

Lesson 23. What does it mean to be committed to the pursuit of a transformed church and society?

Thirteenth Sunday in Kingdomtide

November 17, 2019

General Concept: To be committed to the pursuit of a transformed church and society means to consecrate our whole being to the work of ushering in the Reign of God.

Biblical References: Isaiah 65:17-25, Luke 21:5-19

Age Level Concepts

- We need to be committed to the pursuit of a transformed church and society.
- We need to consecrate our whole being to the work of ushering in the Reign of God.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- Make a connection between commitment to pursue transformation of Church and society and consecrating of oneself to the work of ushering in God's Reign
- Identify ways by which they can help in the work of transforming both Church and society
- Realize the need to consecrate their whole being to the work of ushering in God's Reign

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV])
song chart, offering plate or basket

Biblical Background:

Isaiah 65:17-25

Isaiah retells God's promise of the "New Heaven and New earth" in the context of Israel's hope for restoration. The Lord reassures their devastated people that, "the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind" (65:17). This means that the fall of Judah, the terror of the Babylonian invasion, the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, the forcible dislocation and abjection of Judean leaders (65:1-7), will no longer be considered when God is creating the "new heavens and a new earth." This promise reconfigures everything that Judah had known about its life and its identity. Judah had been under threat from the very earliest cultural memories preserved in biblical tradition; the enslavement in Egypt, the threat of Assyrian and Babylonian empires, and the threat of extinction. Yet, God reminds them to have hope for the possibility of healing and restoring their life through God's power and compassion.

Luke 21:5-19

The account delves into Jesus' prophetic discourse. Here, Luke depicts Jesus differentiating his teaching from that of the false prophets who also quoted the ancient words of God. While announcing the coming of God's judgment, Jesus cautions against following prophets who claim to know God's "timetable" and to have the ability to invoke Jesus' name. This prophetic discourse does not predict anything but was just Jesus following the prophets in teaching that the struggles in history and the disturbances in nature are not accidental. It reminds believers that God triumphed over chaos in creating the natural world, and yet, both human and other forces are still contending for the earth. The hope to which Jesus testifies in this passage, therefore, is no trivial denial of the struggles, the pain and agony of human life, or the catastrophic forces of nature. These are real and the prophets of old have interpreted such devastations as the context of God's saving work. For Luke, Jesus joins this chorus, bringing it close to the concrete realities of early Christians. But he says, "This will be an opportunity to testify", and, "By your endurance you will gain your souls." Jesus is then also promising the faithful that he will give them "words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict."

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn "Let There Be Peace on Earth"

Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with us

Let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be

With God our Creator, children all are we

Let us walk with our kinfolk in perfect harmony

Let peace begin with us, let this be the moment now

With every step we take, let this be our solemn vow

To take each moment and live each moment

In peace eternally

Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with us.

Opening Prayer

We thank you O God for making us rise to live our life today. Make our fellowship and study be part of our pursuit in transforming the church and society. Fill us Lord with your spirit and make us truly your body. Amen.

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read Isaiah 65:17-25

- What kind of a world is being portrayed in the prophecy of Isaiah?
- How would God's people live with God?
- How would you picture out the old creation or what do you think happened to the old creation?
- What do you think is needed in order to achieve transformation?
- Read Luke 21:5-19
 - What kind of a world is being depicted in the account of Luke?
 - What should a believer do to withstand changes of the time?

Lessons Learned

- Our church, the UCCP envisioned to be committed in the pursuit of a transformed church and society towards an abundant and meaningful life for all.

Post on the board the following statements and ask each learner to choose one statement which reflects his /her thoughts in relation to the question at hand. Let each explain the statement they chose.

Question: "How can we demonstrate our commitment in the pursuit of a transformed church and society?"

- a. We demonstrate our commitment in the pursuit of a transformed church and society by assessing the weaknesses of the community of believers and correct its mistakes.
- b. We cannot transform others if we don't transform ourselves first.
- c. We demonstrate our commitment in the pursuit of a transformed church and society by living a life in accordance to the life exemplified by Christ.
- d. Being committed to the pursuit of a transformed church and society means one has to dedicate his whole being to the work of ushering in God's reign.
- e. We need God to change us so that church and society will transform.
- f. The believers need to strengthen themselves and be consistent in their faith and practice to demonstrate its commitment to the pursuit of a transformed church and society.

Applying the Lessons Learned

- As one body, empowered by God's spirit, we collectively work with the guidance of a common vision. Therefore, we find ways in order to achieve this vision.

- Ask: “What are the possible, concrete and doable ways we can identify by which we can help transform church and society?”

Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn

“Make Me a Servant”

Make me a servant humble and meek,
 Lord let, me lift up those who are weak
 And may the prayer of my heart always be,
 Make me a servant, make me a servant
 Make me a servant today.

Closing Prayer

We dedicate ourselves to you O Lord for the work of transforming church and society. Cleanse us from selfish intentions and fill us with your purpose. Make us realize that we need to commit ourselves to your work because it is the only way we can respond to your love and grace. Accept our offerings Lord and may our actions from today please you always. Amen

Lesson 24: What does it mean to have an abundant life?

Fourteenth Sunday in Kingdomtide

November 24, 2019

General Concept: Abundant life means resources are sufficient and equitably shared among everyone.

Biblical References: Jeremiah 23:3; Acts 2:44-47

Age Level Concepts

- Abundant life means resources are sufficient for everybody to use.
- Abundant life means resources are shared equitably among everyone.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- Differentiate equality from equity
- Discuss the effects on society if there is equitable sharing of resources
- Mention the barriers in the application of equitable sharing of resources
- Give suggestions as to how equity can be applied in people’s daily living

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV])
 song chart, offering plate or basket

Biblical Background

Jeremiah 23:3 talks of a prophecy for the restoration of Judah from Babylon in a language which, in its fullness, can only apply to the final restoration of both "Judah" and "Israel." Historically, the years of the prophet Jeremiah's ministry were the most turbulent time for the rulers of Judah. The seats of power in the ancient Near East had shifted. The dominance of the Assyrian empire was waning, and the Babylonian empire was on the rise. Assyria and Egypt, who had once been rivals, now had a tenuous alliance to vainly attempt to buffer Babylonian expansion. This international upheaval left the kings in the small nation of Judah to make some very difficult decisions. While a king's and a ruler's role was to gather the people together and protect them, the kings of Judah, however, made policy decisions that placed the people in peril and ultimately led to their exile. Jeremiah, knowing this, then, declares a prophetic pronouncement which consisted of a critique of the ills of the past and the present which was balanced with an inspiring bit for hope for the future. Hence, verse 3, reminds us that one day, God will gather the exiled people and return them to their homeland. The return from exile would, in essence, be a new start where the people will once again be fruitful and multiply (verse 3).

