

# 2015

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION WEEK

Partners in Faith Formation and Discipleship

## Our Homes and Congregations

I'm reminded of your authentic faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice. I'm sure that this faith is also inside you.

Because of this, I'm reminding you to revive God's gift that is in you through the laying on of my hands.

2 Timothy 1:5, 6  
(Common English Bible)

### *The Purpose of Christian Education*

**Through Christian education we invite people and communities of faith to be transformed as they are inspired and challenged to**

- **Know and experience God through Jesus Christ**
- **Claim and live God's promises, and**
- **Grow and serve as Christian disciples.**

**Foundations: Shaping the Ministry of  
Christian Education in Your Congregation**

“**T**wo heads are better than one.” “It takes a village to raise a child.” “I get by with a little help from my friends.” “**Together Everyone Achieves More.**” These statements (and song lyrics) are just a few of the ways we might describe partnership. While each of us has individual talents and abilities, we often find that our endeavors are more successful when we have the support and encouragement of friends, colleagues, and family members. This is true in the church as much as it is in other aspects of our lives.

The 2015 theme for Christian Education Week focuses on the partnership between congregations and homes in developing Christian faith and discipleship. Our parents or guardians are our first teachers. The values and perspectives we hear es-

poused and see modeled profoundly impact how we perceive God, ourselves, and other people. As we grow and move beyond the boundaries of home, we discover other values and perspectives. Our first response will be to judge them by what we have learned at home.

We live in a world of competing messages. We are bombarded daily with images and words intended to draw us in and shape our worldview. These images and words rarely represent the gospel of Jesus Christ. How do congregations and families learn together to be faithful disciples, following Jesus with integrity and commitment? This is a complex question. You can use Christian Education Week as a starting point for conversation and planning as you explore possible responses.

The materials in this leaflet are designed to help you plan your Christian Education Week/Sunday celebration. Check with your annual conference to determine if a date has been set for this occasion and if the conference receives an offering to support educational ministries in your conference. This celebration can be combined with a “Rally Day,” Promotion Sunday, or Bring a Friend to Church Sunday. It is a great time to dedicate teachers and small-group leaders in worship. Remember to include parents, grandparents, and other guardians in the dedication. However you choose to celebrate, give thanks for the partnership your congregation has with the households of the congregation and community.

# WORSHIP IDEAS

## Call to Worship

One: We have gathered to worship the living God!

All: **It is God who has made us, and not we ourselves.**

One: Let us give thanks to God for God's everlasting love and grace, revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

All: **Thank you for your love, O God. Thank you for your Son, Jesus Christ! Thank you for life itself!**

## Scripture

**Deuteronomy 6:1-9** (Teach your children all the things that God has commanded.)

**Psalms 139:13-18** (We are fearfully and wonderfully made.)

**Mark 8:27-29** (Jesus asks the disciples who they think he is.)

**2 Timothy 1:5-7** (Paul reminds Timothy of family members who have modeled the faith.)

## Hymns

Gather Us In	TFWS #2236
We Are the Church	UMH #558
God is Here	UMH #660
O Lord, May Church and Home Combine	UMH #695

UMH: *The United Methodist Hymnal*  
TFWS: *The Faith We Sing*

## Prayer

God of our mothers and fathers, we thank you for the many people who have taught us to know you, to love you, and to serve you. On this day when we gather to celebrate the many ways we learn and grow in faith, we thank you for our teachers in this congregation and for our teachers in our homes. We pray that in the coming days we might renew our commitment to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. Pour out your Spirit upon us that we may honor you in all that we say and do. In the precious name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

## Litany of Dedication

One: God is good!

**ALL: All the time!**

One: All the time!

**ALL: God is good!**

One: *God is good.* We experience God's goodness through the natural world, through our friends and families, and through this congregation.

**ALL: We learn about God through the stories we tell, the songs we sing, and the places we serve.**

One: Today we ask you, God, to bless our teachers in the faith—those in the church and those at home.

TEACHERS: We have answered your call to teach, and we dedicate ourselves to this ministry.

ADULTS: We dedicate our homes to you and pray that we might demonstrate your love through our words and actions.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH: We thank you for teachers at home and at church. Help us to learn and grow in faith.

**ALL: May we love you with all our hearts, all our souls, and all our strength!**

## Offertory

O God, you give your love and grace to us in abundance, and we are grateful! Today we pause to thank you for the many teachers who have shared your love with us at home and in this congregation. In response to your many blessings we offer you our resources, our gratitude, and our lives. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## Sending Forth

As we leave this time of worship, may we return to our homes, our workplaces, our schools, and our communities prepared to live as Christ's representatives in the world. And may the peace of God that passes all understanding, be ours now and forever. Amen.

