

“Rethink Church” Lectionary Resource March-May 2009

The 2009-12 quadrennium brings change for the denomination’s “Open hearts” advertising and welcoming ministry. Through the Igniting Ministry team, United Methodist Communications has initiated a conversation at all levels of the connection, designed to open a global dialogue about reaching spiritual seekers with the good news of Jesus Christ. It stems from one key question: “What if we Rethink Church?” Building upon the success of the first eight years of the unprecedented “Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors.” identity campaign, this exchange will challenge congregations to “Rethink Church” and move beyond expectations of improved attendance and membership toward genuine engagement with the world at large.

“Rethink Church” – A Lifestyle and a Conversation, not a Program

In the ramp-up to the new “Rethink Church” emphasis of the “Open hearts” ministry, people at all levels of the denomination are asking about the “program” elements of the initiative. It seems that, upon hearing of this development, many people anticipate the impending release of a ready-made, fully-formed, “just add water” church “program.”

As we “Rethink Church” it’s time for us to rethink those expectations, remembering the established resources of Igniting Ministry and their application to this initiative. Many tools already exist. Others will evolve over time. As “Igniting Ministry” becomes “Rethink Church” we will live with old and new wineskins, striving to honor the past and plan for the future.

A message we have delivered since the beginning of the “Open hearts” ministry bears repeating now: “This is not a program or a committee. It’s a way of life.” To engage in ministry with people who currently have few (or no) connections to the church requires a new way of **doing** and **being** the Church. “Business as usual” no longer applies. It’s time for **us** to rethink “Church.”

“Rethink Church” bears a dual message strategy for church “outsiders” and insiders alike. To our unchurched, young adult neighbors, it says, “Think about your spiritual journey and what churches may have to offer you.” To ourselves, it may say, “Think about whether you have anything that young adults would want.” To reconcile these messages – and, perhaps, conflicting expectations – requires effort. Lots of effort. Long-term effort.

“Rethink Church” will not be a quick fix, nor will it be defined without your involvement. You will make of it whatever makes the most of your congregation’s context and culture. You, in partnership with the Holy Spirit and the people of your community, will collaborate to “Rethink Church.” Even the new approach to communicating the “brand promise” reflects this spirit of collaboration:

“Together, we can *open* hearts, *open* minds, and *open* doors. The *people* of The *United* Methodist Church.”

Note the accent on “open” as a verb. Note the engagement of the “people” in the process. Note the emphasis on “United” as our way of being the Church. Note, especially, the word “together,” which invites the “outsiders” into the conversation.

To fulfill the mission of the denomination, “To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world,” we will move beyond “Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors.” as a description of corporate attributes. This “brand promise” will morph into a verb that enables “the people of The United Methodist Church,” in partnership with unchurched people across the globe, to change the world.

Powered by the Holy Spirit, this “Rethink Church” strategic direction will serve as a catalyst that moves the denomination, and those we hope to reach, into dialogue – and ultimately, into transformative, collaborative action. To that end, this document outlines a series of ideas, Scriptures, and ministry tools for leaders. We trust that these ideas provide merely a touch point for worldwide transformation that will be fueled by the passion and creativity of United Methodists throughout the connection.

As you prayerfully consider how to use these tools with your congregation, please remember these suggested guidelines:

- include members and community residents who represent all age groups, with mindful regard for the young adults (ages 18-34) this ministry seeks to reach
- reflect upon these ideas from three perspectives:
 - *Personal* - how does this topic or issue affect my spiritual journey and life?
 - *Corporate* - how does it impact our church’s ministry?
 - *Community* - how does it change our relationship with our neighbors/the world?

Thank you for partnering with the denomination on this important journey of discovery/re-discovery. Please share insights and ministry plans derived from these conversations with the “Rethink Church”/Igniting Ministry team at United Methodist Communications. We’d love to hear how you’re using these tools! Call 877-281-6535, email RethinkChurch@umcom.org, and visit RethinkChurch.org.

As you review the enclosed materials, please be prepared for the “sweat equity” required to bring them to fruition. May God be with you on the journey.

“Rethink” for Lent, Easter, and Pentecost

The following ideas focus on the Lectionary readings from the first Sunday of **Lent (March 1) to Pentecost (May 31), 2009**. Fourteen Sundays’ worth of ideas could lead to small group study, worship sermons, devotions at meetings, conversations with the community, etc.

Each week presents a theme, along with a key Scripture verse from that week’s Lectionary to use in exploring that theme. Each week offers a different “What if?” for us to ponder. Ideas also include how to illustrate the theme with worship visuals, décor, video clips, activities, and many other possibilities. Limits will come only from your own time and creativity.

Because people have different learning and participation styles, these suggestions may help focus their attention and involve them in various ways. Please remember that these are merely suggestions that could help your worship and other ministries generate additional illustrations and activities.

For visually-oriented people, videos may really bring home the message. Verbal learners may respond to the written words from the biblical texts. Still others, who are more action and touch-oriented learners, may want to have things they can do to live out the messages. Use your own ideas to think of objects and activities that help illustrate the stories from the Scriptures.

Themes: All Scriptures reveal themes that you might explore in worship and education ministries during this period. We’ve suggested one to study in-depth; however, the other Lectionary readings may inspire you.

Ideas: These ideas allow congregation members to participate in activities that help them apply what they learn and then make a difference in the community.

Images: Consider using the following images/décor, videos, art, music, drama, and other touch points for your church building and worship services during this season.

General ideas to help you begin to “Rethink Church” with your congregation:

- Have devotions related to the key Scriptures at all meetings during the season.
- Encourage open conversation and brainstorming, making all ideas safe from critique.
- Use “Rethink Church” banners inside and outside the building, with Scriptures and themes illustrated in visual ways, using the images suggested below.
- Emphasize the theme “Rethink Church” with new ideas and ministries, to help the congregation begin to believe that they can work creatively, with God and other people, to transform lives, churches, and the world.