Acts 2:44-47 refers to the communal life of the early church. It refers to what the Holy Spirit can do the life of the community of faith. These verses do not lay down rules or specific structures for Christian living. In their context, they indicate that the essence of the reign of God creates the potential for mutual service that embodies God's justice. The life and work of a Christian community may reflect the reign of God that Jesus proclaimed while on earth and secured through his death, resurrection, and exaltation. The community of faith in Jerusalem lives a multifaceted witness, one not restricted to a single place or mode. This witness manifests itself in houses and in the Jerusalem temple. It benefits its members and earns the admiration of outsiders. The community exists not for its own sake, but to care for its most vulnerable members and to be a means by which God extends His care and providence to others (v. 47). Hence, this passage anchors humanity's deepest hopes for community, justice, generosity, and meaning. Specifically, as a result of people coming to embrace the crucified, risen, and glorified Christ as God's designated agent, or as the particular means by which God institutes and exercises God's reign within creation.

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn

"It Could Be a Wonderful World"

If each little child could have fresh milk each day

If each working man had enough time to play

If each homeless person had some place to stay

It could be a wonderful world.

If there were no poor and the rich were content
If strangers were welcome wherever they went
If everyone knew what community meant
It could be a wonderful world.

If we could consider each other, a neighbor, friend, sister or brother
It could be a wonderful, wonderful world, it could be a wonderful
world.

Opening Prayer

Gather us in your love Lord and make us grateful for the blessing of
life we receive the moment we open our eyes in the morning. Bless
this day as we are going to learn and discern your words for us today.
In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read Jeremiah 23:3
 - What happened to God's people as reflected in the text?
 - What was God's plan and intention for the remnants?
 - Do you think such intentions are still true today?

- Read Acts 2:44-47
 - Describe the life among the believers according to the account in Acts.
 - What aspects of the believers' life were being taken care of?
 - What life- practice of the early believers that impresses you most?

Lessons Learned

- "SLICE of CAKE". Present this situation to the learners and ask for their reaction.
Situation: There is a wedding in the community. The mayor and the rich members of the community were invited as guests as well as the whole community. During the wedding reception, the mayor and the well-offs were seated in a different table; everybody noticed that there were different kinds of food prepared, there were four kinds of cakes and drinks. When it was time to eat, people were asked to line up in order to get their food while those seated on the special table were served. They got to eat only two kinds of dishes way different from those sitting on the special table. The rich got to eat the three kinds of cakes while the last one was divided among all guests. The people seated on

the special table were served with special drinks and the rest with soft drinks.

If you were present in that occasion, how would you feel?

- **DEFINITION OF WORDS.**

Equality – *noun/equal-i-ty*: the quality or state of being equal: the quality or state of having the same rights, social status, etc.

: Synonyms:
sameness, parity, equivalence

Equity – *noun/eq-ui-ty*: fairness or justice in the way people are treated; justice according to natural law or right.

: Synonyms:
impartiality, justice, fairness

- Differentiate “EQUALITY FROM EQUITY”. Ask the learners to cite examples of how these concepts can be applied to their daily lives and which of these concepts would they prefer.

- “EPISTLE TO THE CHRISTIANS TODAY” (UCCP Statements and Resolutions)
General Assembly
21-26 May 1978

In the spirit of concern, we 30 participants to a study seminar on society and institutions sponsored by the Office of the Bishop — UCCP Mindanao Jurisdiction from 27 March to 2 April, 1978, in Davao City, reflected on the following issues:

1. The increasing concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few;
2. The preferential treatment accorded multi-national Corporations resulting in the exploitation of our natural resources for the benefit of these foreign interests; and the irreparable damage inflicted on our environment due to the uncontrolled operations of agricultural and industrial corporations;
3. The violation of basic human rights of the greater majority of our people, including the right of food, clothing and shelter;
4. The enslavement of the greater majority of our people, producing crippled beings, not creatures of God, enmeshed in a culture of silence;
5. The sense of helplessness and despair of the greater majority of our people, resulting from and reinforcing their powerlessness;

6. The political and economic inequality as the primary divider, particularly in the Mindanao and Sulu, rather than cultural religious differences which are often times over-played; and,
7. The reinforcement by the institutionalized Church of the unjust social structure which is faithlessness to its prophetic and transforming ministry.

THEREFORE,

1. We reiterate our stand for genuine human development seeking solidarity with the people in their struggles for justice and liberation;
2. We urge all to take positive steps towards the protection of our environment from agricultural and industrial exploitation and desolation;
3. To encourage the formation and strengthening of people's organizations to ensure popular participation in decision-making;
4. We call upon the institutional church to fulfill its commitment of identification with the deprived, the enslaved, the accused and the despised;
5. We seek the peace that can only spring from situations where "justice rolls like a mighty stream" and development take cognizance of the dignity of the people.

Ref: *General Assembly, 78-117, 21-26 May 1978, p. 35.*

- Ask the learners the following:
 - "What could be the effects in the life of people if there is equitable sharing of resources?"
 - What could be the reasons and hindrances in the application of equitable sharing in our present time?

Applying the Lessons Learned

Our church holds true to its statement before recognizing that there is injustice in the distribution of wealth and resources in our society. Only few hold the economic and political power and wealth of the country while the poor continues to be poor. We see it as one of the root causes of the problem confronting our country. Unless this kind of system or way of life is stopped or destroyed, people will remain to suffer and deprived of life abundant.

We are challenged to take the side of the poor, the deprived and victims of this economic and political manipulations

- What can we do as Christians in order that equitable sharing be experienced in our daily living?

Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn "Christ Has Called Us to New Visions"

(Tune: Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee)

All creation struggles, yearning for a time of true shalom
Are we trying, are we learning now to make the earth our home?
For the hungry and despairing, for the poor of all the earth
Make us partners burden sharing, bringing all a sense of worth.

Christ still calls us, young and aging, men and women bound and free

Colors, talents, thoughts engaging, joined in one community
Christ remolding, healing, leading, sins forgiven, life restored!
Let us live God's justice, heeding, strengthened by our risen Lord.

Closing Prayer

You have given us blessing not according to what we want but according to our needs. You have created the world with so much bounty so that everyone may be filled and live abundantly. But it is sad to know that only few enjoy the abundance that is meant for everyone. We pray O Lord that your empowering spirit will continue to challenge us to stand for what is right and claim what is supposed to be ours. With your love and guidance may we as a community will live out the life that shows care for the needs of others. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen

Lesson 25: What does it mean to have a meaningful life?

First Sunday of Advent

December 1, 2019

General Concept: A meaningful life is a life full of love, lived serving God and others.

Biblical References: Isaiah 2:1-5, Romans 13:11-14

Other Appropriate References: I John 3:16

Age Level Concepts

- A meaningful life is a life full of love, lived serving God and others.
- A meaningful life can only be experienced when one puts God and others first.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- Share how they have achieved or experienced a meaningful life
- Discuss ways of serving God and people and its impact on the lives of the community of believers
- Decide to continually serve God and the people

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV])
song chart, offering plate or basket, bond papers, pens, bowl or box

Biblical Background

Isaiah 2:1-5 describes a day when God's promises to Judah come true. Judah is so often haunted by defeat, judgment, and historical circumstances which are recorded in history. But there will be a day where glory outshines shadow, when joy extinguishes sorrow, when peace silences violence, when rebellion cedes to obedience, when faith becomes sight. This passage portrays a theological claim associated generally with Zion, the Temple, and the city of Jerusalem. Basically, it portrays that God has chosen Zion as the center of his reign over the world; Zion serves as the center of God's governance over creation. And at Zion, God establishes order by bringing chaos to an end. Basically it speaks about God's promises to Zion and to David. The word of promise in Isaiah 2:1-5 is embedded within prophetic oracles of judgment (Isaiah 1:21-31; 2:5-22).

