

A Neighborhood Summer



A 14-Week Intergenerational Worship Plan

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Introduction

A Neighborhood Summer is a curriculum for an entire summer of Sunday services that focuses on the theme of neighborhood and being neighbors. Within the overarching neighborhood theme, the services cover three areas: arts, ritual, and service. Each service offers creative ways to encourage participation, either through discussion or through activities like writing poems, making sandwiches, and evaluating your church building's potential for neighborliness.

Each week's template includes: a description of a guiding topic and how it relates to neighborliness, a Scripture reading, a sermon prompt, congregational song possibilities, and a "Take Home Bulletin Note."

Why have A Neighborhood Summer?

A Neighborhood Summer offers two things: a pattern for intergenerational worship that can be adapted to your local context, and a means of encouraging active participation amongst all worshipers. For intergenerational worship, we use our "children's moment" as the scripture reading, focusing on narratives from the Bible for most Sundays and encouraging children's Bibles for many of them. And we ensure that most activities are age appropriate from lower-elementary through adult. For active participation, we have an all-church activity or discussion as part of all the services. And several of the services encourage a non-traditional sermon format, such as a panel discussion or interview. Instead of "sermon," we call that time "teaching".

In our experiences at First Congregational Church of St. Louis and according to our end-of-summer survey, the most powerful elements of *A Neighborhood Summer* are: weekly testimonies from church members, staff, and friends; panel

sermons; and discussions following teaching times. Over and over again in our survey, participants cited these as the most memorable and spiritually important parts of the summer.

When we planned *A Neighborhood Summer* for our church, we did not anticipate what became a recurring theme throughout the summer: vulnerability. We realized that many of our activities and discussions made a place for congregants to be vulnerable with each other, such as sharing stories from their past, sharing poetry that they had written, or learning about the why behind each other's community service.

Even our weekly testimonies responded to the question "What is a time you felt God's presence deeply in your life?"—a question that invited vulnerability and made a safe space in public worship for sharing experiences of sometimes very private moments.

What if A Neighborhood Summer is a change from my congregation's usual worship habits?

Leading your church toward changes in worship habits can be a scary prospect, especially in churches that do not already have an expectation that summer worship services may be different from those during the program year. We found several strategies that helped us make *A Neighborhood Summer* a thoughtful, even welcome, exploration for our church. These strategies may be helpful in your context.

First, we kept our service's opening and closing sequences basically unaltered, because we felt like the congregation would need that "threshold" time to get their bearings (especially on Sundays when they walked in to something out of the ordinary, like long tables stacked with sandwich fixings). For us, that meant an opening sequence of five consistent elements: Prelude, Call to Worship, Congregational Singing, Liturgical Response, and Passing of the Peace. And it meant a closing sequence of three consistent elements: Congregational Singing, Benediction, and Postlude.

Second, we were explicit about the changes we were making. Before our summer began, we signalled upcoming changes during services, as well as in our printed Order of Worship and our online newsletter. We also made our first Sunday a day to talk about *A Neighborhood Summer* and what it might look like for us. We also framed the summer as a learning experience, rooted in the need for our church to explore intergenerational worship and to listen to the Holy Spirit's leading for our particular congregation.

Talking about the summer's worship as a learning experience also allowed for a third mode of encouraging the congregation to experience the worship with open hearts and open minds: we made clear the expectation that some explorations would work well, and that some would probably fail. Failure is also something God leads us through and teaches us through. There's no shame in planning a service for one space, only to realize the air conditioning is out, and worship needs to move to another, much less convenient space.

The blurb we used at the top of each Sunday's bulletin:

Worship services this summer will intentionally include faith formation/educational activities. Our services will begin and end in traditional and familiar ways, but the center of each service will offer something new or slightly different each week. Services may involve movement, art, contemplation, conversation, testimony, and more. Some of these ideas will work.

Some of them will undoubtedly fail. But when God's people try new things, God is always glorified, new learning takes place, and we grow together in a deeper understanding of how the Holy Spirit is active in our midst. Art, Ritual and Service will be the monthly themes.

Collaborative Worship Planning

When we initially conceived of *A Neighborhood Summer*, we didn't plan our services with much collaboration. Bill chose themes and Scriptures, then planned his sermons. Emily planned children's times with some attention to Bill's chosen themes and Scriptures. And Sarah planned hymns around themes, but usually planned choral anthems far before the service's outline was set. While we occasionally discussed upcoming services in our weekly staff meetings, there wasn't actually a need since we followed basically the same service template every week (with a second template for our Communion services).

Embarking on our *Neighborhood Summer* changed that. For months ahead of time, we developed our services in lengthy collaborative meetings. (Fortunately we enjoy each other's company!) We filled the whiteboard, scribbled on sticky notes, talked for hours on end, and documented our process in a shared online document. In the end, our ideas became truly collective, and we greatly expanded beyond our individual job descriptions.

As we worked, we realized how our change in work practices made room for the Holy Spirit's leading. Before, we didn't make time to listen, just plowing ahead in how we had done things before. But in our intentional collaboration, we made space for a Holy Spirit who "is still speaking" (as the United Church of Christ's motto puts it).

A Few Details About Our Congregational Setting

As you think about adapting *A Neighborhood Summer* to your own context, details about First Congregational may be helpful to know. First, our *Neighborhood Summer* ran from early June to early September for 14 weeks total. We celebrate Communion on the first Sunday of each month, so in the service templates that follow, four include Communion.