Week 1: March 1 Rethink Repentance

Mark 1:9-15 – Baptism and temptation; key verse – v. 1:14b-15

Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." (Mark 1:14-15, NRSV)

“Rethink” Touch Point: John’s baptism of repentance and forgiveness of sins ushered in a fresh expectation of the coming of God’s kingdom, fulfilled in Jesus. What if we lived as if we were God’s kingdom – here and now?

Other Lectionary Readings:

Genesis 9:8-17 – Noah and Covenant
Psalm 25:1-10 – David, repentance
1 Peter 3:18-22 – Baptism, Noah, Christ

Leadership Questions:

Personal – What do I need to leave behind in order to move forward into the future God desires?

Corporate – How can repentance bring a new era of “kingdom-is-now” living?

Community – How do people in our community see our congregation – and how willing are we to hear what people say about us?

Themes

- “Wash off the dirt” – *The Message* paraphrase of the Scripture states this way
- “Do over”/new/fresh start
- Helping someone is not always clean and tidy
- God’s kingdom is now – and is in our hands; what are we doing with it?

Ideas

- Do a Service of Renewal of Baptism and Reaffirmation on this Sunday
- Have a “clean out” day for the church building with nothing off limits. If it’s unused, broken, neglected, cluttered or freezer-burned, get rid of it. Ask forgiveness later if someone notices or gets upset.
- Do a “clean up the neighborhood” day – invite your neighbors to help clear out debris, trash, and winter grime in the blocks around the church building. Order some pizzas or sub sandwiches and feed the neighbors, too – no charge – to thank them for helping.

Week 1: March 1 Rethink Repentance

Images

To get you started for these 14 weeks, we recommend that you visit these web sites:

- **UMTV.org** – stories of United Methodists who are making a difference in their communities and the world, told in under two minutes through video and voice over; the streaming videos could be useful as illustrations for your themes. We've recommended some stories and provided the date to make them easier to find and watch.
- **MediaWarehouse at RethinkChurch.org** – this download center for all "Open hearts" resources allows you to view the advertising messages and download FREE all available ads. Search by key word or type of medium you want to use.
- **IMDb.com** – the Internet Movie Database; this exhaustive collection of movie and television information may inspire you or remind you of a film clip that may make just the right point for your presentations.

Consider these metaphors for illustration and conversation:

- Crossroads or fork in the road
- "Mulligan" in golf (forgive a bad stroke and start over)
- Reboot a computer
- Football – instant replays and red flag reviews (change idea of what happened)
- False start in swimming or running
- Dawn of a new day
- "U" Turn sign
- Recharge a battery
- Turn a key
- Extreme makeovers
- Tune up/inspection
- Spring cleaning
- Resolutions – New Year, eternal
- Videos:
 - Existing "Open hearts" TV messages: "Dream" and "Thousand Hands" (find at MediaWarehouse at RethinkChurch.org)
 - UMTV story: "The Recovery Church" (5/14/08 – a non-judgmental place for people seeking healing and support, in the Minnesota "twin cities")
 - Movies: *The Bucket List* (stop living with certain patterns and begin living with new passion); *The Legend of Bagger Vance* (let go of the past and move forward)

Week 2: March 8 Rethink Covenant

Gen. 17:1-7, 15-16 – Abraham and Sarah/Covenant to bless earth; key – v. 17:7

I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. (Gen 17:7, NRSV)

“Rethink” Touch Point: God’s covenant with Abraham included more than just that family. All generations and the entire earth, blessed through a faithful family’s influence, can receive the richness of covenant relationship with God and one another. What if we take seriously our role as people of the covenant?

Other Lectionary Readings:

Psalm 22:23-31 – suffering

Romans 4:13-25 – covenant people by faith

Mark 8:31-38 (foretells death) or *Mark 9:2-9* (transfiguration)

Leadership Question:

Personal – What are the covenants in my life, and the names and roles that reflect those covenants?

Corporate – What can our church do now that will demonstrate faithfulness and bless generations to come?

Community – What programs and ministries could be covenant partners with our congregation to influence and improve our community?

Themes

- Faithfulness, obedience, patiently waiting for the fulfillment of Covenant
- Contract/Sign here
- Read the small print – God never breaks a promise
- Cultivate covenant – doesn’t just stand – takes relationship and commitment
- Safe ground/Trust/Protection
- Blessed to be a blessing

Week 2: March 8 Rethink Covenant

Ideas

- Discuss in small groups: What is our part of the covenant and how do we carry it outward beyond the church and our relationship with God to relationship with the community?
- Consider this week a time to remember the Global connection and community – living green – air and water – We share air with the whole planet; Anticipate Spring and its time of renewal

Images

- Rings – wedding; holding hands – diamond commercial; old and young couples
- “Handler” – Sci-fi and spy films with one person as “handler” for another
- “Fav 5” My circle, network – tribe – covenant of friendship
- Blood brothers
- Social networking
- Family Tree/DNA – could we think of covenant as roots and limbs – acorn to oak – time, patience, care?
- Crack in concrete – life finds a way through that crack
- Ripple effect/butterfly effect – one person’s action affects others
- Videos:
 - “What Happens After Sunday?” – video from original *Igniting Ministry Planning Kit*; also available in the *Living Our Promise Trainer’s Toolbox*; Roger Swanson mentions that the Church exists for those who are not part of it; several portions of the 13-minute video address these themes
 - Existing “Open hearts” TV messages: “Daughter Sleeping” and “Children Playing” (feature children and parents and touch the theme of faith passing from generation to generation)
 - UMTV story: “Girls Give Dolls” (2/5/07 - baskets with dolls inside - made by 8 and 11 year old girls working with their grandmother and made available to children in poverty)
 - Movies: *Evan Almighty* (like Noah, Evan keeps a covenant with God even when others think he’s crazy); *Pay it Forward* (when we receive, we give to another and change the world); *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* (knowing the ways you’ve changed someone else’s life)

Week 3: March 15 Rethink Boundaries

Exodus 20:1-17 – Ten Commandments; key verse – v. 20:3

You shall have no other gods before me. (Exodus 20:3, NRSV)

“Rethink” Touch Point: God’s actions in bringing Israel from slavery showed boundless power and goodness, and yet the people rebelled and questioned both God and Moses. Before providing instructions, in minute detail, for ordering life and worship, God set the priority relationships and boundaries in place. What if we stretch our boundaries?