In the prior chapter, the "holy" city of Jerusalem is accused of murder, rebellion, injustice, and corruption (Isaiah 1:21-23). The texts immediately following Isaiah 2:1-5, claim that God's people have forsaken God's ways (Isaiah 2:6-9). In the first two chapters of Isaiah, then, Jerusalem is offered words of both judgment and salvation. These words of judgment, however, are not in contradiction to the promise of Isaiah 2:1-5.

In this text, promise and judgement are not contradictory realities: judgment serves promise, and contributes to bringing about the fulfillment of promise. The city of God will one day be transformed from alloy to pure metal. She will be a holy and magnificent magnet for the nations, but only after a season of judgment and refinement; when God will turn God's hand against the city. God must first approach Zion in the form of an enemy before showing himself as the fulfiller of promises.

Romans 13:11-14 reflects the emphasis of the advent of dawning light. He speaks of the night being far gone, and the day of salvation being at hand. The implication he draws is that people have to live accordingly since it was Christ who enacted our salvation. Our hope will be found in Him which will come and cast away every shadow of darkness.

One of the essences of this hope is the transformation of our lives and communities. This is a manifestation of the future that awaits us. So, as we wait for Christ's coming, we need to become people worthy of Christ people by putting off the deeds that mark the world as unprepared for Christ's reign of peace and justice. This is why Paul says at the beginning to "waken from sleep." It is a plea to start faithfully living out the meaning of Christ's life and resurrection, actual and concrete.

Thus, Paul begins with a short phrase as an imperative: "Do this." Then (13:11-12a) he gives some indicatives: "knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. The

night is almost gone, and the day is near.” Then, he gives more imperatives, calling us to action in light of the time (13:12b-14): “Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.” To sum it up, he is saying, that as the day of the Lord approaches, to be in the new Kingdom of God, we must walk in holiness and lead a transformed life, in contrast to this evil world wants us to do.

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn

“Love Will Be Our Home”

A home is really where the heart is
Then home must be a place we all share
For ever with our differences
Our hearts are much the same
And where love is we come together there.

Chorus 1:

Wherever there is laughter ringing, someone smiling, someone
dreaming

We can live together there, love will be our home.

Wherever there are children singing, where a tender heart is beating

We can live together there, love will be our home.

With love, our hearts can be a family
And hope can bring the family face to face
And though we may be far apart
Our hearts can be as one
When love brings us together in one place.

Chorus 2:

Wherever there is laughter ringing, someone smiling, someone
dreaming

We can live together there, love will be our home.

Where there are words of kindness spoken, where a vow is never
spoken

We can live together there, love will be our home.

Love will be our home.

Love will, love will be our home (3x)

Wherever there is laughter ringing, someone smiling, someone dreaming

We can live together there, love will be our home.

Opening Prayer

Most loving and merciful God, we put ourselves in your care and protection every day. You have proven to be a loving God and loving you with all our heart, mind and strength is what we can give back. We draw meaning and purpose of our lives from all that you have revealed to us. Lord, make us see and know you through loving and serving others. Amen

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read Isaiah 2:1-5
 - What was the prophecy all about?
 - How would people live as foretold by the prophet?
 - How would this kind of life be achieved according to the prophecy?

- Read Romans 13:10-14
 - What was the writer's appeal to the believers in Rome?
 - What could have been the situation of the believers in Rome?
 - How should the people of God live or behave as mentioned by the writer?

Lessons Learned

DYAD. Ask the learners to pair themselves. Let them find a place/corner/ space for their sharing. Within their dyad, share the following:

- Do you think you have experienced or achieved a meaningful life?
- How can meaningful life be experienced?
- How were you able to achieve a meaningful life?

GROUP OF FOUR.

- Would you consider serving others or putting God and others first can help you achieve a meaningful life? Why?
- How can we serve God and others?
- What impact can you see when we serve God and others?

Applying the Lessons Learned

Ask each learner to write letter of commitment to serve God and the people. Let them place their letter of commitment in a box or

bowl. The facilitator may read two or three letters of commitment if time will allow.

Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn "Pass It On"

It only takes a spark to get a fire going
And soon all those around can warm up in its glowing
That's how it is with God's love
Once you've experienced it
You spread God's love to everyone
You want to pass it on.

I wish for you my friend, this happiness that I found
You can depend on Him, it matters not where you're bound
I'll shout it from the mountain top, I want the world to know
The Lord of love has come to me, I want to pass it on.

Closing Prayer

Make us worthy to be your servant, Lord. May we find a meaning in serving you and by putting the concerns and cares of others first from our own. Help us to find joy even in simple good deed we do each day. This we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen

Lesson 26: What does "all" mean?

Second Sunday of Advent

December 8, 2019

General Concept: "All" means all created beings.

Biblical References: Isaiah 11:6-9, Romans 15:4-13

Age Level Concepts

- "All" means everything that God created.
- "All" includes those of different color, status, race, class, belief, and gender identity.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- Discuss the meaning of "all" in relation to the life and faith of the church
- Cite examples of programs, ministries and even relationships with other faith communities that express the principle of inclusivity

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV])
song chart, offering plate or basket

Biblical Background

Isaiah 11:6-9 portrays a poetic emphasis on Isaiah's idea of a peaceable kingdom where predators will cease their predation and their prey will lose their fear. Some scholars believed that the prophet poetically using these animals as symbols of natural enemies represent the hostilities that exist among people. The writer is not saying that God will reconfigure all of nature so that no animal feeds on another but that God intends us to picture a world where people live at peace with each other, a world where sin no longer creates hostilities that separate one person or tribe or nation from another; a world where people are able to acknowledge one another as friends, neighbors, brothers, and sisters, a world where there is no longer any such thing as enemies or enmities.

On the other hand, it could also give us the idea that humans are not just the only concern for God's transformation, but also includes all of creation. Thus, the text can also refer to a vision characterized by a remarkable dynamism that is, at the same time, the mark and guarantee of stability and peace. In the visions, the order of nature and the common life of humans and animals are organically linked and woven together. None will do evil. None will destroy (11:9). This is God's promise, the vision of security: the glorious, abundant resting place where the root of Jesse stands. The shoot will grow tall and become a visible sign for the nations. Not a battle standard, but a standard of peace.

Romans 15:4-13 is considered to be the climax of Paul's letter to the Romans. It begins and ends with hope, and it indicates that the character of God is the basis for that hope. In v. 4, "steadfastness and the encouragement of the scriptures" is the source of hope. In v. 5, "the God of steadfastness and encouragement," to whom scripture witnesses, gives hope. In v. 12, the Gentile's hope in the Messiah from the line of David, and in v. 13, the final and familiar blessing sums up the passage and the letter as a whole: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope."

Paul, in this letter, gives grounds for hope in two ways. First, he reminds his listeners of the truthfulness and faithfulness of God. Second, he turns their attention to God's presence in their midst, precisely and especially in the experience of mutual love and service between people who previously were enemies. "Welcome one another," he says, "as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (v. 7).