Second, in planning our activities and discussions, we were mindful of our sanctuary's layout, as well as the expected number of congregants each week. Some activities work well for larger groups, and some activities, such as the Architecture Survey, we planned for Sundays when we expected lower than average attendance. In some activities, movement between stations is especially important, and we thought carefully through these activities to make sure our Sunday services flowed smoothly.

Third, as a Congregationalist church in the United Church of Christ denomination, we had a significant amount of discretion to vary our order of worship and our Scripture readings. If you are in a tradition with less local congregational choice, you may still find that our suggested activities and discussions inspire you to imagine new paths in your worship setting.

**IN OUR INTENTIONAL COLLABORATION,
WE MADE SPACE FOR A HOLY SPIRIT
WHO "IS STILL SPEAKING."**

Worship Themes

Within the larger theme of neighborhood, monthly and weekly themes are:

Opening Service: What is neighborhood?
(Communion Sunday)

Arts

- Visual Art
- Music
- Poetry
- Architecture

Ritual

- Communion (Communion Sunday)
- Baptism
- Healing
- Rituals at home

Service

- Sharing abundance (Communion Sunday)
- Service in local community
- Service beyond local community
- Service to "the least of these"

Concluding Sunday: Taking summer learning into the future (Communion Sunday)

Testimonies

As part of your church's neighborhood summer, invite your actual neighbors to speak to their faith in the services. These neighbors could be church members, staff members, or friends of the church. A prompt could be, "What is a time you felt God's presence deeply in your life?"

Bible Resources

The following may be useful additions to your congregation's preferred Bible translation:

Celtic Treasure: Daily Scriptures and Prayer
by J. Philip Newell

This volume contains poetic paraphrase of Genesis chapter one that may be helpful for Week 4 Arts: Poetry.

Growing in God's Love Story Bible, ed. Elizabeth Caldwell and Carol Wehrheim

Each story is followed by three prompts: Hear, See, and Act. These prompts engage the child in the story more fully. The wonderful illustrations in this story Bible come from a variety of artists, with a diversity in the art style as well cultural and racial diversity.

The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language
by Eugene H. Patterson

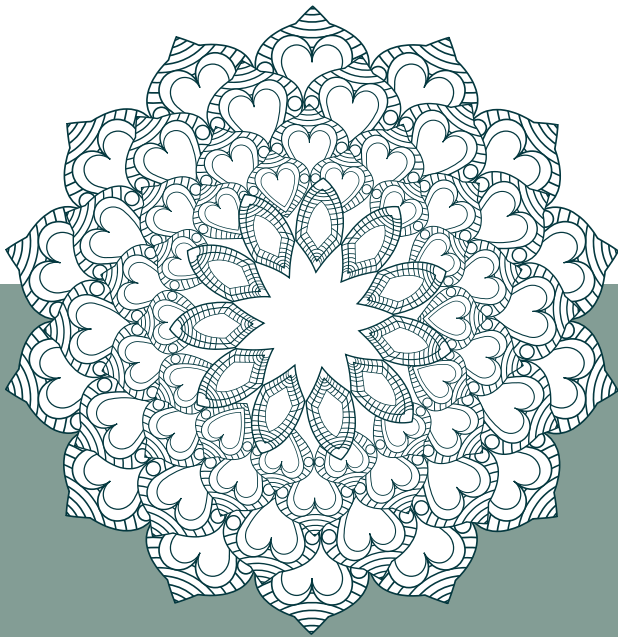
This dynamic translation uses language that is less complex and confusing than traditional versions of the Bible, making it good for kids. It may be a good alternative to a story Bible when using more obscure Scriptural passages.

The Spark Story Bible: Spark a Journey through God's Word, ed. Debra Thorpe Hetherington

This Bible for lower-elementary and preschool kids tells Bible stories in a way that is truly friendly to young kids and not confusing. The cartoon-style illustrations portray all of the characters as one light-brown color. Each story ends with a question to engage the reader.

"I Will Sing"

We used the song "I Will Sing of Your Love, Love, Love" by Rev. Dr. Christopher Grundy throughout the summer. Sometimes we used Dr. Grundy's verses, and other times we wrote our own to coincide with our worship themes. With the author's permission, we have included alternative verses that fit with the services' individual themes. Verses written by our church staff are marked with an asterisk. You may purchase the sheet music online at <https://www.convergencemp.com/i-will-sing-of-your-love-love-love.html>.



The introduction on coloring as a spiritual practice we used in our bulletins on the Arts Sundays:

Coloring as a Spiritual Practice For All Ages!

"A great epidemic in our culture is anxiety. Captive to the frantic, catastrophizing thoughts in your mind, you become inaccessible to others—present physically perhaps, but in no way truly available. But disciples of Christ seek to be increasingly available to God and compassionate to their neighbors. Coloring a picture can quiet our minds; it turns down the white noise that isolates us from God and others. This kind of coloring is one form of mindfulness practice. And the literature around the benefits of mindfulness for anxiety mounts daily it seems."

-Rev. Dr. L. Roger Owens, "Yes, Coloring IS a Spiritual Practice—Here's Why," www.pts.edu/blog, used with permission

Bulletin Flexibility

Typically our bulletins are large 11 x 17 paper folded in half, and are 8 pages long. That format allowed for flexibility and creativity. We included a side column each Sunday with "take home" ideas. Our hope was that worshipers would continue to ponder their Sunday experience and expand their learning. These "take home" ideas are included in the templates that follow. We also often included space for writing in the bulletin, and on the Arts Sundays, the back page had a coloring sheet for adults and children alike. Many of the pews had baskets of colored pencils and we encouraged worshipers to use those pages for reflection and meditation, either during the service or at home. If you have flexibility in your Sunday bulletins, we encourage you to think about what might help enhance your congregation's worship experiences.