Other Lectionary Readings:

Psalm 19 – Law of Lord, pure, just, right
I Cor. 1:18-25 – wisdom and foolishness of God
John 2:13-22 – cleansing the temple

Leadership Questions:

Personal – What boundaries have I placed between myself and others – and how can I determine if they are still helpful for my relationships?

Corporate – How do we sometimes put “Church” as an object of worship ahead of God? What can we rethink about “Church” to keep God as top priority?

Community – What language do we use that no longer has relevance to neighbors in our community and may put invisible barriers up between us?

Themes

- The commandments came to Israel when they were lost and wandering in the desert 40 years
- Boundaries help us find our way back to God and what’s right
- Boundaries sometimes need re-evaluation to keep first things first

Ideas

- Use this week to present information about “Safe Sanctuaries” and Cyber-safety. Perhaps, by inviting the community to learn what the church does to keep children safe, you will reach beyond your normal boundaries
- If weather permits, have a worship experience or community-friendly event outside your church’s building – on the lawn, in a community center, etc.
- Discuss with your congregation how to overcome the seen and unseen barriers of race, education, culture, economics, etc. , in your community

Week 3: March 15 Rethink Boundaries

Images

- GPS – 10 commandments are our GPS – redirect us; recalculate
- John Wesley preaching in the open air, giving lay people leadership, and working with women and persons of African descent – pushed boundaries
- Jesus changed the boundaries of relationships with Israel and Gentiles and with the “clean” and “unclean” of His day
- OnStar – help always available and monitoring your progress
- “Bubble” – personal space, personal boundaries, no violations of that bubble
- MySpace/Facebook – boundaries in relationships no longer as much of an issue
- Videos:
 - Existing “Open hearts” TV messages: “The Journey” (people wandering and trying to find their path to God)
 - “Friends Like These” – video from the resources *Beyond 30 Seconds: Developing a Welcoming Congregation* and the *Living Our Promise Trainer’s Toolbox*; this video tells the story of how a congregation responded when a guest pushed its boundaries of proper behavior in worship by trying to light a cigarette in the Sanctuary
 - “The Perfect Moment” – video from the resource *Beyond 30 Seconds: Developing a Welcoming Congregation* tells the story of a church that does sunset devotions to help its neighbors pause in a spiritual way to honor God as they watch the sunset at the beach
 - UMTV stories: “Boat Church” (9/5/07 – a church thinks way outside the box and starts an outdoor worship service where congregation members are welcome to come in their boats); “Apartment Church” (10/20/04 – a church starts a worship service in an apartment complex); “Mobile Message (6/18/03 – Sidewalk Sunday School extends the boundaries of congregations to reach kids through street evangelism)
 - Movies: *The Great Debators* (stay focused on a goal and break boundaries in the process); *The Ten Commandments* (use this perennial Lenten favorite film to generate discussion about the differences between the Biblical text and the dramatization)

Week 4: March 22 Rethink Grace

John 3:14-21 – God so loved...; key verse – v. 3:17

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:17, NRSV)

“Rethink” Touch Point: In this pivotal, oft-quoted passage, we usually emphasize v. 3:16 and its message of personal salvation, but the very next verse reminds us of God’s power to save the whole world. What if we offer grace rather than condemnation?

Other Lectionary Readings:

Numbers 21:4-9 – complaining people; God sends snakes
Ps. 107:1-3, 17-22 – thanks to God
Ephesians 2:1-10 – grace and faith

Leadership Question:

Personal – What are my experiences of grace?

Corporate – How is our church serving as a means of God’s grace?

Community – How can we share God’s message of grace with a world that often sees Christians as judgmental and condemning?

Themes

- Extravagant love
- With grace you can’t fail
- You don’t have to be perfect
- Bailout – God is our bailout plan
- We don’t have to earn God’s favor or be afraid of Christ condemning us
- We look back and see grace in retrospect

Ideas

- Use the “Hymn of Promise” during worship this week; to be relevant and friendly toward seekers, sing the most recognizable hymn among your unchurched neighbors – “Amazing Grace”
- To parallel Nicodemus’ evening visit to Jesus, have an evening service in which you invite the community to bring the questions they most want to ask God – and let them ask the pastor whatever they want in an open forum; could also do this through an online discussion forum or blog

Week 4: March 22 Rethink Grace

Images

- After midnight – teen not home in time – call, grace period
- Credit card grace period
- 2nd chance, extra credit
- Rain/Sunshine/Wind on face – touch of God
- Safety net
- Fumbles recaptured by a teammate/Support of a team
- Potter/clay – redo to get right shape
- Bankruptcy – relevant especially in today’s financial crisis
- Start over
- Reset GPS, computer, etc.
- Prune the tree
- Insurance
- Spell check – catch errors at end
- “Off the hook” – not held accountable
- Late paper – professor/teacher takes it anyway
- Videos:
 - Existing “Open hearts” TV messages: “Dream” (you can start over); “Advice” (love letter from God to us)
 - “Out of the Ashes” – video from the resources *Beyond 30 Seconds: Developing a Welcoming Congregation* and the *Living Our Promise Trainer’s Toolbox*; this video tells rest of the story of Richard Kimbro, featured in the video suggested for Week 3 – “Friends Like These”
 - Movies: *Amazing Grace* (tells the story of William Wilberforce, an 18th-century English politician who fought for the abolition of slavery, and of his relationship to the author of this renowned hymn); *Joshua* (a carpenter named Joshua brings joy and light to every person he meets when he arrives in a small town)

Week 5: March 29 Rethink Sin

Psalm 51:1-12 – Sin/cleansing; key verse – v. 51:10

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.
(Psalm 51:10, NRSV)

“Rethink” Touch Point: Confronted with his sin by a powerful, courageous prophet, King David responded with this prayer for cleansing and pardon. Why does “sin” make us so uncomfortable? What if we call sin by its name and learn to move on from it?