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn “Welcome to the Family”

Welcome to the family, we’re glad that you have come
To share your life with us, as we grow in love
And may we always be to you
What God would want us be, a family always there
To be strong and to lean on.

May we learn to love each other more in each new day
May words of love be on our lips, in everything we say
May the spirit melt our hearts and teach us how to pray
That we might be a true family.

Opening Prayer

Embrace us all, Lord in your fold. May the Spirit that brought us together in this place will open our minds and make us receptive to your message. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read Isaiah 11:6-9
 - How would you describe the world as prophesied by Isaiah?
 - How would you characterize the kind of relationships present in the world as prophesied?
 - Who are involved in the world as mentioned in the prophecy?

- Read Romans 15:4-13
 - What do you think are the problems confronting the Christians in Rome that urged Paul to write?
 - What are the important points that the writer wants to convey?
 - What does the message of the letter tries to tell us believers today?

Lessons Learned

- DEFINITION of WORD/S.
 - What does “all” means?
 - : All (*adjective*) means the whole, entire, total; every member or part of.
 - : In the context of faith and practice of beliefs, “all” means everything that God created; includes those of different color, status, race, class, belief, and gender identity.

- MIRRORING. Ask the learners to find a partner. Let them stand for one minute facing each other. Let them look at each other and try to see what makes their partner unique and different. While they're still facing each other, ask the following and let them respond spontaneously:
 - Do you believe that the person in front of you deserved to be loved and should belong to your community? Why?
 - Do you believe that the person in front of you is different and special? Why?
 - Do you believe that the person in front of you should be accepted as s/he is? Why?
- Process the activity. Ask the following:
 - What were the feelings involved while doing the activity?
 - What were your reflections while looking at your partner's face?
 - What could be the reasons why it is hard to accept those different from us?
- READING OF STATEMENT: "Let Grace Be Total". Ask the learners of their reflection to the church's stand on the issue and whether they can translate the principle of inclusivity and community in this issue.

"Let Grace Be Total" (LGBT)

UCCP Statement on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) Concerns

1. Understanding LGBT

What is LGBT?

This is primarily a matter of the sexual or gender orientation of the person, where a woman may feel, act and think like a man (lesbian), and where a man may think, feel and act like a woman (gay) or adopt both orientations (bi sexual), or one who may have actually undergone physical change in order to fully transform into one's own sexual or gender orientation, (transgender). Society generally views this group as a kind of aberration, something that goes against the accepted, regular 'norm of the society. Thus, this is a group

that has been experiencing rejection, ridicule and even harassment and bullying from some sectors of the society.

2. What can our faith tradition say about the LGBT?

The church, particularly the UCCP stands on a tradition of faith that has always been regarded as an affirming, welcoming, accepting and caring community of the followers of Christ. This Protestant, Reformed, Evangelical faith tradition is rooted primarily and solely on a theology of grace, not a theology of law or pure legalism. Within this faith tradition, we consider the grace of God as an unconditional gift of God. All people, regardless of race, gender, nationality, political affiliation or even religious conviction are seen as one in Christ and are all objects of God's redeeming, healing and reconciling love (cf. Gal. 3:28). It is in the spirit of this so profound and immeasurable love of God for the world, "*not counting equality with God as a thing to be grasped,*" (Philippians 2:54) that God sent His only begotten son in humble solidarity with the lost, the last and the least in this world, completely humbling himself as a servant, *and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross* (cf. Phil. 2:8; John 3:16;).

This is the very nature of this God we worship which makes the Christian faith truly unique and distinct from all other religions. We worship and follow a God who in the spirit of this great love for all took the most unthinkable and so radical step for a powerful, divine being to undertake, to humble Himself and stand in complete solidarity with the most ordinary, powerless, alienated and struggling people of this world.

As demonstrated by Jesus in his numerous encounters with people caught in various kinds of situation, God does not impose conditions to being accepted, or being healed. Jesus even gave especial attention to people who are considered as outcasts like the lepers, the sinners, such as the tax collectors like Zachaeus, the widows, the poor, the immoral, the rejected, the ostracized and the marginalized, those who are objects of ridicule, contempt and outright judgment and condemnation by the rest of the society.

3. The Present situation of the LGBTs

The LGBTs, as a group has long been an object of ostracism and judgment, ridicule and condemnation by so many in our society. This is largely due to cultural ethos and values that are so patriarchal in nature, legalistic in perspective, pharisaic in world view and self-righteous in outlook. From such a perspective, world view and outlook, the LGBTs have no place, since this is a world only for either male or female. There can be no in between. There can be no gray areas. It is either black or white.

Jesus has long denounced and rejected such a narrow, legalistic, patriarchal, pharisaic, self-righteous outlook and even hypocritical perspective (Matt. 23:1-28). Within this purview of the teachings and work of Jesus, the LGBTs can be considered as well embraced, affirmed and upheld by the gracious and loving presence of God in Jesus Christ.

4. The Gifts as well as Accountability of the LGBT

With the gift of God's grace that heals and accepts unconditionally, LGBTs therefore can take their own place within the body of Christ and can contribute their own gifts towards the ministry and mission of the church. They are to be considered and respected as legitimate

members of the community and fellowship of the church and as such should be protected from the prejudices, discrimination and even bullying by some sectors of the community.

At the same time, a code of moral and ethical conduct will have to be observed and expected from the LGBTs in the same degree that is to be expected of any other person or member of the community. A gay person or LGBT who commits an illegal, immoral, unethical act, or an actual crime is to be held liable and responsible for such act in the same way that an immoral and unfaithful spouse or a corrupt politician-thief, or a bullying student had to be held accountable for their acts.

5. What the church can do to address the concerns of The LGBT

Subsequently, the church needs to address the prejudices of society against the LGBTs by engaging in educational seminars and fora on this issue for both members and the wider community. A program on Gender Sensitivity that will include issues related to LGBT concerns may be launched on the conference and local church levels. Such program may focus also on the LGBT is own struggle for justice and equality of treatment and against prejudice, discrimination and rejection.

This stand of the church should be seen as being in line also with our goal for greater unity in the church of our only one Lord and God in Jesus Christ, (*that they may be one, John 17:11, 21, 22, 23.*). In this high priestly prayer of Jesus, just before he gets arrested, tried, tortured, and executed by crucifixion, Jesus more than once expressed this prayer-wish for the unity of the church to be sealed by the love of God for his people as perfectly revealed in Jesus Christ. Finally, in the last verse of this prayer of Jesus, he himself had expressed the wish that this love of God, this love that expressed full acceptance of and solidarity with the beloved, this love that is even willing to sacrifice for the beloved is the very same love that should characterize the life of his followers.

This statement is in response to the mandate coming from the 2010 Gen Assembly to come out with a Statement that will address the issue of LGBT consistent with the theology and Statement of Faith of the UCCP. This is an initial statement for reflection.

The Faith and Order Commission

08 January 2014

Applying the Lessons Learned

A meaningful and abundant life is intended for all. Human beings and the rest of creation are to be part of this vision and hope. The church is supposed to be a bearer of this message. As part of God's creation and called to minister to the world, the church should be an example of living out the principle of inclusivity.