Order of Worship

To facilitate a smooth service flow, we used the following order of worship. Key elements here are moving directly from teaching to activity or discussion, and then having a predictable cue for people to regather after an activity (we used the song “I Will Sing”).

Welcome and Announcements

Prelude

Call to Worship

Congregational Singing

Liturgical Response (such as Affirmation of Faith; Call to Confession, Prayer of Confession, and Assurance of God’s Grace; or Litany of Praise)

Optional Service Element (such as Baptism; Blessing; or Reception of New Members)

Passing of Peace

Congregational Singing (such as “I Will Sing” verses)

Testimony from a Church Member, Staff Member, or Friend of the Church

Solo or Instrumental Music

Scripture with Children

Teaching (with additional Scripture as needed)

Action and/or Discussion

Congregational Singing (may repeat short song to regather after activity/discussion)

Communion (with music as needed)

Prayers, concluding with the Lord’s Prayer

Invitation to the Offering

Offering with Solo or Instrumental Music, or with Congregational Singing

Prayer of Dedication

Closing Hymn

Benediction

Postlude

1. A Neighborhood Summer

Theme: A prayerful approach to imagining “who is my neighbor.”

Take Home Bulletin Note: Prayer stations offer individuals or groups an opportunity to engage in interactive prayer. Prayer stations can allow us to experience deeper focus, creative insight, and ways to express ourselves to God that would not ordinarily be available through verbal prayer. You can encourage creative prayer in your household by setting up a prayer station or two for your family to use.

Scripture: Luke 10:25-37, the Good Samaritan. Invite a group of children and adults from the congregation to act out the story while it is read aloud.

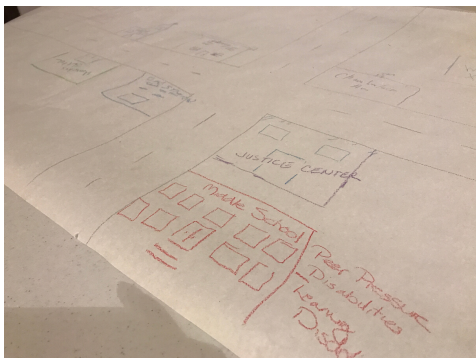
Teaching: Introduction to “A Neighborhood Summer,” including an overview of things to come (arts, ritual, and service areas) and a reminder that some experiments will work and some will not, but regardless, we can follow the Holy Spirit.

Action: Prayer Stations

- Leader’s introduction to the prayer stations: Praying can be difficult. Sometimes it is difficult to quiet our minds and hearts. Sometimes we don’t think we know the right words to say. Prayer stations offer a tangible, guided way to connect with God.
- Prayer Station 1: Draw roads on a large piece of white butcher paper and lay it out on a table. Invite people to reflect on the integral parts of the neighborhood and draw/add them to the map while praying for these sites.
- Prayer Station 2: On a table, offer colored paper for people to write or draw their own prayers.
- Prayer Station 3: Hang a large map of the world and one of the local city, as well as current news headlines (e.g. natural disasters, conflicts). Offer sticky notes for people to write prayers for the city and world, then place the sticky notes on the maps.

Congregational Song Suggestions: O Lord, Hear My Prayer (Taizé), Sweet Hour of Prayer (Walford), Be Thou My Vision (Byrne/Hull), What a Friend We Have in Jesus (Scriven), Breathe on Me, Breath of God (Hatch), Let Us Break Bread Together on Our Knees (African-American Spiritual).

I Will Sing: Introduce stanzas 1 and 2 by Christopher Grundy.



2. Arts: Visual Art

Theme: Creating is a way of practicing neighborliness since the act of creating is to be in relationship with God and another person. “Creativity is good theology. It’s what God did in the beginning.” -Ann Voskamp

Take Home Bulletin Note: In the week ahead, what are some ways you can strengthen your relationship with God through being creative? Some possibilities: Writing a poem; Making up a story to tell a child at bedtime; Letting God’s light shine out through your actions and words; Working in the yard; Connecting with a “neighbor” through a conversation or card; Visiting a place where you can be inspired by the artistic expression of others.

Children’s Book: *What Do You Do with an Idea?* by Kobi Yamada, a playful take on the power of creativity.

Scripture: Genesis 1:1-2:4, the Creation Story (suggested poetic paraphrase by J. Philip Newell), possibly read by a congregant with experience in drama.

