Home Month* resource is for family ministry leaders, ministry teams, and council chairpersons/coordinators in local congregations. It is designed to help local congregations develop and strengthen faith in the home and to celebrate Christian Home Month.

Although Christian Home Month is typically celebrated during the month of May, congregations may choose any month of the year to focus on the Christian home and its key role as a center for faith formation.

Our theme for 2017 is: “Families Called to Love.” Over the past months, through the tumult of the presidential election in The United States and the establishment of a new administration, children, youth, and adults have at times felt excluded, concerned with the deep differences dividing the country, angry at those with whom they disagree, caught up in name-calling and loss of civility. At times, it may seem that we have forgotten how to cast the wide net of love that Jesus challenges us to cast upon the world.

It’s fitting to go to Scripture for key verses that ground us in love. Look at Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Here we are reminded to love God and to keep these words throughout the day in visible ways. Through Jesus’ words in John 13:34-35, we hear the commandment to love one another. As we are called to show love individually, we are called as disciples to show love in our homes and with those we call family. And

as we act with love toward those in our family, we are challenged to act in love with those in our communities and in the world.

This downloadable PDF includes worship service resources, a retreat plan, and devotional activities for families as they foster a climate of love in their homes. We trust you will find something in this resource that will inspire, encourage, and affirm you as you continue in the important work of family ministries.

Rev. MaryJane Pierce Norton
Retired Staff, Discipleship Ministries

CHRISTIAN HOME MONTH QUADRENNIAL THEMES 2017-2020

2017: Families Called to Love
2018: Families Called to Peace
2019: Families Called to Justice
2020: Families Called to Hope

 **DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES**
The United Methodist Church

EQUIPPING WORLD-CHANGING DISCIPLES
UMCdiscipleship.org

CALLED TO LOVE: WORSHIP SERVICE RESOURCES

*The following helps are suggested for use in worship for celebrating Christian Home Month or Family Life Sunday as part of a worship service. For additional resources, see *The United Methodist Book of Worship*.*

Call to Worship

Leader: We come together to praise God who is the source of our life and our love.

People: We lift our voices in praise for God who loves us always.

Leader: We come to celebrate and support families who practice love in their homes and communities.

People: We lift our voices in thanks for the love we feel in our families.

Leader: We come praying for families who feel no love for themselves or for others.

People: We lift our voices in sorrow for those who hurt because of the actions of others.

ALL: Let us worship, trusting in God's love and mercy. Praise be to God!

Hymns

(Choose which hymns most fit your worship service)

- "Jesus Loves Me," 191, *The United Methodist Hymnal*
- "The Gift of Love," 408, *UMH*
- "Blest Be the Tie that Binds," 557, *UMH*
- "When Love Is Found," 643, *UMH*
- "The Summons," 2130, *The Faith We Sing (TFWS)*
- "Come! Come! Everybody Worship," 2271, *TFWS*
- "Fill Us with Your Love, O Lord," 3005, *Worship & Song (W&S)*
- "Love Lifted Me," 3101, *W&S*
- "Welcome," 3152, *W&S*

Scripture Readings

Lectionary readings for the day may be used, or you may choose from the following:

- Old Testament: Deuteronomy 6:4-9
- Psalter: Psalm 85, *UMH* 806
- Gospel: John 13:34-35
- Epistle: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Prayer for Families

Gracious God, who created all of humankind and showed to us the importance of relationships with one another, we commend to your care all the families of this congregation, community, and world.

We pray that each home may be a home where love is felt. We pray for homes where, instead of love, hurt, abuse, and suffering abide. We pray for children, youth, and adults, recognizing the importance of and the gift of every age as we grow. May your grace be present to all.

Grant us wisdom to know where there is no love, courage to act out of love for others, and peace to trust in your grace. Help us to live so that the commandments of love for you and love for others are shown in the ways we live together. Amen.

A Litany for Families

Leader: Gracious God, you created us to dwell in community. We thank you for the witness of families in the Scriptures who help us know we do not have to be perfect to receive your love.

People: Help us remember the witness of the Scriptures, O God.

Leader: You created us to follow your laws. We thank you for the commandments to love you and to love others.

People: Help us recall your words of love, O God.

Leader: You gave us Jesus to teach us ways to live in community with one another.

People: Help us follow the path that Jesus has shown, O God.

Leader: You created us to act in ways that help those around us know the true meaning of love.

People: Help us act upon your words of love, O God.