Ask:

- What programs, advocacies, activities, involvements has our local church engaged in?
- What could we do as followers of Christ to manifest this belief/principle in our daily lives?

Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn ““Spirit Embracing Daughters”

Spirit embracing daughters, embracing sons

Pour out your power and peace

Help us accept with joy your promise of life

Grant that our rivalries cease.

Refrain: We are called, we are free to declare God’s wonderful grace
 We are called, we are free to proclaim good news in this
 place.

Spirit inviting elders, inviting young
 To dream of how we might live
 Send us a holy vision filled with Shalom
 Deepen the care that we give.

Refrain: We are called, we are free to affirm what God’s love has done
 We are called, we are free to bring justice to everyone.

Closing Prayer

You accepted us as we are and gave your life for all. Your grace was not a privilege of the few but a gift to all. With all gratitude we humbly ask your spirit to teach us as we live out our beliefs. Open our minds and hearts to accept the differences and uniqueness of others. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Lesson 27: What does an abundant and meaningful life for all look like?

Third Sunday of Advent

December 15, 2019

General Concept: An abundant and meaningful life is where everyone enjoys the fruits of their labor, basic social needs are met, and there is mutual respect for the dignity of life.

Biblical References: Psalm 146:5-10, Matthew 11:5-6; Isaiah 65:17-25

Age Level Concepts

- An abundant and meaningful life is when everyone benefits from the work that they do, they receive fair wages, and there is healthcare, housing and education for all.
- An abundant and meaningful life is when there is mutual respect for the dignity of life and no one's rights are trampled upon.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- Discuss the policy statements of the Church with regards to respect for human rights and dignity of life
- Express their thoughts and feelings towards the stance of the Church
- Cite the Bill of Rights as written in the Philippine Constitution
- Discuss the ways by which these are upheld or not
- Affirm the belief of the Church to respect human rights and uphold the dignity of life

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV])
song chart, offering plate or basket

Biblical Background

Psalm 146:5-10

The psalmist begins with the exclamation of praise to the Lord. This is a marvelous proclamation of the psalmist who centers his life in the one whom lies our hope and life: "Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God" (verse 5). The wilderness through which they return to will blossom forth as the glory of God is present with those who return. This is the God of strength for the infirm, giver of sight to the blind, and the one in whom joy and gladness break forth as "sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (verse 10).

In other words, the reasons of praise are ample. Praise the Lord for creating sky, earth, and sea, and all that is in them and for keeping faith without ceasing (verse 6). Praise the Lord, too, for giving justice to the oppressed, food to the hungry, freedom to the imprisoned, and sight to the blind. Praise the Lord for protecting strangers and supporting widows and orphans (verses 7-8). There are a lot of things that are praiseworthy here. The psalmist shows us why the person who knows the Lord has many reasons to praise His name. Those who place their trust in themselves or others have no reliable reasons for rejoicing; but all those whose faith is in God have more reason to praise Him than they can ever comprehend!

Matthew 11:5-6

Matthew was understandably confused by the turn of events: he was imprisoned, and Christ was carrying on a ministry of healing, not judgment, in Galilee, far from Jerusalem, the city of the king. There, he did not find a completely warm reception (8:34). John wondered if he had misunderstood Jesus' agenda. It would be wrong to

interpret this as a wavering of his faith (v.7). These disciples that John the Baptist sent were his own followers. It is worth noting that John was imprisoned at this time and that he was the same John to proclaim the coming of Christ and actually baptized Jesus.

Now, he seemed to be going through a trial himself. Like the disciples, John, probably, really expected Jesus to take physical rule of Israel then, so he questioned him. "Are you the promised one?" Even the "voice crying in the wilderness" was discouraged and was lead to doubt while in prison. This is so difficult to believe after he had heard the voice from heaven, when he baptized Jesus.

Matthew 11:4 "Jesus answered and said unto them, "Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see:" Then He sent John's disciples back as eyewitnesses of many miracles. Evidently, He performed these miracles in their presence just so that they could report back to John that they had personally seen proof that He was indeed the Messiah. In other words, the miracles Jesus mentioned to John's messengers were precisely those which Isaiah identified in the advent of the Messiah (Isaiah 35:5-6; 61:1). The deeds which he demonstrated to the people and to those in need were more convincing than any words claiming that He is indeed the promised Messiah.

Isaiah 65:17-25

These texts are part of the so-called "Isaiah's motif of glorification of Zion". Verses 17-19 are absolutely luminous with words of creating and delighting. "I am about to create," God sings. "I am creating...I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight." Peace and righteousness will oversee the life teeming within Zion's gates (60:17); violence, predation, and fear will be no more. This is a declaration of the promises of God concerning abundant life. God's people will know no more weeping or cries of distress, no more premature loss of life; homes will be built and inhabited; vineyards will be planted and their fruit enjoyed (implicitly contrasted here is the ancient terror of being dispossessed by an enemy.

"Like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be" (verse 22). We can imagine a mature olive tree, gnarled and green and leafy, being a metaphor for spiritual serenity and fruitfulness. Labor will never again be in vain. Childbirth will yield generation upon generation of blessed offspring. This is a touching passage for a traumatized community that felt God's absence keenly during the exile: "before they call, I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear" (verse 24). Never again will God hide God's face.

Moreover, the primeval ancestors' sorrows will be transformed into the joy of having blessed offspring and the years of enduring will turn to the enjoyment of the fruit of human labor. Thus Israel's glorious restoration which refers to the vision of "new heavens and new earth" will have Zion at their center. A healed Israel will be

cherished within the very heart of God's delight. Good news indeed: "They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the LORD." The believer is left longing for that place of unending reconciliation and joy.

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn "Purihin Sya"

Habang ako'y nagmamasid sa kapaligiran

Kay daming magagandang bagay aking namamasdan

Tulad ng mga ibon at bulaklak sa parang

Na nagsasaad ng kanyang pag-ibig.

Koro: Kaya purihin siya at sambahin ang ngaalan Nya

Aleluya! Pasalmatan natin Siya.

At kung ang landas ko man minsan ay madilim

Sya'y tapat at tunay na gumagabay sa akin

Bawat mga pangako Niya'y hindi nagmamaliw

At sa bawat araw siya ay kapiling.

Opening Prayer

Despite difficulties and daily responsibilities, we come not because we are forced to but because we seek you and we wanted to strengthen our relationship with you and our fellow believers. Whatever transpire here may help us grow in faith and service. Fill us with your Spirit, we pray. Amen

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read Psalm 146:5-10 and Isaiah 65: 17-25
 - What do you think was the intention of the writer for writing this psalm/prophecy?
 - How does the writer characterize God?
 - How would you describe the life with God as portrayed in the texts?

- Read Matthew 11: 5-6
 - What do you think was Jesus' intended message to John?
 - What were the signs of the one who is to come according to Jesus?
 - How would you describe life when these signs were fulfilled?

Lessons Learned

The Classification of Rights

- Natural- those possessed by every citizen without being granted by the State for they are given to persons by God as human being created in God's image that he may live a happy life.
- Constitutional – conferred and protected by the constitution
 - Cannot be repealed through legislation
 - Statutory - provided for by law, promulgated by the law-making body and may be abolished by the same body.