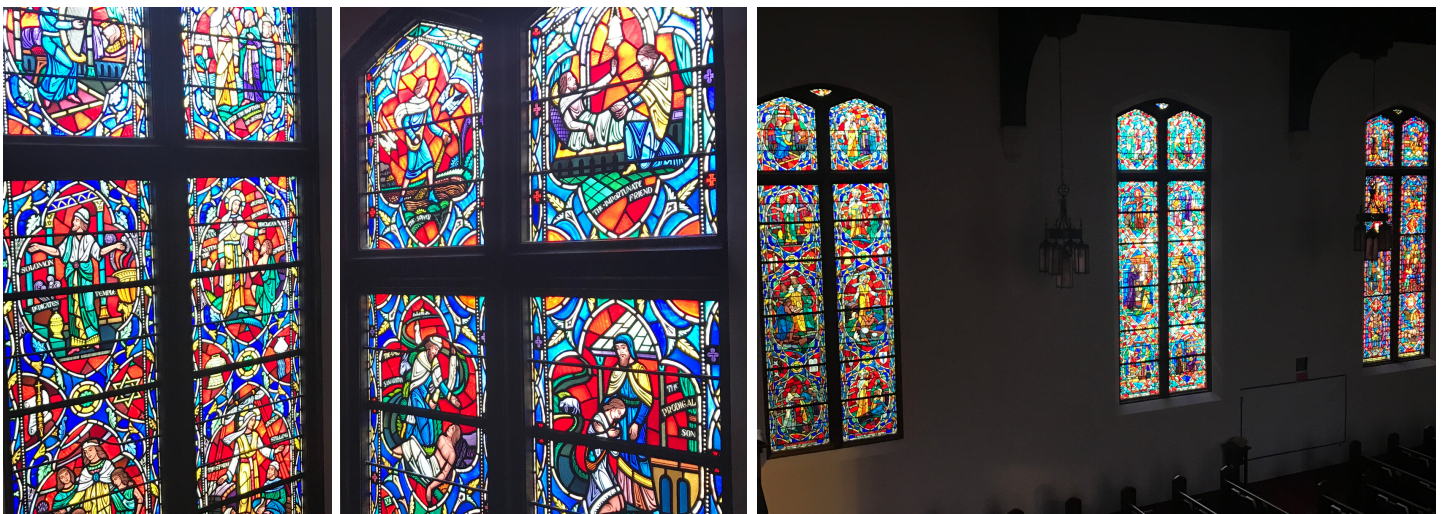
Teaching: Since God is creative and made us as creative beings, our practices of creativity are a form of godliness, of living out our faith.

Action: Stained Glass Window Scavenger Hunt

- We “see” this art every Sunday, but don’t typically notice its details.
- The Scavenger Hunt could highlight biblical stories or odd things about the window’s content.
- In the bulletin, include a guide and answer key.
- For windows with less literal detail where a scavenger hunt is not suitable, the focus could include the windows’ history, artists’ interpretation, or a talk from an art historian.

Congregational Song Suggestions: All Things Bright and Beautiful (Alexander), Fairest Lord Jesus (Anonymous), Praise to the Lord! the Almighty (Neander/Winkworth), For the Fruits of God’s Creation (Green), All Creatures of Our God and King (St. Francis of Assisi/Draper), For the Beauty of the Earth (Pierpoint).

I Will Sing Stanza: *I will sing of a love so bright, that it colors the world with your warmth and your light. And I will sing of your love, love, love for as long as I live. **



3. Arts: Music

Theme: Music can help us glimpse the divine communion of the Trinity - helping us create community in our own neighborhoods.

Take Home Bulletin Note: Every time we sing together we are creating community! Scripture says to “make a joyful noise,” (Psalm 98), not “make the most perfectly pitched, professionally trained noise”! So, MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE! In your home, in the car, while at work, in the garden, out and about... How many ways can you find to make a joyful noise by yourself or in community with others?

- Wake your children up with a song
- Dance to your favorite song
- Use everyday household items to create a percussive beat
- Whistle while you work
- Share a song that is meaningful to you on social media
- Listen for the music of nature

Scripture: Genesis 18:1-8, Abraham and Sarah Welcome the Angelic Visitors. Read the story and discuss what it means to be a good host (to say “yes” to strangers).

Teaching: An underlying value of neighborliness is saying “yes” to the Other; music can model this yes as we breathe together and voice together in song. We literally *create* community and *embody* community when we make music together.

Action: In conversation, or through a space for writing in the order of worship, invite those gathered to imagine what a baseline “yes” looks like - or could look like - in their relationships with other people in their neighborhoods, their relationships with the wider world, and their relationships with God. “When you say yes to being in relationship, what changes? What are your actions like? Where is your heart?”

Congregational Song Suggestions: Holy, Holy, Holy (Heber), God Is Here (Green), Sing Praise to God, When in Our Music God Is Glorified (Green), Come, Christians, Join to Sing (Lateman), O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing (Wesley), How Can I Keep from Singing (Lowry).

I Will Sing Stanza: *I will sing of a love so strong that it flows from our hearts in a life-giving song, and I will sing of your love, love, love for as long as I live. **



4. Arts: Poetry

Theme: Poetry helps us imagine the community God wants us to help create.

Take Home Bulletin Note: Try your hand at more poetry writing, haiku or otherwise. Nature themes and imagery evoking a specific season are the traditional focus of haiku. Try experiencing nature to inspire your poem. To begin, determine your subject matter. Pay attention to small details around you. Use all of your senses. Think of what you hear, feel, taste, smell, and see. The words and expressions in haiku are usually simple and deal with everyday situations and feelings. Think about the different types of literature you read, and what forms might inspire you to imagine the world God invites us to help create.

Scripture: Luke 1:46-55, Mary's Magnificat. For children, read the story of Mary's visit to Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-56).

Other Scriptures: Isaiah 40:1-11, Hosea 4:1-3.

Teaching: Scriptural poetry like Mary's song can help us imagine God's beloved community, a first step in creating that community.

Action: Write haiku and share with each other.

- Offer a place in the bulletin to write haiku and, after a time for creating, regather and share the haiku with each other.
- Bulletin note: Haiku is a Japanese form of poetry with seventeen syllables. English haiku usually split the syllables into three lines with 5, 7, and 5 syllables. Use the space below to create your own haiku.
- Bulletin may also include haiku examples.

Congregational Song Suggestions: For All the Children (Lohman), Canticle of Turning (Cooney), Tell Out My Soul, the Greatness of the Lord (Dudley-Smith), My Soul Gives Glory to My God (Winter), and other settings of Mary's Magnificat.