Leader: For all families, bless us in our lifelong quest to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

People: Hear our prayer, O God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

CALLED TO LOVE: FAMILY DEVOTIONAL TIMES

FAMILY DEVOTION. Prepare a gathering place for family worship. Create a centerpiece on the table where you eat your meals or in another area of your home where you can gather as a family. Include a candle, the words “Love God, Love Others” written and placed next to the candle, and items that remind you of God. During your time of devotions, follow this worship sequence:

- **Praise:** Praise God with a song, or simply start your time saying together, “We Praise God.”
- **Prayer:** Use a family prayer or say the Lord’s Prayer. Hold hands as you pray.
- **Reading:** Read a Scripture passage of your choice, a short devotional passage from *The Upper Room Daily Devotional Guide*, or another devotion of your choice.
- **Reflection:** Ask each person to answer these questions, “What was your favorite part of this Scripture or devotion? What have you learned from this Scripture or devotion? What actions do you think we need to take because of this Scripture or devotion?”
- **Sharing:** Family members share joys, concerns, and prayers for themselves and others.
- **Blessing:** Use a hymn such as the “Doxology” or “Blest Be the Tie that Binds” to end your time together. Or use a simple dismissal, saying together, “God be with you” or “God’s love surrounds you.”

FAMILY NIGHT. Set aside a regular time for sharing family fun activities together. You could do the same activity each time (play board games, cook special treats, volunteer as a family in service to others, learn about people who live different lives from yours). Or each family night could be planned by a different family member, with the activity based on agreed-upon criteria.

LOVING OTHERS. Identify people in your community who are in need of knowing God’s love (someone who has just lost a family member, someone struggling in school, someone new to your community, someone who can no longer drive a car, someone who is sick). Each month, make cards together to send to those who need to know God’s love; or, as a family, visit someone from your church or your community who is alone and needs to know there are those who care about him or her.

LEARN ABOUT PEOPLE WHO MAY BE PERSECUTED BY OTHERS. In recent weeks, there have been increasing numbers of hate crimes by groups and individuals. Such hateful acts have included desecrating cemeteries, writing hateful words on buildings, hurting those different from themselves. Talk about these hard issues. Read together stories in the media; then ask, “How would God want us to act in this situation? What would ‘loving God and loving others’ look like in this situation?” As a family, decide on

actions that you might take, such as: visiting in houses of worship different from your own, writing to officials, or joining others in your community to provide food or clothing to those hurt by hateful actions.

REFRIGERATOR REMINDERS. Post on the refrigerator a Scripture passage, a line from a hymn or song, an inspirational thought, or a brief prayer. Change the reminder each Saturday. Place this at a level that all in the family can see when they open the refrigerator door.

SCRIPTURE/PRAYER/THOUGHT-FOR-THE-DAY CARDS. Buy a spiral notebook of index cards; write a favorite Scripture verse, short prayer, or thought for the day about love on each card. Illustrate each card. Each day, turn over one of the cards to reveal the Scripture verse, short prayer, or thought for the day to read aloud.

IDEA STARTERS FOR CONVERSATIONS AROUND THE TABLE OR AT ANY TIME:

- What did Jesus mean in saying, “Love your neighbor as yourself”?
- Name a kindness you would describe as an act of love. What other kindness could be described as an act of love?
- Talk about an experience when you realized that God loves you.
- Which “random act of kindness” expresses for you a good example of expressing God’s love: Feeding a stray animal, sitting by someone you do not really like and having a conversation, taking out the trash when not asked to do so? Why is this a good example?
- Talk about a time when you did not feel loved.
- What is one of your first memories of being loved?
- What are some loving experiences you have had at church – in Sunday school, worship, on retreat, during a special program?
- Complete one of these sentences (and create your own):
God is with me when....
A person I know who shares God’s love is....
My favorite story about love in the Bible is....
I would like to tell stories about Jesus to....
A favorite memory about church is....
The best church retreat ever was when.....
If I preached a sermon, it would be about....
I like to be with my family when we.....

ESTABLISH A FAMILY COVENANT FOR LOVE. This covenant can be renewed every three months; however, the basic elements of the covenant stay intact. The promise of love, forgiveness, acceptance, truthfulness, growth, and witness is the basis of the covenant. This leads to peaceful family living.