Other Lectionary Readings:

Jeremiah 31:31-34 – new Covenant – written on hearts

Hebrews 5:5-10 – priesthood of Melchizedek

John 12:20-33 – Jesus came to this time and place; can’t avoid this hour

Leadership Questions:

Personal – How do I rationalize or ignore my sin? What heart-cleansing do I need to experience to attain a “new and right spirit” in me?

Corporate – As a church, how do we find the courage to speak out against wrong and be a voice for change? How do we respond to prophets in our midst?

Community – How do we find the energy to do right in the community, when so much of our energy involves maintenance of the status quo in our church?

Themes

- Missing the mark
- Barriers to our potential
- Wrong things we do every day but may not see them as wrong
- Rationalizations/“not my fault” – blaming others
- Accountability
- Flip side: Getting hung up on the negatives, not seeing positives
- “I messed up”
- What do we just throw away instead of thinking how we can fix it?

Ideas

- During worship, give people an opportunity to write down sin that weighs heavy on their hearts; provide an opportunity to burn that paper
- Take extra time in worship to “offer signs of love and reconciliation” today

Week 5: March 29 Rethink Sin

Images

- Obstacle course, stumbling block
- Crack in road or crack in sidewalk
- Smile lines/Botox/Stress/frown lines – our faces change as we age – how do we cope with those changes?
- Imperfections
- Baggage
- Warning ticket for speeding – we don't see that as sin anymore
- Rose colored glasses
- Refresh command
- Undo key
- Videos:
 - Existing “Open hearts” TV messages: “Love Letters” (love letter from God to us); “The Journey” (not every path is smooth and straightforward); “Finding Yourself” (what you see outside is not always what's happening inside)
 - Movies: *A Few Good Men* (confronting those in power with what they've done wrong); *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (putting yourself on the line to confront corruption in leadership)

Week 6: April 5 Rethink Suffering (Palm Sunday – Passion Liturgy)

Mark 14:1-15:47 or Mk 15:1-39, (40-47) – Betrayal, trial, death; three keys – personal (v. 14:36), corporate (v. 14:18-19), and community (v. 15:39)

Personal:

He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." (Mark 14:36-37, NRSV)

Corporate:

And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, "Surely, not I?" (Mark 14:18-19, NRSV)

Community:

Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!" (Mark 15:39, NRSV)

"Rethink" Touch Point: Jesus' example of selfless suffering on our behalf prompts us to consider the true meaning and impact of suffering. Though we want to avoid suffering, good can come from it. What if we embrace and learn from suffering?

Leadership Questions: During this Holy Week, consider the following questions as you ponder the key verses above.

Personal – How do we personally respond to suffering?

Corporate – How do we cause one another to suffer?

Community – How does the community around us view suffering? Where do we see faith being denied today?

Other Lectionary Readings:

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 – Lord, thanks, salvation
Mark 11:1-11 or John 12:12-16 – Messiah, triumphal entry
Isaiah 50:4-9a – suffering
Psalm 31:9-16 – suffering
Philippians 2:5-11 – humility, exaltation

Week 6: April 5 Rethink Suffering (Palm Sunday – Passion Liturgy)

Themes

- We don't see what's really happening inside with others
- Suffering in your own mind – “Mind chatter” and negative “Self talk”
- “Awfulizing” – jumping to the worst possible conclusions
- “Should” on yourself – add pressure and suffering unnecessarily
- Less visible suffering everywhere – personal, corporate, community
- Racism – causes a community to suffer, personal suffering, corporate (church)
- Think beyond typical pictures of suffering to consider these afflictions:
 - Co-dependency
 - Insecurity
 - Perfectionism
 - Depression
 - Loneliness

Ideas

- Counteract suffering with random acts of kindness – do things in the community with no expectation of receiving anything in return
- Encourage your congregation members to keep a personal journal for meditations during Holy Week, considering these topics: bitterness, lack of forgiveness, self-pity, inaction, suffering we inflict on others, suffering that we find comfortable and hard to release
- Volunteer in places where suffering occurs in your community: hospitals, hospice, nursing homes, animal shelters
- Take a field trip to a place like the Holocaust Museum or Native American Museum to consider how groups of people have suffered and discuss how faith helps us through suffering and how “faith” sometimes afflicts others

Images

- All suffer together (Body analogy – Paul)
- Economy – everyone is suffering now by layoffs, drill down, trickle effect
- Dominoes falling
- River affected by pollution – not just the source suffers
- “Spiritual economy” – is that in a recession, too?
- Videos:
 - Movies: *Schindler's List* (help others who are suffering); *Life is Beautiful* (finding hope and joy in the midst of suffering); *Passion of the Christ* (harsh, difficult picture of Christ's suffering and death)

Week 7: April 12 Rethink Death (Easter Sunday)

John 20:1-18 (Mary at tomb) or Mark 16:1-8 (short version); key verses – John 20:15; Mark 16:6; John is more personal and Mark more a proclamation

Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." (John 20:15-16, NRSV)

But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. (Mark 16:6, NRSV)

"Rethink" Touch Point: Resurrection changes everything we understand about death; this passage serves as the ultimate example of what it means to rethink a closely held belief. What if death weren't the end, but rather the beginning?

Other Lectionary Readings:

*Acts 10:34-43 (Gentiles saved) or Isaiah 25:6-9
Ps. 118:1-2, 14-24 – Lord is righteous; salvation from Lord
I Cor. 15:1-11
Isaiah 25:6-9
Psalm 114
I Corinthians 5:6b-8
Luke 24:13-49

Leadership Questions:

Personal – What needs to be reborn in my spiritual life?