## WORKSHOP: FAITH FORMATION IN OUR HOMES

**Time: About 60 minutes**

**Purpose:**

By the end of this gathering, participants will be able to:

1. Identify devotional resources for use in their homes
2. Create a plan for family worship
3. Tell one story about their experience of God

**Preparation:**

- Publicize the workshop and its purpose.
- Pray for those who will attend.
- Gather materials:
  - ⇒ Name tags
  - ⇒ Markers
  - ⇒ Crayons
  - ⇒ Refreshments (optional)
  - ⇒ Newsprint
  - ⇒ Paper
  - ⇒ Pens or pencils
- Copies of *Pockets*, *Upper Room Disciplines*, *The Upper Room*, *devozine*
- Copies of “A Guide to Lectio Divina,” “Modifying Lectio Divina for Use in Groups,” “Daily Examen”
- Arrange chairs in a circle or around round tables for the total group interactions. Have an easel with newsprint or a whiteboard and markers ready to use with the total group.
- Set up two tables with chairs at each for small-group activities. (If you have a large number of participants, determine how many tables you will need for each of the learning activities.)
- Make copies of all handouts, as well as instructions for each of the small-group activities. (Handouts are available on p. 6.)
- Place the needed instructions, handouts, and supplies for the small-group activities on the tables. (See the details of the workshop listed below.)

## CONDUCTING THE WORKSHOP

**Getting Started (About 10 minutes)**

As participants arrive, invite them to make nametags. If you have provided refreshments, point them out to the arrivals. Welcome everyone and ask them to briefly introduce them-selves by telling their name and who lives in their home. (If the group is very large, you may need to break into smaller groups in order to complete the introductions in a timely manner.)

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Tell the group that these verses, known as the *Shema*, emphasize the importance of families as a setting for faith formation. In our homes we have daily opportunities to remember the love and grace of God. This gathering is designed to help them develop skills in sharing their own experiences of God and in planning times of worship and devotion at home. Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for their role as mentors in the faith and for your time together.

Describe the two learning centers available for exploration: 1) My Faith Story and 2) Devotional Resources. Tell the group that they have 30 minutes to explore the activities of their choice. (They can visit both learning centers or spend all their time in one. Their choice should reflect their own needs.) Participants can take a break and enjoy refreshments as needed.

## **Learning Centers (About 30 minutes)**

### **My Faith Story**

Instructions: Create a “timeline” for your life. Draw or write about times when you experienced God’s presence or absence. Identify any sacred places or significant people who taught you about God. Make note of times when your faith was challenged or when it changed in some way.

Find a partner and show him/her your “timeline.” Choose one particular experience from your life and describe it for your partner.

### **Devotional Resources**

Instructions: Review the various devotional resources available for use with your family. Select a Scripture passage, and practice Lectio Divina. Read the instructions for modifying Lectio Divina and for the Daily Examen.

Think about which resources or activities might work best in your home. Talk with another participant about how you might begin using the resources.

## **Total Group Sharing (About 10 minutes)**

Ask the participants to reassemble in the total group space. Invite people to share any insights they had or questions that were raised by the small-group activities.

Then invite participants to think about particular times that would be optimal for reading Scripture, praying, or using a devotional resource at home. The times could be daily, weekly, monthly, or seasonal (e.g., Advent). As participants brainstorm ideas, make notes on newsprint. Identify specific activities that work best when there are children in the home, teenagers in the home, or only adults in the home. Let the group know that you will send them a copy of the ideas in the coming week.

## **Closing (About 5 minutes)**

Read 2 Timothy 1:5-7. Ask participants to name aloud one or more people who helped them grow in faith. Close with a prayer of thanksgiving for all who have been teachers in the faith, especially those in our homes.



2015 CHRISTIAN EDUCATION WEEK

# A GUIDE TO *LECTIO DIVINA*

## Select a scripture passage.

### ***Lectio* (Reading)**

Read the passage slowly. Imagine the setting. What do you see? What do you hear? Think about who is present and what they are doing. What are they thinking? What are they feeling? How might they respond to Jesus? What do they think about Jesus himself?

### ***Meditatio* (Meditation)**

Read the passage again. Reflect on what the passage means. What were the prevalent circumstances when the passage was written? What did the writer want to communicate to the readers? How were the persons in the passage changed, if at all? What is God saying to you through this passage?

### ***Oratio* (Prayer)**

Move from your meditation into a time of prayer. Pray for the persons and situations that God has brought to your mind. Ask for guidance in the areas in which God is working in your life. Let the scripture and your meditation lead you in prayer as a response to the Word.

### ***Contemplatio* (Contemplation)**

When you have finished speaking to God, be silent before God. Breathe deeply. Try to empty your mind of all words, thoughts, and distractions. Open yourself to whatever God wants to tell you. If your mind wanders, focus on the scripture again. Then be quiet again. Remember: practice makes perfect.

# THE DAILY EXAMEN

The Daily Examen is a prayer practice involving reflection on one's day in order to see where and how God has been at work in one's life. It can be used easily at lunch or at the end of the day.