■ CALLED TO LOVE: RETREAT MODEL

Planning for the Retreat

1. The congregation prays for the retreat, the participants, and the team that will plan the retreat.
2. A retreat planning team is created, made up of six to eight people in the congregation.
 - The retreat team meets and plans the retreat:
 - Chooses a date and secures a location
 - Decides on the retreat schedule, including times for prayer and worship
 - Prepares a budget
 - Recruits leaders
 - Arranges all food needs
 - Plans an offering for an organization in the community that helps families in need
 - Designs a flyer that includes a registration form and information about fees, dates, and location.
3. Publicity and promotion. Someone from the team prepares information and distributes it through the church newsletter, e-newsletters, worship bulletins, bulletin boards, and other avenues in the congregation. Regular notices with sign-up forms should appear beginning six months prior to the retreat and leading up to the week prior to the retreat.
4. The team collects the following supplies: songbooks/sheets; Bibles; a copy of *The Boy and the Ocean* by Max Lucado, along with other children's books about love; board games; sports equipment; one poster board per small group; magazines, scissors, glue; modeling clay or Play-Doh for each small group; one large paper bag for each small group, each containing three sheets of construction paper, a roll of masking or painter's tape, six markers of assorted colors, a skein of yarn, scissors, four paper plates, and six plastic cups.

Friday

4:00–6:00 P.M. – Registration

6:30–7:00 P.M. – Dinner (A served meal or bring-your-own-bag supper)

7:15–7:30 P.M. – Gathering Time. Share announcements and opening prayer. Sing familiar camp songs, favorite hymns, and praise choruses.

7:30–9:00 P.M. – Divide participants into “family” groups of four to six people (mixing up actual family members with others in the congregation). Ask each group to come up with stories it enjoys that illustrate love for God and/or love for others. Each group should have one story for each category:

(1) Old Testament story; (2) New Testament story; (3) Story about a church member or of something that happened in the church; and (4) Favorite folk story or a story from a book or movie. After the family groups have agreed upon the four stories they would like to share with the larger group, they need to decide on three pieces of information from each story that they can give to the larger group to help them guess the stories. For instance, if the group's story from the Old Testament is “Noah and the Ark,” the three pieces of information could be: (1) A dove is important in this story; (2) An extended family was involved in this story; (3) The rainbow is a sign of a promise given in this story.

When the total group gathers, each family group can lead in getting the other family groups to guess the stories.

9:00–9:30 P.M. – Read *The Boy and the Ocean* by Max Lucado to the group. After reading, ask for several people to share their thoughts and feelings about the story and what it has to say about love. Lead the group in a time of prayer, sharing joys and concerns; then sing together.

9:30–10:00 P.M. – Snack and Game Time. Share snacks. Have board games available, music to listen to, other activities for all ages. If the setting allows, have a campfire or take a flashlight walk.

Saturday

8:00–9:00 A.M. – Breakfast

9:00–9:30 A.M. – Morning Worship. Lead the group in singing, Scripture, and prayer.

9:30–10:30 A.M. – Ask the participants to reassemble in the same “family groups” as the previous night. Provide a Bible for each group. Distribute the paper sacks with the items prepared in them. Ask each family group to choose either an Old Testament story or a New Testament story from the night before. The groups are then to use the items provided in the paper bags as props for retelling the story they selected to the larger group.

10:30–11:00 A.M. – Break

11:00–11:30 A.M. – Ask the groups to present their Bible stories.

NOON–1:00 P.M. – Lunch

1:00–5:30 P.M. – Afternoon fun. Encourage naps. Provide walking/hiking trail maps, recreational/sports equipment, arts and crafts materials.

5:30–6:30 P.M. – Dinner

6:30–7:30 P.M. – Ask the participants to reassemble in their “family groups.” Ask each group to go back to the

story it chose regarding the church or a church member. Ask each group to create scenes or a picture illustrating the story on the poster board provided. Instruct the family groups to lift up ways the story illustrates the love that is found in your church.

7:30–8:15 P.M. – Gather the groups together and allow the family groups to share the pictures or scenes of love they have created.

8:15–8:30 P.M. – Break

8:30–9:00 P.M. – Lead the group in sharing and praying about their joys and concerns. Ask those who wish to name a song, or a Scripture verse, or something they have seen this day that helped them understand God’s love and how we share God’s love with others.