The Bill of Rights. Article 3 of the Philippine Constitution (a summary)

- Section 1: Right to LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY and Equal protection of the laws.
- Section 2: Protection against unwarranted arrests, search and seizures
- Section 3: The privacy of communication
- Section 4: Freedom of speech; right to free press, freedom of assembly, the right to petition
- Section 5: the free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship, without discrimination
- Section 6: the liberty of abode and the right to travel
- Section 7: the right of the people to information on matters of public concern shall be recognized
- Section 8: the right to form union
- Section 9: The right to just compensation
- Section 10: Non-impairment clause
- Section 11: the right to free access to court
- Section 12: Right of person under custodial investigation
- Section 13: Right to bail and against excessive bail
- Section 14: the rights of the accused (the right to be heard by himself and counsel, to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation against him; to have a speedy, impartial and public trial
- Section 15: the Writ of Habeas Corpus
- Section 16: The right to speedy disposition of cases
- Section 17. The right against self-incrimination
- Section 18: the right to political beliefs and aspirations

Section 19: the prohibition against cruel, degrading or inhuman punishment

Section 20: Non-imprisonment for debts

Section 21: The right against double jeopardy.

Our church upholds not just the natural rights of persons but the constitutional rights as well. Statements had been made to proclaim such stance. An example of this declaration released giving importance to the church's concern for human rights:

RESOLUTION FOR THE CREATION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS DESK

General Assembly

21-26 May 1978

WHEREAS, as a church body, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines should look at the prevailing universal concern for human rights as a great opportunity to advance the Christian concern for the dignity and well-being of people;

WHEREAS, we believe that human rights are gifts from God, and that His will is for us to enjoy the fullness of our humanity;

WHEREAS, there is an urgent need for us as a Church to make more manifest our concern for human rights;

THEREFORE, It is hereby resolved that a desk for human rights be created within the structure of the Church, and that human rights be among our major thrusts in the next quadrennium.

Ref: *General Assembly, 21-26 May 1978.*

The Resolution is in Appendix XXII, p. 564.

A DECLARATION AGAINST VIOLENCE

Executive Committee

23 February 1990

... Because the land is full of bloody crimes and the city is full of violence...

Ezekiel 7:23

We are greatly disturbed and alarmed by the escalating cases of violence in our country. Senseless killings of church people and other civilians, and of police and military personnel are indicative of this worsening situation in which we live.

We believe, however, that the upsurge of crimes and violent acts are symptomatic of graver and more basic problems such as those of *widespread poverty, exploitation and oppression*. Such a situation has deadened the moral and spiritual nerve of our people.

Greatly contributing to the state of violence is the *total war policy* of our government in dealing with the insurgency problem and the *interventionist policy* of the United States government in the affairs of the Philippines. Moreover, *economic dominance* in collaboration with the local and national big business enterprises contribute to the upsurge of violence in our midst.

Since the total war policy of our government was implemented with the support of the U.S. senseless killings, massacres, and disappearances of persons have markedly increased. Several of those who carry firearms have become emboldened to use arms indiscriminately. Indeed, many violent acts have been attributed to armed civilian groups which enjoy the support of the military establishment. Such actions of the very people entrusted with the task of peace-keeping have pushed many civilians to take the option of armed struggle. Indeed, outright killing or *salvaging* has become the rule and due process has become a myth.

The rise of politically and economically related and motivated crimes is very alarming. Those who are supposed to establish peace and order, and to protect the life and property of our people, have often been found to be the perpetrators of horrible killings and massacres of the hapless and helpless civilian population. Added to these are the criminal and terroristic activities of outlawed elements of our society. Indeed, the land is full of bloody crimes and the city is full of violence.

What has our Christian faith to say to all these?

- Our faith affirms that *persons are created in the image of God*. There is no distinction. All persons have equal worth in the sight of God.
- We affirm as Christians that *life is a divine gift*; therefore, it has to be regarded with dignity and sanctity. No one is to be a judge, jury and executioner of any one's life. That is a divine prerogative.
- We affirm as Christians that wholehearted *trust and reliance in God* is much better than alliances with and reliance on powerful nations.
- We affirm as Christians that *shalom or holistic peace is God's will for his people*. *Shalom* means wholeness, well-being growth, harmony, security, equality and not just absence of conflicts and war. Genuine peace happens when the roots of conflict and violence are removed; when a just social structure is built; and, when human rights and dignity are held sacred.

The time has come for all of us to act.

Let us pray for the fulfillment of God's promise:

I will make your overseers peace and taskmasters righteousness. Violence shall no more be heard in your land; devastation or destruction within your borders

*Isaiah
60:17-18*

We call on our leaders in the government to:

- *Abolish* the Citizens Armed Force Geographical Units (CAFGUs) and other para-military units; as mandated by the Constitution.
- *Serve* notice for the non-continuance of the United States military bases beyond 1991.
- *Pursue* aggressively and purposively independent foreign and national policies.
- *Institute* measures and enact laws that address to the basic socio-economic needs based on the common cries and demands of the less fortunate members of society.

We call on all parties involved in the strife: AFP, NPA, MNLF, MILF RAM and other armed groups:

- *Stop* all strafing, bombings and ambushes which destroy life and property, and drive thousands away from their homes, farms and means of livelihood, thus aggravating poverty causing deaths to both children and adults;
- *Respect* the rights of civilians and other non-combatants; and stop immediately all violent and terroristic acts; black listing, name calling, and labelling people as the enemy, because all these contribute to the atmosphere of fear, despair and destruct in one another;
- *Call* for a ceasefire. Return to the negotiating table to deal with a comprehensive settlement of this terrible and costly conflict by seriously dealing with the root causes of insurgency and other crimes against life and property.

We call on all manufacturers of weapons and instruments of war to:

- *Stop* making weapons and instruments of war and stop making war as a business industry.
- Instead, *produce* equipment that support and enhance life. Let the prophecy of Isaiah be fulfilled through you ... and *they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks* (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 3:4).

We call on all Christian homes and institutions to:

- *Liberate* themselves from all forms of structures, systems and expression that propagate militarism and enhance the development of military culture.

We call on all Christians and peoples of various faiths and persuasion to:

- *Be* true instruments of peace, doing only all acts that make for peace;
- *Be* ever vigilant to defend firmly but peacefully the rights of the least fortunate members of society;
- *Promote* what is just and denounce what is unjust.

Moreover, let us all *be steadfast and immovable in our faith, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain* (1 Cor. 15:58).

Done on the 23rd of February, 1990 at the Conference Room of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, Quezon City, Philippines.

The General Assembly
The Executive Committee
United Church of Christ in the Philippines

Bishop Juan A. Marigza
Northern Luzon Jurisdiction

Bishop Patrocinio A. Apura
Visayas Jurisdiction

Bishop Gabriel A. Garol
Southern Luzon Jurisdiction

Bishop Lorenzo C. Genotiva
Mindanao Jurisdiction

Bishop Errne R. Camba
General Secretary

Atty. Emilio C. Capulong, Jr.
Chair, General Assembly

Ask the following questions after reading the declarations and statements of the church on issues that concerns the church and society:

- What are your thoughts, reflections and feelings on the stance of the church regarding issues that involve the lives of people?
- What are the rights which you think are being upheld or not?
- What issues do you think are still prevailing today?
- Do you believe that the stance of the church before is still relevant today?
- What could be the effects to the lives of people if basic rights are upheld and the dignity of life is respected?