Corporate – What does resurrection thinking mean to our congregation at this time in its life? What may need to die in order for the Church to experience resurrection?

Community – How can our church be a source of rebirth in our community?

Week 7: April 12 Rethink Death (Easter Sunday)

Themes

- Ultimate example is Resurrection – forces us to rethink death
- Personal/Corporate/Community – seek God in all ways
- Death gives way to new life
- Personal death – dreams die; visions, hopes fade
- Corporate death – do some things in church need to die before new begins?
- Community – cities – are our communities dying because of our lack of action?

Ideas

- What if you celebrate All Saints Day on Easter instead of in November – or in addition to your November celebration? Honor the memory of your church's members who have passed into the Church Triumphant with some type of remembrance today
- Encourage your congregation to consider how to honor the deceased – through a columbarium, cemetery, memorials and bequests, and foundations and endowments, etc. – so people may live on after their death

Images

- Expiration Dates – how can we predict ours – and prepare for it?
- “Silent silhouettes on the horizon of change” – many cityscapes – tear down to rebuild (riverfront malls, example – Joel Barker's imagery)
- We often don't think about fixing things – just toss them out
- Life stages – birth, rebirth – multiple times in life – think more peacefully
- Railroad tracks in middle of nowhere – once had thriving towns
- Floods change river courses/Hurricanes change coastal landscapes
- Traumas in our lives – death, divorce, job loss
- Life transitions – small deaths
- Death of relationships – not just physical death
- Books: *One More Day* and *Tuesdays with Morrie* (Albom); *Who Moved My Cheese?* (Johnson – change or die); *Death and Dying* (Kubler-Ross);
- Videos:
 - Existing “Open hearts” TV messages: “Dream – Easter” (you can start over...); “Love Letters” (love letter from God to us); “Advice” (love letter from God to us)
 - Movies: *The Notebook* (the intimate relationship of love and death); *Steel Magnolias* (live despite grief and death – cycles of life continue); *Iron Man* (science prolongs life where death would have been inevitable before); *The Count of Monte Cristo* (defy death; find redemption)

Week 8: April 19 Rethink Sharing (Poverty Focus Area)

***Acts 4:32-35 – Sharing all as any had need /nobody wanted; key – v. 4:32**

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. (Acts 4:32, NRSV)

“Rethink” Touch Point: The believers in the early church relied upon one another’s possessions to benefit the whole community. Those with property offered it freely to help those without means, so nobody went without what they needed. As our denomination supports four “focus areas” during this quadrennium, this passage helps us focus on partnerships with people living in poverty. What if we shared ***all things*** with those in need?

Other Lectionary Readings:

Psalm 133 – unity
I John 1:1-2:2 – life, forgiveness
John 20:19-31 – Thomas and disbelief

Leadership Questions:

Personal – How can I re-evaluate my giving of time, talent and treasure?

Corporate – How can we consider our property as “community” property, for the benefit of those who have none? What can we share with one another?

Community – What can the church do to create partnerships with people in poverty, to improve living conditions in our neighborhood?

Themes

- Give and receive
- Believe we have something to offer
- Together, we can do something
- Share the wealth
- Hope and giving go hand in hand
- Eternal sharing – what we do may make an eternal difference for someone
- Teach people to fish – don’t give them fish – give skills
- I can’t change the whole world but I can start by helping my neighbor
- Sharing spiritual gifts, not just physical gifts

Week 8: April 19 Rethink Sharing (Poverty Focus Area)

Ideas

- Work with your church's leadership to discuss how, specifically, you can share with others – some people want tangible suggestions and don't know what to do on their own; consider it a "gifts" wish list to share with the congregation
- Support organizations that help gleaners; these groups help clear land so we don't waste crops; Search YouTube for stories about a farmer who appealed for help and people showed up to help him clear fields of food that otherwise would have rotted; by gleaning his land he avoided losing everything and they received free food
- Start a community garden on the church's land – invite community people to participate as a welcoming and non-threatening way to get them to engage with your congregation – no strings attached
- Have a church pot luck supper and invite homeless people from your community to share a meal, kindness, and conversation with your church members; while you're talking with people, ask how your church can help meet their ongoing needs

Images

- Hands
- Gift boxes and bags
- Knitting blankets
- Food – big baskets of it, full to overflowing – horn of plenty
- Feast – banquet; big family dinner; church pot luck
- Community garden
- Videos:
 - Existing "Open hearts" TV messages: "The Gift" (woman shares her gifts around the community); "Thousand Hands" (not just about money in the offering plate)
 - UMTV stories: "Prom Brings Joy After Storms" (3/22/06 – church in VA helps teens in hurricane-ravaged area); "Kids Care for Homeless" (2/22/06 – "tweeners" make "manna bags" with a day's worth of healthy food); "Constructive Kids" (7/12/06 – teens help rebuild homes to make safe housing for neighbors in need)
 - Movies: *The Pursuit of Happyness* (a kind person sometimes makes all the difference in someone else's life); *Cinderella Man* (faith, prayer, hard work and a few breaks help sustain a man and his family through the Great Depression and times of deep despair); *Places in the Heart* (a woman cobbles together a unique "family" to revitalize a farm)

Week 9: April 26 Rethink Healing (Health Focus Area)

***Acts 3:12-19 – health restored through Christ** (expand Lectionary passage to include 3:1-19 for fuller context); key verse – v. 3:16

And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you. (Acts 3:16, NRSV)

“Rethink” Touch Point: Peter and John showed compassion to a man, healing him through the power of Jesus’ name. The Israelites watched, astonished that these simple men, not learned or “Holy” by standards of the day, could perform such a miracle. What if we believed God could bring healing and wholeness to the world through us?

Other Lectionary Readings:

Psalm 4
I John 3:1-7 – righteousness
Luke 24:36b-48 – Jesus eats with Apostles

Leadership Questions:

Personal – How can my faithful example bring healing and wholeness in individual lives, in my church, and in the community?