Here is a brief description of one way to use the Examen:

#### **1. Pay attention to God's presence.**

Looking back on the events of the day, ask God to help you understand how God was speaking to you through those events.

#### **2. Pay attention to the good in the day.**

Think about the work you did and the people with whom you interacted. Remember the food you ate, the beauty of the natural world, or a song you heard.

#### **3. Pay attention to your emotions.**

What do you feel about the things that happened today? Consider what God might be saying to you through these feelings.

#### **4. Pay attention to any promptings to prayer.**

Are you review the day, make note of any experiences you celebrate or needs you encountered. However small, spend time in prayer related to one aspect of your day—thanking God, confessing to God, or interceding on someone's behalf.

#### **5. Pay attention to tomorrow.**

Consider what you will be doing tomorrow. Ask for God's guidance, and lift people and work in prayer.

# SUPPORTING PARENTS AND TEACHERS FOR FAITH FORMATION

1. Text or email weekly ideas for prayer or Bible reading.
2. Provide copies of *Pockets*, *devozine*, and *The Upper Room* for families.
3. Create a closed Facebook group for parents and for teachers; invite people to use the groups to share joys and concerns, ask questions, and support one another as leaders in faith formation.
4. Post brief articles that provide explanation and questions for reflection about Scripture on the church's website.
5. Invite a storyteller to demonstrate how to tell stories for parents and teachers.
6. Help parents and teachers learn to create meaningful rituals for use at home and in congregations.
7. Create a lending library of Bible storybooks and music for use by families or classes.
8. Hold All-Church events throughout the church year to help people of all ages experience the primary stories and events of the Christian faith.
9. Provide new parents with a copy of *Baptism: Understanding God's Gift* (ISBN978-08817-7636-2).
10. Use the church's website, email list, and social media to provide updates on what children and youth classes will be studying, what the pastors will be preaching, and how families can use that information in their devotion times at home.

## THE CHALLENGE AHEAD

Christian Smith, William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center for the Study of Religion and Society at Notre Dame, noted the following about spirituality and young people:

"If there's one thing I know about younger people, nearly every last one of them thinks of Christianity as a set of rules and regulations, do's and don'ts. They aren't necessarily fighting against that. That's simply what they think Christianity is – a place of moralistic requirements. I don't think techniques and practices are going to change the situation. Churches need to show what the gospel really is. Congregations need to have a conversation: What is Christianity? What is God for us? What is the power of the gospel? They should go back again and again to the drinking well of the gospel and offer a true alternative transcendent story."

To learn more from Dr. Smith, see his interview with Yale University at <http://bit.ly/1Ep6KZ7>.



# RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

The resources listed here can be downloaded at [www.umcdiscipleship.org](http://www.umcdiscipleship.org) unless noted otherwise. Many of them are in the section for Christian education and formation at [www.umcdiscipleship.org/education](http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/education). To quickly locate these resources, go to your favorite search engine and enter the title of the resource followed by Discipleship Ministries.

## ***Foundations: Shaping the Ministry of Christian Education In Your Congregation***

Grounded in “Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task” as stated in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, this is a statement of the biblical and theological foundations of Christian education.

## ***Intentional Faith Development: Establishing Standards for Christian Formation and Discipleship***

To be used in conjunction with *Foundations*, this resource helps congregations as they develop standards as part of a comprehensive plan for faith formation.

## ***Teacher Development: A Comprehensive Plan for United Methodist Congregations***

Assists congregations in identifying what teachers need to know, do, and be. Provides help in developing a congregational plan for development.

## ***iTeach***

A free monthly e-mail newsletter for teachers and leaders that provides support for the developmental areas identified in *Teacher Development*.

## ***Baby Steps***

This resource provides practical tools for parents and guardians to engage spiritually with their children up to five years of age.

## ***Discipleship Ministries Webinars***

These one-hour webinars focus on a variety of topics related to Christian faith formation and discipleship. Each webinar is recorded and archived at [www.umcdiscipleship.org/webinars](http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/webinars).

You can order the following resources from Cokesbury, the Upper Room online bookstore, or Amazon.

## ***Family, The Forming Center: A Vision of the Role of Family in Spiritual Formation***

This classic resource explores a variety of practices that families can use to deepen faith, including prayer, storytelling, and service.

## ***The Godbearing Life, The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry***

This resource offers a lively spiritual primer and practical guide for those who care for young people. You will find suggestions for using the classical spiritual disciplines with youth.

## ***Parents & Grandparents as Spiritual Guides, Nurturing Children of the Promise***

Grounded in the belief that all of life is holy, this resource explores the role of families in forming children’s faith.

Christian Education Week is authorized by the General Conference of The United Methodist Church, but its observance is set by each annual conference. Check with your annual conference office to determine if your annual conference has set a specific date.

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