Sunday

8:00–9:00 A.M. – Breakfast

9:00–10:00 A.M. – Closing Worship

10:00–11:00 A.M. – Clean-up and Journey Home

CONGREGATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR CHRISTIAN HOME MONTH

- For congregational planners, reprint the “Family Devotional Times” material in your church newsletter, or place it on your website. List one suggestion a month. Ask families who followed the suggestion to write about their experience (or tell you about it). Create a “We Did It!” column in your newsletter or on your website and feature what these families did in following through with the suggestions.
- Plan a family fun time at church. Include a meal and use the time there to make the refrigerator reminders or Scripture/prayer/thought-of-the-day cards.
- Encourage families to adopt the “Family Covenant for Love” and carry out the practices for at least a month. Suggest a starting day for all in the congregation who want to participate. As part of worship, ask those who intend to live with the covenant to stand. Pray for the families. On the ending date, ask all families who lived with the covenant to stand. Recognize each family by name and join in singing the Doxology to voice your thanks to God for their efforts.

FAMILY COVENANT FOR LIVING TOGETHER IN LOVE

Create a covenant together as you promise to grow in love for God and others. Every month, take time to ask, “How have we lived into our covenant?” Celebrate how you have shown God’s love for one another. Then make any changes that might be needed for the next month.

This covenant will be in effect from _____ (*beginning date*) to _____ (*ending date*).

In order that our family may be one that promotes love for one another, we promise one another to:

1. Spend time eating, playing, and praying together.
2. Look for ways family members show love to one another and praise one another for loving acts.
3. Learn about organizations that address hurts and needs of families such as: programs addressing abuse in the family; food pantries or home-building projects that show love to those who are without; hospitals and hospice care that provide for families when a loved one is ill. As a family, choose a way to offer service to one of these places.
4. Seek out stories of love at church, in the news, at school, and at work and tell these stories to one another.

Signed by: _____

(All family members sign the covenant.)

CHRISTIAN HOME MONTH: PLANNING CALENDAR

2017

APRIL: Begin plans for observing Christian Home Month in worship, in small-group gatherings, with a churchwide meal, and in homes. Ask families to bring to the church pictures and written statements about how they practice love for God and love for one another at home and in their communities. Use these for the church newsletter and bulletin and to create a bulletin board.

Continue observance of Lent with daily devotions published in your church bulletin or newsletter or placed on your church Facebook page.

Celebrate Easter. Create a flower cross. Make a large cross covered with chicken wire. Invite families to bring Easter flowers from their yards or gardens to church or provide flowers at church. Invite children, youth, and adults to place the flowers on the cross, using the chicken wire to hold the flowers in place. After worship, place the flower cross in front of the church building as a sign of God's love at Easter.

Observe Earth Day on April 22. Join with others in your community to plant trees, clean up a park, or participate in some other community-wide project.

MAY: Carry out plans made for celebrating the Christian home. Recognize women in the congregation who are mothers in families and mothers in faith.

Recognize graduates of high school and college with prayer in worship. Invite graduates to name someone in the congregation who has helped them know more about God's love and how to show God's love to others.

JUNE: Celebrate Pentecost Sunday. Invite congregation members to wear red on June 4. Make a Pentecost bulletin board that includes a poster or drawing of a large tree. Ask individuals and families to add to the tree the

names of those in the congregation who have helped the church grow.

Recognize men in the congregation who are fathers in families and fathers in faith.

Publish a devotional guide for families to use on vacation. Include Scripture, meditations, and prayers.

JULY: Plan a fix-up day at church and invite families to help with beautification projects for the church and the church grounds.

Recruit a leader and set up a brief adult study of *A Gift of Love: Sermons from Strength to Love and Other Preachings* by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Host a "movie under the stars" night on the church grounds for families in your community.

AUGUST: Have an "end of summer" ice cream social. Ask church members to bring school supplies that can be given to local schools for families who cannot afford to buy supplies for their children. Pray in worship for teachers and for students as they begin a new school year. Have a "back to school" Sunday and invite all students to bring their backpacks to worship. Bless the backpacks, students, and teachers as they begin a new school year.

SEPTEMBER: Hold a parenting class for parents and grandparents. Use the Upper Room resource *Parents & Grandparents as Spiritual Guides: Nurturing Children of the Promise* by Betty Shannon Cloyd. Contact local hospitals to identify needs of new parents. Invite congregational members to bring in items needed by the hospitals for new babies and their families.

OCTOBER: Celebrate Children's Sabbath on October 8. Use resources provided by the Children's Defense Fund (<http://childrensdefense.org>).

Host a fall festival for your community.