Corporate – What surprising means or persons might God want to use to bring healing – both in our midst and around the world?

Community – How can our church get more involved in healing ministries and programs in our community?

Themes

- Healing comes in ways we don’t always want or that we question – people questioned Peter healing the crippled man – faith in Christ healed him
- Forgiveness & Reconciliation
- Inclusiveness
- Euthanasia – what is health and healing and how does it come?
- Healing sometimes doesn’t come without pain and transition – do the surgery, drain the puss, take the medicine
- It’s hard to heal alone – we need others to help us
- Some would rather die than do the hard work of healing
- Use all the tools at our disposal – take medicine, participate in your own healing
- Being healed of our “dis-ease”

Week 9: April 26 Rethink Healing (Health Focus Area)

Ideas

- Use this week to highlight healthcare issues for all – a worldwide issue that our denomination has as one of four “focus areas” during 2009-12
- Using resources like Wesley’s *Primitive Physic* and Nouwen’s *The Wounded Healer*, begin a study of health and wholeness with your congregation; in the weeks after Easter, this type of study can be an excellent short-term opportunity for newcomers to make a meaningful connection to your church
- Observe World Malaria Day (April 25) this weekend and invite your congregation and community to learn more about this disease, which kills a child every 30 seconds
- Raise funds to support Nothing But Nets and buy as many \$10 malaria nets as you can with the proceeds; encourage your children’s ministry planning team to make Nothing But Nets the focus of children’s giving during Spring and Vacation Bible School

Images

- Prune the tree
- Figure out a way around – wash out the road – find a new way to get where you are going
- Re-mem-bering
- Dignity in death
- Treat symptoms or genuine healing – can we tell the difference?
- Videos:
 - “Open hearts” TV messages: The newest TV spot, set to debut this week, will focus on global health as its theme; watch for it at RethinkChurch.org in March!
 - UMTV stories: “Free Health Supplies” (2/21/07 – PA church provides health care equipment to low-income and uninsured people in the community); “Clinic Cures Community” (1/16/08 – church starts clinic to help uninsured workers; grows to multiple sites and serves thousands); “Bears Ease Burdens” (5/21/08 – a church provides Teddy Bears to patients in hospitals nearby; bears attend worship and are prayed for before going into “duty”)
 - Movies: *The Green Mile* (healing comes from unlikely and sometimes scary sources); *A Civil Action* and *Erin Brockovich* (class action suits benefit many people suffering from chemically-induced diseases); *Patch Adams* (healing with humor and kindness)

Week 10: May 3 Rethink Leading (Leadership Focus Area)

This is the advertising launch week of “Rethink Church” – May 5 & 6 – consider how to launch this initiative in your community

I John 3:16-24 – Lord is shepherd, leader; key verse – v. 3:18

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. (1 John 3:18, NRSV)

“Rethink” Touch Point: John’s letter reminds us of Jesus’ loving example – laying down his life for us. As leaders we follow Christ’s example and become servants to others. What if we honored servants as leaders and challenged leaders to serve?

Other Lectionary Readings:

*Acts 4:5-12 – questioned Peter’s power; came from Christ, not himself
Psalm 23 – Lord is shepherd
John 10:11-18 – lay down life for friends; servant leadership

Leadership Questions:

Personal – Where is God calling me to lead – at home, work, church, elsewhere?

Corporate – How can we demonstrate sacrificial love and service to the members of our congregation? Who are our future leaders and how are we helping them grow in their service to others?

Community – What truth and action can we show the community, as we engage in loving service in the world?

Themes

- Leading by serving – strong, principled leaders are one of the “focus areas”
- Leadership challenges for us in church – not just ordained clergy anymore; strong lay leadership involvement needed in many areas underserved by clergy
- Membership and participation; leaders having to “pay dues” before becoming leaders – how can we reconsider these expectations
- Discover your gifts and serve in appropriate places – edify them and the church
- Integrity, humility, serving rather than being served

Launch Idea:

Show your church’s leadership this week as you address a community need in sacrificial service to others. Build from what you’ve learned in previous weeks. Be creative and do something new and different to help people “Rethink Church.”

Week 10: May 3 Rethink Leading (Leadership Focus Area)

Ideas

- Honor your local community servants for their leadership and heroism – police, fire, military folks lay down life for us; recognize their contributions and sacrifices during worship this Sunday
- Begin a short-term study of Jim Collins' book *Good to Great for Non-Profits*, with special emphasis on his "Five Levels of Leadership" and reflect on other leadership models and materials from the secular and business world

Images

- Horses led with bits
- Sleds with dog teams in the lead
- Bicycle team – leader; whole team helps the leader get through
- Child learning to walk or ride a bike – walk beside and help; get down off your own bike to help another learn
- Can't fully feel what something is like until you do it yourself
- Driver's ed – brake pedal on passenger side – help and backup
- Children making 911 calls to save people's lives
- Take off the bib and put on the apron
- Big brothers/big sisters; teaching, leading – art form like pottery
- "Claim it" – call to action for young people – don't just talk, claim, do something
- Food banks, tutoring, ministries in the community
- Videos:
 - "Open hearts" TV messages: "Daughter Sleeping" (a single mother ponders how to lead her daughter); "No Estás Obligado" (we serve because we follow Jesus; our leader shows that example)
 - UMTV stories: "Soothing Homeless Soles" (2/15/06 – a foot-washing ministry for the homeless shows servant leadership in action); "Youth Face Homelessness" (3/19/08 – a teen leads his congregation to help the homeless in his area after experiencing "Night Ministry")
 - Movies: *Mr. Holland's Opus* (leadership comes in humble and self-sacrificing packages); *The Karate Kid* (teaching and leadership sometimes combine to change lives)

Week 11: May 10 Rethink Witnessing (Growth Focus Area)

***Acts 8:26-40 – Philip baptizes Eunuch on road** – new places/generations; not just in temple; new places for new people, out in the world and not just inside the church; key verse – v. 8:30

So Philip ran up... and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" (Acts 8:30, NRSV)

“Rethink” Touch Point: Philip the evangelist saw a potential believer in Christ, where others might have seen a person to avoid. By demonstrating faithfulness to the Gospel and willingness to take the message to unusual people, in unusual places, Philip gives a powerful witness and example. What if we stepped outside the church to meet people where they are instead of expecting them to come to us?