Applying the Lessons Learned

- Give examples of how our stance as a church is being practiced and proclaimed.
- Name the programs of the church that focuses on concerns of people specifically their rights.

Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn "And Ev'ryone 'Neath the Vine"

And ev'ryone neath the vine and fig tree
Shall live in peace and unafraid.
And ev'ryone neath the vine and fig tree
Shall live in peace and unafraid.

Plowshares beat out of swords and guns
And we will study war no more,

Plowshares beat out of swords and guns
And we will study war no more.

Closing Prayer

We strive despite challenges to achieve a meaningful and abundant life for all. We believe this is Your intention and will for us. Empower us O Lord and enable us to live out the stand of our church on issues that affects our life as created beings. May we be truly salt and light of the world as you have called us to. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen

Lesson 28: Why do we need to be committed to the pursuit of a transformed church and society towards an abundant and meaningful life for all?

Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 22, 2019

General Concept: We need to be committed to the pursuit of a transformed church and society towards an abundant and meaningful life for all because this is the will of God and we need to participate in the work towards its realization.

Biblical References: Psalm 80:17-19, Matthew 1:21-23, Psalm 72:1-7

Age Level Concepts

- We need to be committed to the pursuit of a transformed church and society towards an abundant and meaningful life for all because it is God's will.
- We need to participate in the work toward its realization to express our obedience to God.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- State possible reasons why some people are unwilling to commit themselves to the work of transformation
- Discuss the reasons for the need to commit oneself to the pursuit of a transformed church and society
- Make a commitment to participate in the work for a transformed church and society

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV])
song chart, offering plate or basket, cartolina, pentel pen, double-sided tape

Biblical Background

Psalm 80:17-19

These verses are originally considered as a corporate prayer, with the congregation or a choir intoning the refrain. Particularly in verse 19, there are three verbs which dominate the refrain: Restore (Hebrew shub), shine ('ur), save (yashab). The psalm

exploits the dual meaning of the first word (shub). In the refrain, the word means "restore," and is a plea that God would change the circumstances of the people. But in v. 14, the word means "turn," or "repent" (cf. Psalm 90:13), and is a plea for God to change God's will concerning the people's situation.

The poetic play on these two meanings of the word amounts to an assertion of faith by the community; the solution to the people's situation rests in the heart of God. The people cannot change their own circumstances, but God can, simply by willing that the situation be reversed. Similarly, the plea for God to "let your face shine" is a plea for God's grace to shine down on the people, like how the sun bathes the earth in light. In the psalms, God's disfavor is often pictured as God hiding God's face, or turning away from the community. Most people of faith are familiar with the words of the benediction: "May God's face shine on you" (cf. Numbers 6:25). The plea here is a prayer for the very thing that is promised in the benediction: God's shining forth in deliverance and blessing.

One more aspect of the refrain is worth mentioning. The refrain builds in intensity each time it occurs, by adding to God's name, moving from the more generic "God" to the more proper and personal "O Lord, God of hosts" Hence, the psalm closes with the people vowing to continue to "call on your name." This promise then leads to the last occurrence of the refrain which employs the most personal and intense form of God's name in the psalm: "O Lord, God of hosts." God's "name" is a shorthand formula for the relationship between God and God's people. God gave the people the name so they could call upon him in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, and so that they would bear God's name in their mission to love, bless, and save the nations.

Psalms 72:1-7

This psalm is identified as one of the nine Royal Psalms (2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 110, 132) that sing praises to the king as God's chosen representative on earth. They are prayers from Israel's worship for the king and his role as earthly ruler. Verse 1 sets the tone and contains the only petitions voiced to God in an imperative tone (with emphasis added through the parallel structure): "Give the king your justice ... [and] the king's son your righteousness." Having justice is a trademark of God's reign and must be embodied by God's agent in the world. The rest of the psalm is organized around a long series of petitions that begin with, "May he ..." The psalm asks that God grant the king -- and the people, through the king's reign -- righteousness, justice, prosperity, protection (from oppressors), a name that endures, shalom (well-being), political dominion, and, as a spontaneous response to these regional priorities, the tribute and admiration of the nations.

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn “Take My Life, God, Let It Be”

Hymnal of Faith Journey, 279

Take my life God, let it be consecrated faithfully

Take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my spirit, let it move at the impulse of your love

Take my intellect and use all its powers as you choose.

Opening Prayer

We take this Sabbath O Lord to pause from our daily activities so that through worship, fellowship and study we may strengthen our connection with You and with our fellow believers. Bless this moment Lord as we reflect on Your message for us today. This, we pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.

Learning Time

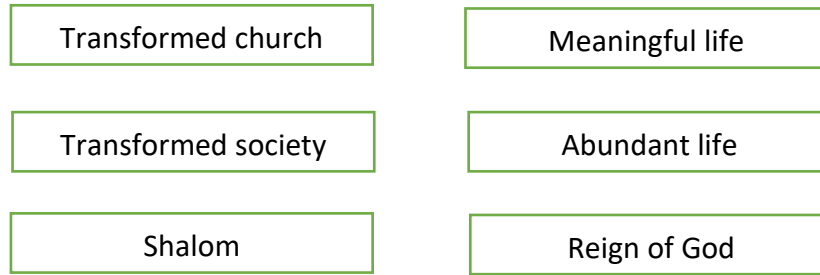
Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read Psalm 80:17-19 and/or Psalm 72:1-7
 - Who do you think was referred to as “the one at the right hand” of God?
 - What could be the reason behind such plea for God’s help?
 - What kind of commitment was expressed by the people as pointed out in this psalm?
 - What do you think is God’s will for the people as expressed in the psalms?
 - Why should God’s people work to realize God’s will in the life of the people?

- Read Matthew 1:21-23
 - What does the account try to affirm for the readers?
 - What is the connection of the two names (Jesus and Emmanuel) to God’s intention and purpose for the world?
 - Do you believe that God’s intention for the people was revealed in and through “Jesus”- the Emmanuel?
 - What are the revealed intentions of God?
 - As believers, what commitment can we give to help realize God’s intention for people and the rest of creation?

Lessons Learned

MAKE A CONNECTION. Cut out illustration board or cartolina into meta cards. In each meta card, write concepts related to the lesson. Randomly, place the cards on the board. Tell the learners to make a connection out of those concepts.



DISCUSS. Ask the learners the following:

- Why do you think others find it hard to commit themselves to the work for transformation?
- Why do you think it is necessary for the believers in Christ to commit themselves for the work of transforming church and society?

Applying the Lessons Learned

If we believe that all believers should commit themselves in the pursuit of a transformed church and society because it is God's will and our appropriate expression of obedience to God, what can we commit to God today?