Include both fun and service opportunities for children, youth, and adults.

NOVEMBER: Provide a bulletin insert with prayers for families to use in celebrating Thanksgiving. Plan resources for celebrating Advent and Christmas in the home. Provide a list of places that need volunteers and that would welcome families volunteering together for Thanksgiving celebrations for those without food and shelter.

DECEMBER: Offer an Advent workshop for families. Invite individuals to bring to the church one Advent/Christmas decoration they use in their home and talk about why the decoration is important to them. Provide a devotional guide for lighting the Advent wreath and praying together at home.

2018

JANUARY: If you haven't yet used the "Family Covenant for Living Together in Love," invite families to do so as a New Year's resolution. Publish a list of "beat the winter doldrums" ideas. Include such ideas as playing board games with the family; telling one another stories of ancestors; having a star-gazing night; picking a favorite Bible story and acting it out.

FEBRUARY: Celebrate Marriage Ministries on the Sunday nearest Valentine's Day. Recognize anniversaries, engagements, and milestones in the lives of couples in the congregation. Sponsor a Pancake Dinner on Tuesday, February 13, before Ash Wednesday on February 14; or encourage families to make pancakes together at home. Observe Ash Wednesday on February 14. Use the Lent resources found at www.UMCdiscipleship.org.

MARCH: During Lent, begin Covenant Discipleship groups with children, youth, and adults. Sponsor a churchwide study on prayer and

together write prayers that focus on love of God and love of others. Print the prayers in your church bulletin; include them in your church newsletter, and post them on your Facebook page.

Use the book *Scrambled Starts: Family Prayers for Morning, Bedtime, and Everytime In-Between* by Jenny Youngman as inspiration for writing a prayer focused on love of God and love of others to be used as part of your Easter Sunday worship on April 1.

APRIL: Celebrate Easter Sunday on April 1. Include the prayer written by your congregation as part of your study on prayer. Hold an Easter egg hunt after worship for all children in attendance.

Observe Earth Day by having an inside and out clean-up day at the church.

Begin preparations for observing Christian Home Month 2018: Families Called to Peace.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES: RECOMMENDED READING

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

- *The Boy and the Ocean* by Max Lucado, paintings by T. Lively Fluharty (Crossway, 2013)
- *God's Paintbrush* by Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, illustrated by Annette Compton (Jewish Lights, 2004)
- *The Golden Rule* by Ilene Cooper, illustrated by Gabi Swiatkowska (Abrams Books, 2007)
- *Growing Everyday Disciples: Covenant Discipleship with Children* by Melanie Gordon, Susan Groseclose & Gayle Quay (Discipleship Resources, 2016)
- *The Three Questions*, based on a story by Leo Tolstoy, written and illustrated by Jon J. Muth (Scholastic Press, 2002)
- *One Good Deed* by Terri Fields, illustrated by Deborah Melmon (Kar-Ben Publishing, 2015)
- *Whoever You Are* by Mem Fox, illustrated by Leslie Staub (HMH Books for Young Readers, 2006)
- *Who's in a Family* by Robert Skutch, illustrated by Laura Neinhaus (Tricycle Press, 1997)

YOUTH BOOKS

- *Everyday Disciples: Covenant Discipleship with Youth* by Chris Wilterdink (Discipleship Resources, 2016)

ADULT BOOKS

- *Disciples Making Disciples: A Guide for Covenant Discipleship Groups and Class Leaders* by Steven W. Manskar (Discipleship Resources, 2016)
- *A Gift of Love, Sermons from Strength to Love and Other Preachings* by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., forward by Coretta Scott King, new forward by the Reverend Dr. Raphael G. Warlock
- *Parents & Grandparents as Spiritual Guides: Nurturing Children of the Promise* by Betty Shannon Cloyd (Upper Room Books, 2000)
- *The Practice of Love: Real Stories of Living into the Kingdom of God*, edited by Jonathan Brink (Civitas Press, 2011)
- *Scrambled Starts: Family Prayers for Morning, Bedtime, and Everything In-Between* by Jenny Youngman (Upper Room Books, 2015)

RESOURCES THAT SUPPORT MINISTRIES WITH FAMILIES

The Christian Home Month Resource, published annually by Discipleship Ministries, is a manual designed for use by leaders with families. Additional resources, ideas, and suggestions for Christian Home Month 2017 and family faith formation can be found online at:

<http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/leadership-resources/intergenerational-family-ministries>

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