I Will Sing Stanza: *I will sing of a love so queer, that it opens the floodgates and casts out all fear. And I will sing of your love, love, love for as long as I live.*

- Note: This service fell on Pride Sunday, which is important to our Open & Affirming congregation. Hence, the verse choice.

Poems written by members of First Congregational Church during worship:

Children scamper back
and forth, sharing joy and hope
to all with God's love.
-Sheila Merrell

We wait in darkness
and pray for the disruption
where light pours through cracks.
-Carol Klein

Listening to Sarah,
music cares for my soul,
waiting for God's word.
-Ginny Hartley

Care for others now
for the next day may not come.
Love lasts forever.
-Ward Klein

God is in this world.
It is for us to see where,
and then to go there.
-Jim Hartley

Grandma had a brook
flowing gently through her yard,
and I felt peace there.
-Bill Mellish

5. Arts: Architecture

Theme: The buildings we live, work, learn, and worship in can create or inhibit community. Being a good neighbor means having a welcoming and accessible building.

Take Home Bulletin Note: Architecture and our use of space can reflect our understanding of God, our theological foundation, and who we intentionally or unintentionally include and exclude. So pay attention to the physical spaces around you: Our church, your home, where you work, where you or your children go to school, where you play, where you eat... What do you notice? What do these spaces say about community and God, inclusion and exclusion?

Scripture: Matthew 7:24-27, the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders. May sing the song “The Wise Man Built His House Upon a Rock” (by Ann Omley) as part of a children’s time.

Other Scripture: Psalm 127:1a.

Teaching: Building can be a concrete expression of neighborliness. How can the buildings a church uses help the congregation live into its calling to be neighbors?

Action: Explore how the congregation’s building is (and isn’t) neighborly.

- Divide the building into zones (e.g. sanctuary, first floor, second floor, basement, outdoors).
- Assign congregation into random groups by numbering the bulletins unobtrusively.
- Invite each group to appoint a recorder/timekeeper who has a clipboard holding paper. The groups should record their reflections of how each zone is welcoming/neighborly or not.
- After the groups have surveyed the building, take time in the service to hear their main findings.

Congregational Song Suggestions: The Wise Man Built His House Upon a Rock (Omley), How Firm a Foundation (“K”), All Are Welcome (Haugen), The Church’s One Foundation (Stone), Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation (Neale).

I Will Sing Stanza: *I will sing in our buildings tall where we welcome each other and do not build walls. And I will sing of your love, love, love for as long as I live. **



6. Ritual: Communion

Theme: There is always room at God's table. In the ritual of communion, we build community.

Take Home Bulletin Note: Think about where and when in your daily life you encounter God's Beloved Community/Kingdom, and how to celebrate it. Here are some rituals around food for acknowledging and celebrating God's love:

- Prayers before a meal
- Talking about where food comes from, and how it's important to care for God's creation so it's healthy enough to produce food
- Talking about and thanking God for all the people who help the food get to our table: farmers, fertilizer makers, harvesters, truck drivers, stock people and checkers at the store
- Thanking God for all who prepare and clean up after a meal

Scripture: Luke 14:15-24, the Parable of the Wedding Banquet. Suggested resource: *Growing in God's Love Story Bible*. Discuss what it would be like to not be invited to an event, and how God invites all people to be part of God's family.

Teaching: What do our lives look like if we believe God's table is big enough for everyone?

Action: Discuss experiences of community.

- Invite people to discuss in small groups their earliest experiences of truly being in community with others.
- If the sanctuary's space allows: partake in communion while all gathered around a large table or row of tables.

Congregational Song Suggestions: Shall We Gather By the River (Lowry), As We Gather at Your Table (Daw), For Everyone Born, A Place at the Table (Murray), I'm Gonna Eat at the Welcome Table (African-American Spiritual), Draw the Circle Wide (Light), One Bread, One Body (Foley), The King of Love (Baker), My Shepherd Will Supply My Need (Watts) and other settings of Psalm 23.

I Will Sing Stanza: *I will sing of a table so long, where love is shown and all belong. And I will sing of your love, love, love for as long as I live.. **



7. Ritual: Baptism

Theme: Being a good neighbor means fulfilling the covenants we make during baptism.

Take Home Bulletin Note: Explore your family history and see who has been baptized. What does baptism mean to your family? Do you have any traditions around baptism? Remember your baptism. If you have been baptized, think about what it means to you. When it rains, watch the water renew the earth and remember God's renewing love for you. Consider the baptismal covenant we make with those who are baptized. How can you join the community in fulfilling those promises? Pray for one another; teach Sunday school; serve as a confirmation faith partner; give of your time in the broader community; donate to families in need; be a part of the worshipping community...

Scripture: Mark 10:13-16, Jesus Blesses the Children. Suggested resource: *The Spark Story Bible*.

Teaching: Different perspectives on baptism. A "panel sermon" format allows for more voices and contributes to the neighborly spirit of the summer. Have several people share different angles on baptism, such as:

- *Covenant:* One aspect of baptism is a covenant between God and individual, and between the Church and the individual. What does it mean for us to live into the covenant we have made with others who have been baptized?
- *Children:* By baptizing children, we show our belief that children are the Church, just as much as grownups are. If we fully live into our belief that children are the Church, what might change in our homes, schools, and worship services?

Action 1: Invite the congregation to respond to the sermon by talking with each other about their experiences of baptisms.

Action 2: If performing a baptism, invite people to walk up and touch the water in the font (perhaps during an offertory).