Other Lectionary Readings:

Psalm 22:25-31 – all will bow down to Lord; proclaim to generations yet unborn
I John 4:7-21 – love one another and be in the world
John 15:1-8 – Jesus is true vine; fruit that will last

Leadership Questions:

Personal – How can I be a witness for Christ in my daily life? What gives me energy and nourishes my faith?

Corporate – How can we go to the community with a message of hope instead of expecting people to come to us? How are we measuring success and how can we re-evaluate those measures?

Community – Who are people we might normally pass by without noticing? Knowing we can't do everything by ourselves, what community organizations can we explore as partners to make this community a better place?

Themes

- Witness not with words but also with actions – service is witnessing
- Prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness – new language in Discipline
- Highlight “Open hearts” and our advertising efforts for corporate witnessing, welcoming and inviting
- Faith sharing, evangelism – remove the stigma
- “Faith and Good Works” DNA in our denomination
- Authenticity; Being real; Drop the act

Week 11: May 10 Rethink Witnessing (Growth Focus Area)

Ideas

- “Random Acts of Witnessing” – like “Random Acts of Kindness” but instead, talk to people and hear about their faith questions
- The Church Growth Focus Area will challenge our churches to develop “new places for new people” and reach our communities in new and creative ways – begin to have a conversation with your church about starting a new faith community in an unexpected and “out of the box” place
- Explore community partnerships as ways to reach new people in new places – perhaps groups of people need places to meet and you could provide space
- Share “life stories” and “soul stories” with others; find new places to meet new people and begin conversations to learn about their lives and interests

Images

- Faith Talk – not about talk but about life
- Living consistently – walk the talk
- Help someone; person with sign asking for food/Good Samaritan
- Proselytizing/tracts; no “screaming on the quad” – new formats and ways to share Christ to honor the context of today
- Not about the building – where else?
- Outside the box – church is the box; get outside the walls and property boundaries; Outside the physical bounds of the building – off the property
- Faith meets life; outside the church
- Other days of the week – not just Sunday
- Core beliefs – heart of the matter; back to basics; soul talk/soul sharing
- Videos:
 - UMTV stories: “Church in a Box” (6/27/07 – church solves space issue by expanding to second site, with worship center in a box); “Dramatic Worship” (9/12/07 – Hot Metal Bridge congregation in Pittsburgh does church in new ways for new people); “Church Runs Restaurant” (10/24/07 – a congregation starts a restaurant to meet community needs and neighbors)
 - Movies: *Chocolat* (new people in the community can bring new energy and new perspectives)

Week 12: May 17 Rethink Love

John 15:9-17 – abide in Christ’s love; key – v. 15:13

No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. (John 15:13, NRSV)

“Rethink” Touch Point: You know the song – “They’ll know we are Christians by our love.” In this passage Jesus sets the expectation of what love really is and how we can demonstrate love to others. In today’s world, though, younger generations often see Christians as anything but loving – judgmental, rigid, uncaring – and those are just the kindest descriptions from some people. What if we became known for love?

Other Lectionary Readings:

*Acts 10:44-48 – Gentiles receive Holy Spirit
Psalm 98 – joyful noise to the Lord
I John 5:1-6 – love and obey Christ

Leadership Questions:

Personal – What portion of my life am I laying down for others? What types of people do I have a hard time loving?

Corporate – How do we show love to one another in the church?

Community – How can we show love to a hurting and suspicious world?

Themes

- Abide in Christ’s love
- True love is the long term – not falling in love but sustaining love
- Commitment/Covenant or contract
- Life-long love; daily love; eternal love – how do we show all?
- Selflessness, putting another first – that shows love
- Exceptional acts of love – not random, more than kindness
- Risk and vulnerability – dare to love
- Stake your reputation on love
- Lay down our lives differently – act of courage to share yourself
- Put your life on hold for someone else; put life on pause to help another press “play” – invest time in love
- Love remains when all else leaves

Week 12: May 17 Rethink Love

Ideas

- Sponsor an evening dinner and discussion group to bring together your church members with community leaders; find common ground with those outside the church as you discuss what your church can do to demonstrate love to your neighbors
- For a children's sermon, ask kids to define and describe love; hear what they have to say and then bring the message back around to "love as serving others"

Images

- Organ transplants – sacrifice for others
- Tribe, Facebook, relationships expressed in different ways these days
- Involved in social networking; cocooning – locked in; love finds another way through the social networks – less isolation now if we choose
- Out on a limb; tightrope
- Indiana Jones/Last Crusade – step out in faith off the edge
- Notes and love letters – new ways now – text, email, etc.
- Safe place; technology broadens our ways of sharing love
- All the different definitions of love from the Greek language
- Discipline, consistency, vulnerability, lifestyle and not program
- Love your neighbor; not war with your neighbor
- Videos:
 - UMTV stories: "Pets for Elderly People" (4/12/06 – ministry gives pets to people who need loving companionship); "Serving Special Needs" (3/28/07 – ministry for special needs children as an act of love for children and their parents)
 - Movies: *Saving Private Ryan* (a team of soldiers puts several lives on the line to save one man); *P.S. I Love You* (a dying man leaves messages for his widow, giving her hope and a will to love again)

Week 13: May 24 Rethink Life

I John 5:9-13 – Son of God; eternal life; key verse – v. 5:12

Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 John 5:12, NRSV)

“Rethink” Touch Point: This passage addresses the eternal and abundant life available through belief in Jesus Christ. It’s not about excluding those who don’t believe; rather the passage suggests that only with Jesus are our lives truly full and eternal. What if we really began to live instead of merely survive?