Congregational Song Suggestions: Down in the River to Pray (American Traditional), Baptized in Water (Saward), Child of Blessing, Child of Promise (Cole-Turner), Come, Thou Fount (Robinson), Come, Holy Spirit, Dove Divine (Judson), I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say (Bonar).

I Will Sing Stanza: *I will sing, "Let the children come, do not hinder them," for You love everyone. And I will sing of your love, love, love for as long as I live.*



8. Ritual: Healing

Theme: God's wholeness is possible for all of us, and we find it most completely in community with others.

Take Home Bulletin Note: When we're in need of healing and wholeness, we can feel separated from other people. But when we allow ourselves to be vulnerable in community, we find the support we need for the healing process. How can you participate in community more fully? How can you make yourself more vulnerable? How can you be the community someone else needs for their healing and wholeness?

Scripture: John 9:1-12, Jesus Heals a Man Blind from Birth. Discuss how communities can reject people because of disabilities, as happened in the case of the man born blind. By healing the man, Jesus restores him to the community that was too broken to accept him as a disabled person.

Teaching: What can we learn about community from the story of Jesus healing the man born blind? How can our community love with open arms, rather than with rules about who is and isn't allowed in?

Action: Healing Rituals

- Station 1: Anoint with oil and prayer - a tangible acknowledgement of our brokenness and our need to move beyond brokenness, and a tangible way of remembering that God offers us wholeness that we may not fully understand.
- Station 2: Light candles, and invite people to pray for their own intention, as well as for the other intentions, remembering that God's light illuminates the darkness.
- Station 3: Invite people to thread bells on ribbons as a way of remembering loved ones who have died. (Note: these ribbons may be tied to a banner for an All Saint's Day processional).

Congregational Song Suggestions: We Yearn, O Christ, for Wholeness (Carlson), In Christ There Is No East or West (Oxenham), There Is a Balm in Gilead (African-American Spiritual), Precious Lord, Take My Hand (Dorsey), If You Will Only Let God Guide You ("If Thou But Suffer God to Guide Thee," Neumark/Winkworth), When Peace Like a River (Spafford), O Christ, the Healer, We Have Come (Green).

I Will Sing Stanza: *I will sing of a love so whole, that is gathers us in and it heals every soul. And I will sing of your love, love, love for as long as I live. **



9. Rituals at Home

Theme: Rituals are not just for our church, but for our broader community, including our at-home community.

Take Home Bulletin Note: Do you normally think of ritual as something we only do at church? You might already have important rituals and might want to create some new ones. How can you ritualize ordinary, everyday tasks and activities so you can connect better with God, your neighbors, and yourself? ... When you water your plants, eat a meal, awaken and go to sleep, drive to work, play with your children... We have put together a booklet to give you some ideas of rituals you might want to add to your life. Try something new and let us know how it goes!

Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:4-9, the Shema. Invite children to think about their at-home rituals that explicitly connect them to God. Consider introducing the Jewish tradition of the mezuzah, a visible reminder to keep their faith in their hearts.

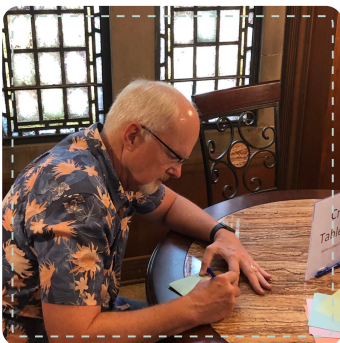
Teaching: Ritual brings a spiritual dimension to the ordinary. With that in mind, what are rituals that we already do in our everyday lives?

Action: Creating daily rituals

- Station 1: Create a table prayer for mealtimes
- Station 2: Create a ritual to celebrate birthdays and anniversaries
- Station 3: Create a blessing for work or school
- Station 4: Create a morning prayer ritual
- Station 5: Create a ritual that is unique to a person or their household
- Take home booklet: Prepare a booklet for people to take home with ideas for at-home rituals, offering examples from staff members' home lives.
- Note: In framing these activities, be aware that "home" can include households with single people and multigenerational families.

Congregational Song Suggestions: Rise and Shine (Traditional), Come, Let Us Join with Faithful Souls (Tarrant), Thank Our God for Sisters, Brothers (Powell), Community of Christ (Murray), Love Divine, All Loves Excelling (Wesley), We Walk in Love (Witkowski).

I Will Sing Stanza: *I will sing as I wander and roam, I will sing in the church, in the streets, and at home. And I will sing of your love, love, love for as long as I live. **



10. Service: Sharing Abundance

Theme: We are called to be good neighbors and share out of our abundance, instead of being paralyzed by a false fear of scarcity.

Take Home Bulletin Note: What do you have an abundance of that you could share with someone? Time? Food? Love? Financial resources? Household items you no longer use? Knowledge? Skills?

Scripture: 1 Kings 17: 7-16, Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath. Discuss scarcity and famine. What would it be like to not have enough to eat - and still share with others?

Teaching: When we are afraid that we don't have enough, we often lack the courage to share what we do have. How can we live into the generosity of God's abundant gifts?

Action: Sandwich making leading into communion.

- Make sandwiches for a local shelter, then use leftover bread for communion.
- Station 1 and 2: Assembly lines for sandwich making.
- Station 3: To include people with food allergies, also have a station for decorating brown paper lunch bags.

Congregational Song Suggestions: Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ (Kaan), I Come with Joy (Wren), All Who Hunger, Gather Gladly (Dunstant), We Plough the Fields and Scatter (Campbell/Claudius), Come, My Way, My Truth, My Life (Herbert).

I Will Sing Stanza: *I will sing of your boundless grace, of your outstretched arms, and your endless embrace. And I will sing of your love, love, love for as long as I live.*



11. Service in our Church

Theme: How do we use our church building to serve our neighborhood?

Take Home Bulletin Note: We have great examples around us of what happens when we expand our community and treat “the least of these” as family. [Note: include information specific to the non-profit groups that use your building and provide information on how people can volunteer with these groups.]

Scripture: Deuteronomy 5:12-15, from the Ten Commandments. Suggested resource: *The Message Bible*. Discuss who God includes in the day of rest - everyone! Discuss what “alien” means and how people who from different places also deserve rest.

Teaching: Interview a leader from a non-profit connected with your congregation.

Action: No action this week so more time can be given to the interview.

Congregational Song Suggestions: Who Is the Alien? (Bringle), I Woke Up This Morning (African-American Spiritual), This Little Light of Mine (African-American Spiritual), This Is the Day (Garret), O Day of Rest and Gladness (Wordsworth), Nearer, My God, to Thee (Adams), Come Unto Me, Ye Weary (Dix).

I Will Sing Stanza: *I will sing of your boundless grace, of your outstretched arms and your endless embrace. And I will sing of your love, love, love for as long as I live.*



"Mama" Cat Daniels, founder of
Potbangerz Feed the Body Mission

The Potbangerz use our church kitchen
weekly to prepare meals for the unhoused
in St. Louis.

12. Service in our Local Community

Theme: Our faith commitment is to our specific congregation, but also to our church's broader neighborhood.

Take Home Bulletin Note: How does your faith inform how you engage with the wider community? Would you like to get more involved in the work of [church name's] mission partners? Visit [url] to learn about our mission partners and their work. Also keep an eye out in the bulletin and our calendar for opportunities to jump into the work!

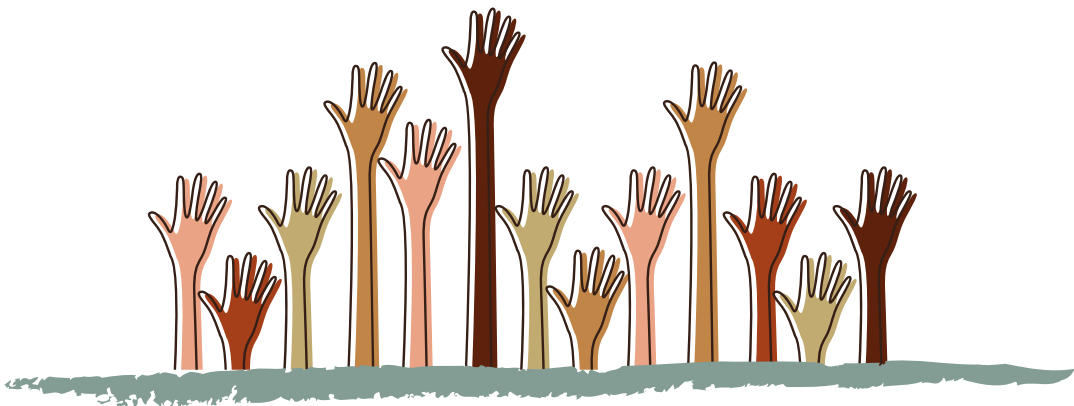
Scripture: Ruth 1:1-18, Ruth Chooses to Go with Naomi. Suggested resource: *The Spark Story Bible*. Discuss how family is someone who you choose to be with.

Teaching: Panel Sermon of volunteers in the congregation: invite 2-3 people in the church to share their volunteer experiences.

Action: Invite the whole congregation to discuss with each other their experiences serving in the community.

Congregational Song Suggestions: I Shall Not Leave from By Your Side (Shelton), God of Grace, and God of Glory (Fosdick), Lord, Speak to Me that I May Speak (Havergal), Take My Life, and Let It Be Consecrated (Havergal), I Am Thine, O Lord (Crosby), Lord of All Hopefulness (Struther), Ye Servants of God (Wesley), Will You Come and Follow Me (Bell).

I Will Sing Stanza: *I will sing of a love so bright, that it fills our community with your light. And I will sing of your love, love, love for as long as I live. **



13. Service: Global Neighbors

Theme: While our response to God's call to service can be addressed individually, we affirm that our faith community must also respond collectively to our local and global neighbors.

Take Home Bulletin Note: As a church community we can continue to respond to the needs of our neighbors together. [Mention specific global missions connected with your congregation and how people can get involved.]

Scripture: Deuteronomy 15:11, Open Your Hands to the Poor and Needy.

Teaching: Panel sermon sharing mission and outreach in the church, such as mission trips or global mission partners. Possibly include a group of people sharing their experiences from a missions trip.

Action: Invite the whole congregation to discuss with each other their experiences connecting with global missions.

Congregational Song Suggestions: Let All the World in Every Corner Sing (Herbert), Sent Forth By God's Blessing (Westendorf), We Are One in the Spirit (Scholes), We Love Your Kingdom, Lord (Dwight), Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah (Williams/Williams).

I Will Sing Stanza: *I will sing with the goats and sheep, with all creatures for whom your love runs deep. And I will sing of your love, love love for as long as I live. **

- Note: First Congregational's service focused on a recent trip to the Heifer Ranch in Arkansas, which is the reason for this verse.
- Alternative: *I will sing of your boundless grace, of your outstretched arms, and your endless embrace. And I will sing of your love, love, love for as long as I live.*



14. Taking Our Summer Into the Future

Theme: Let's remember where we've been and where we're going.