Other Lectionary Readings:

Psalm 1 – Lord watches over the righteous

*Acts 1:15-17, 21-26 – choose new apostle – pray and find the one God wants

John 17:6-19 – protect Christ’s people – Jesus prays for his followers

Leadership Questions:

Personal – How can I live “abundant life” as I anticipate eternal life? Who do people say that I am – and does it match what I want them to say?

Corporate – How can we show the world what life really holds – now and for eternity? Where is our church in its life cycle – growing, declining, dying?

Community – What can we do to bring the life-giving message of Christ to our community and the world?

Themes

- Apocalyptic, eternal life vs. living here and now
- Embrace all that God desires to give us
- Jesus as source of “meaning of life”
- Life is sacred and precious in itself – we don’t have to “produce” to be loved by God and given life in Christ
- What do our lives mean to others?
- How do we measure life? By the numbers?
- Can we live abundantly in isolation?

Week 13: May 24 Rethink Life

Ideas

- Use this week to explore “Hot Topics”/provocative themes – meaning of life, life on other planets, origins of life, cloning, conception/abortion, euthanasia, stem cell research, global warming
- Have people consider the long-term view of their lives in a small group setting; ask them to write their own eulogies or obituaries and consider what they want said of them at their funerals
- Plant trees and flowers to celebrate and participate in the miracle of life
- This will be Memorial Day Weekend; use the timing to consider these topics:
 - Life after betrayal and loss; observing holidays after the loss of a loved one; moving on and yet honoring your loved one by living
 - Honoring those who gave their lives in service to others

Images

- Check ups and ways of keeping life and health
- Technology and other enhancements of life
- Addictions, overindulgence, excess, waste
- Ebb and flow of life
- New life
- Road less traveled
- Books to discuss or study: *Passages* (G. Sheehy); *Seasons of a Man’s Life* (D. Levinson)
- Videos:
 - Existing “Open hearts” TV messages: “Rain – Picket Fence” (what does my life mean?); “Finding Yourself” (you can find yourself again and don’t have to do it alone)
 - UMTV stories: “Wigs for Cancer Patients” (5/1/06 – helping life have meaning for people being treated for cancer); “Help for Homeless Women” (4/2/08 – a PA shelter helps women rebuild their lives)
 - Movies: *It’s a Wonderful Life* (a man feels his life has been worthless but gets a new perspective); *Freedom Writers* (an enthusiastic educator presents possibilities and helps teens create new lives for themselves); *Groundhog Day* (what if we got chances to relive the same day?)

Week 14: May 31 Rethink Church (Pentecost)

*Acts 2:1-21 or **Ezekiel 37:1-14 – Can dry bones live again?**; key verse – v. 37:3

He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." (Ezekiel 37:3-4, NRSV)

“Rethink” Touch Points: The passage in Acts 2 celebrates birth of “The Church” at the festival of Pentecost, mere weeks after Jesus’ death and resurrection. The Scripture in Ezekiel calls into question whether a prophet, declaring God’s word to dry bones, can make those dead bones hear God and live again. While the Acts passage offers a traditional Pentecost message, choosing the unexpected Scripture of Ezekiel may provide a more rich interpretation of “Rethink Church,” signaling our church’s rebirth through the rethinking we’ve done in the past several weeks. What if **we** Rethink Church?

Other Lectionary Readings:

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b – Lord endures forever;
Romans 8:22-27 or Acts 2:1-21 – birth of the Church – Rethink Church
John 15:26-27 (Holy Spirit advocate); 16:4b-15 (go to Father; give what I have)

Leadership Questions:

Personal – What is “church” to me? What about the phrase “Rethink Church” challenges or upsets me? What about it excites and motivates me?

Corporate – What is “church” to our congregation? How can our church live again by rethinking itself?

Community – What are our church’s “names” in the community (probably not the one on the building)? How can we change our name in their eyes?

Themes

- Lots of ways of rethinking church – see previous weeks for examples
- Rethink the old patterns of doing things; Bring people into a new paradigm, not an old one
- Large church, new ways to define success
- Sub-categories/touchpoints:
 - Rethink worship traditions and experiences
 - Rethink administration
 - Rethink ministries in the community

Week 14: May 31 Rethink Church (Pentecost)

Ideas

- On this final week of the “Rethink Church” launch and build-up, have a celebratory all-church dinner and lead an open discussion to ask people how they define “church” and what it means to them. Group people by tables according to their interest in discussing these topics – or others you think better reflect your congregation’s needs at this time in its life:
 - Rethink Church
 - Rethink Worship
 - Rethink Mission
 - Rethink Education
 - Rethink Nurture
 - Rethink Witness
- Feeling brave? Invite the community and let people challenge the church. Listen only and try not to be defensive if they say things that are difficult to hear. Be willing to learn whatever it takes to discover what your church needs to be relevant in your community

Images

- Bones are the most visceral image with the Ezekiel passage
- Church buildings and people
- Use your church directory photos in a creative way
- Videos:
 - Existing “Open hearts” TV messages: “The Journey” (the people coming together at the end offer a new picture of “Church”); “The Gift” (what if church happened outside, as people share their gifts with the world?)
 - UMTV stories: “The Recovery Church” (5/14/08 – Rethink Church to start something new and reach new people); “Gas Station Church” (1/28/04 – a church built atop a gas station – income support for ministry); “Church Skateboard Park” (5/25/05 – church donates land and money for a skate park for the community)
 - Movies: *Keeping the Faith* (try new ideas and shake things up to introduce change and energy to a congregation); *Sister Act* (get out into the neighborhood and bring new life and energy to the church)

Again, thank you for partnering with the denomination on this important journey of discovery/re-discovery. Please share insights and ministry plans derived from these conversations with the “Rethink Church”/Igniting Ministry team at United Methodist Communications. We’d love to hear how you’re using these tools! Call 877-281-6535, email RethinkChurch@umcom.org and visit RethinkChurch.org.