Take Home Bulletin Note: Throughout the summer, we have explored—and lived out—different ways of being loving and vulnerable neighbors to each other and the wider community, through Art, Ritual, and Service. What can each of us do to continue building up our church community through worship? What can we do individually and collectively to engage our local and global neighborhoods?

Scripture: Isaiah 43:18-19, "Forget the Former Things." Discuss watching what God is making new.

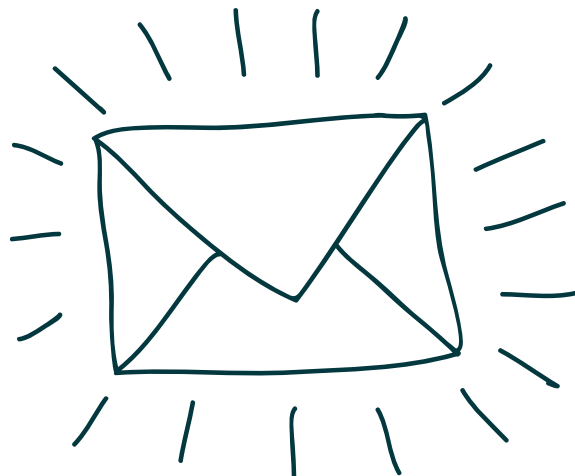
Teaching: Sum up learning from the summer's experiences and point toward the future God is calling us to.

Action: Consider: What does this summer's learning mean for our individual and collective future?

- If taking communion, invite people to partake, then walk to stations.
- Station 1: Sticky notes to write what we can do going forward, then place those notes on a wall poster.
- Station 2: Write postcards with individual commitments, which individuals address to themselves and which will be mailed to them at the start of the new church year (Advent).

Congregational Song Suggestions: Come, Thou Fount (Robinson), Spirit of the Living God (Iverson), We Worship You God (Grant), O God, Our Help in Ages Past (Watts), "Sleepers, Wake!" A Voice Astounds Us (Nicolai/Daw), Love Divine, All Loves Excelling (Wesley), My Faith Looks Up to Thee (Palmer).

I Will Sing Stanza: Sing Stanzas 1 and 2 by Christopher Grundy.



About the Creators

Dr. Sarah Bereza

Sarah Bereza (Phd, Duke) has served at First Congregational since 2018 and has ministered as a church musician since 1999. She produces resources for church staff and musicians on her website (sarah-bereza.com) and through her podcasts *Music and the Church with Sarah Bereza* and *Getting to Nimble*, which she co-hosts with Bill Smutz. She also co-hosts a podcast for creatives: *Writing on Wednesdays*. Sarah's forthcoming book, *Professional Christian: Integrating Personal Faith and Public Ministry in a Fragmented, Filtered World*, helps leaders learn to be fully themselves as they live out the call to be "all things to all people."

Hannah Rice

Hannah first served First Congregational Church as the Interim Minister of Faith Development for Children and Youth from 2012-2015, and then returned in August 2015 as the Minister of Administration and Membership. She graduated summa cum laude from the University of Missouri with a BA in Communication and a minor in Religious Studies. She then spent three years in the Master of Divinity program at Eden Theological Seminary, graduating in 2012. She grew up in the United Methodist Church, but became a member of FCC in 2015. She has been a member of the Committee on Ministry: Preparation for the St. Louis Association of the UCC since 2016. In 2017 Hannah became a member of the First Congregational Preschool board, and in 2018 began serving as the board president. As a lover of music, Hannah plays in the FCC handbell choir and occasionally sings in worship. She has also sung with a local women's choir, Bel Canto, since its founding in 2010. Hannah loves crafting, reading, Netflix, and snuggling with her dogs Marco and Polo.

Rev. Dr. Bill Smutz

The Rev. Dr. Bill Smutz, has been an ordained Presbyterian pastor for over thirty years. A native of Webster Groves, Missouri, his academic background includes a B.A. in Economics & Business from Westminster College (Fulton, MO), a Master of Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary, and a Doctor of Ministry from Eden Theological Seminary. Bill has served churches in Ohio, Missouri, Wisconsin, Kansas, and Indiana. He served as the interim/transitional pastor at St. John's UCC, Chesterfield, MO from September 2015 – November, 2017, and was the interim/transitional pastor at First Congregational Church of St. Louis in Clayton from December 2017 until January 2019. He now serves St. Lucas UCC (St. Louis, MO) as their interim pastor. Bill and his wife, Gina, have three adult sons, and are over-the-moon grandparents of Taylor, George and Maggie! Bill is an anglophile, music lover, apple grower, architecture junkie, stamp collector, frustrated model railroader...who thinks the Green Bay Packers hold a special place in the divine pantheon...who knows that disciples of Jesus always live in hope...who trusts that there will always be a Church of Jesus Christ, but believes the Holy Spirit is presently reshaping the church in new and different ways for God's unfolding future!

Emily Stokes

Emily attended the University of Evansville and graduated Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education, with a minor in Art. She received her Master of Arts in Pastoral Studies from Eden Theological Seminary in 2016. She facilitates the local chapter of the Association of United Church Educators in an effort to encourage networking, resourcing, and collegial support of local Christian educators. Emily loves to travel, is an avid movie watcher, loves to do jigsaw puzzles, and enjoys crafts of all sorts. She finds joy in spending time with her family and friends. She has been a member of Bel Canto, a women's ensemble, since 2010.



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of the United Church of Christ**

*At the First Congregational Church of St. Louis,
you'll find a group of welcoming individuals, couples, and families
exploring their faith together while working to make a difference
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