Fill the acronym:

C -
 O -
 M -
 M -
 I -
 T -

Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn

"Take My Life, God, Let It Be" Hymnal of Faith Journey, 279

Take my will, Your will be done! Make your will and mine be one
 Take my heart and by your grace make of it your dwelling place.

Take my love and let it grow, let my loving overflow
 Take me now and help me be part of Christ's community.

Closing Prayer

O God who sent Jesus into the world to serve and not to be served, mold us to become committed stewards of your ministry. We commit what we have and make us your servants with no reason to be

ashamed of. Shape us for the work of transformation in which you have called us to involve. With your Spirit, we believe all things are possible. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen

Lesson 29: As a church, how do we become a responsible, empowered, self-reliant and caring community of Christian believers committed to the pursuit of a transformed church and society towards an abundant and meaningful life for all?

First Sunday after Christmas Day

December 29, 2019

General Concept: The Church must educate, mobilize and act.

Biblical References: Isaiah 63:7-9, Hebrews 2:11b-12, I Corinthians 1:2-9

Age Level Concepts

- The Church can become a responsible, empowered, self-reliant and caring community of believers by educating its members.
- The Church can attain its vision by mobilizing its members and doing concrete actions towards the realization of an abundant and meaningful life for all.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- Evaluate the strategies and actions taken by the Church to educate and mobilize the members towards becoming a responsible, empowered, self-reliant and caring community of faith
- Determine the factors contributing to the failure or success of such efforts
- Resolve to continue finding ways to educate and mobilize the members of the Church in support of its vision
- Invite other people to join our Church

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV])
song chart, offering plate or basket

Biblical Background

Isaiah 63:7-9 functions as a recital of the past faithfulness of God, a literary element that oftentimes is present in many lament Psalms (e.g., Psalm 89:1-37). The thanksgiving in verse 7 is rather generic, or is a recitation offered numerous times throughout the Psalter. The word, ḥasadim, translated as "gracious deeds" and "steadfast love", is a word that describes the loyalty of Yahweh to his covenantal relationship to Israel. In a time when nothing good could be said of their situation, they can at minimum, acknowledge the basic and undeniable fact that God has been good to them in the past and that they continue to be his people today. Yahweh

reminds Israel in verse 8 that as God's covenant people they are characterized as "children who do not deal falsely."

Moreover, verse 9 then recalls the events of the exodus, particularly the episode in Exodus 33:1-34:9. This text describes how Yahweh assures Moses that his presence will remain with him despite Israel's disobedience following the golden calf incident. Israel's first redemption, their exodus from Egypt, was followed shortly with disappointment which came from the people's discontent. Nevertheless, Yahweh did not depart from his people and continued to be their savior through their distress, particularly during their wanderings in the wilderness.

Hebrews 2:11-12

Three Old Testament quotations emphasize the union that exists between Christ and the men and women he has saved. He calls them his brothers and sisters, he trusts in God as they do, and he and these his children are God's new people (11-13).

Christ became a human being to save human beings, and he did so by living with them and dying for them. His death was a victory, not a defeat, for by it he set people free from the power of Satan. Those whom he saves are now free from the fear and bondage that sin brings (14-15). The reason Christ descended to a status lower than angels was that the people he wanted to save were lower than angels (16). By sharing their experiences of human life, he could be their representative in taking away sin. He could also be their helper in gaining victory over life's temptations (17-18).

I Corinthians 1:2-9 emphasizes on Paul's theme of being "called." Paul describes himself as one of those whom God has "called" to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. In 1:2, Paul informs the Corinthians that they are saints by virtue of their "calling." In 1:9, Paul closes our section by referring to those whom God "called" into fellowship. In 1:24, Paul speaks of Jews and Gentiles who "are called." In 1:26, he speaks of the Corinthians call to salvation. The idea of God's calling is everywhere in this chapter! For Paul, God's call to salvation and apostleship was essential to their life and ministry. Paul goes on to state that he was called "by the will of God." This gave him an even greater sense of confidence and perseverance. It reminded him that his true allegiance was to God, not man. Particularly, Paul speaks of these Corinthian Christians as "the Church of God which is at Corinth" (v. 2a). The church belongs to God, not to them. They aren't the church of Corinth, but the church of God.

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn "With Gifts that Differ by Your Grace"
Hymnal of Faith Journey, 245

With gifts that differ by your grace, Your Spirit fits us all
 That Christians in each time and place may answer when you call.
 You strengthen some to take a stand, to prophesy or preach
 While others give with open hand, or heal the sick or teach.

And yet, because our faith is frail, we bury gifts you give
 Afraid to risk, afraid to fail, we are not free to live
 At times we use your sacred gifts for only selfish ends
 Our purpose fades, our focus shifts, and conflict soon attends.

Opening Prayer

Bless us today, O Lord. Bless the people who are instrumental for our learning and growth in faith. As we break Your word, may we gain knowledge and understanding of Your love and will for us today. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read Isaiah 63:7-9
 - What does the psalm tries to affirm about God?
 - What were the deeds of God that the people remembered clearly?
 - How did the people respond to God's gracious deeds?
 - Do you think that the response of the people was appropriate to what God has done for the people?
- Read Hebrews 2:11b-12, I Corinthians 1:2-9
 - What do the letters try to convey to the readers?
 - Why did Paul praise the Christians in Corinth?
 - What did the churches do to become responsible and caring community of believers?
 - How did the churches manifest the empowerment of the Spirit in their lives?

Lessons Learned

List down the various programs, actions or strategies undertaken by our church to educate and mobilize the members towards becoming responsible, empowered, self-reliant and caring community. Evaluate these strategies as to what contributes to its success or failure.

Example:

CHURCH PROGRAMS/STRATEGIES	Failure or Successful	Contributing Factors
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Christian Education and Nurture - Sunday School - Bible Study - Liturgy and Worship - Fellowship - Trainings for Lay	failure	No teachers, Sunday School guide not available

Applying the Lessons Learned

Suggest ways on how to prevent failure in the implementation of strategies and to eliminate the factors that contribute to the failure of church's efforts to educate and mobilize the members.

CHURCH'S PROGRAMS/STRATEGIES	CONTRIBUTING FACTORS	WHAT CAN BE DONE

INVITATION TO JOIN. The facilitator may prepare beforehand an invitation card to be distributed to the participants. Let them fill the name of the person they are planning to invite into the church.

Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn "With Gifts that Differ by Your Grace"

Hymnal of Faith Journey, 245

Come Spirit, build our church anew that all may do their part
 Together finding life in you, diverse yet one in heart
 So may your people seek your will, transformed in all our ways,
 We offer mind, body and skill, a sacrifice of praise.

Closing Prayer

Compassionate God, we may have weaknesses and failures in doing our tasks but we are assured that through the work of the Spirit in our lives, we will be able to overcome them all and by our unity despite diversity we will be able to realize our vision. We rest our hope in Your power and mercy. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Lesson 30: What is the church's mission?

Epiphany Sunday

Second Sunday after Christmas Day

January 5, 2020

General Concept: The Church has no mission other than the mission of Christ; the Church simply continues the mission of Christ.

Biblical References: Jeremiah 31:8-9, [Ephesians 1:3-14](#)

Age Level Concepts

- The Church has no mission other than the mission of Christ.
- The Church simply continues the mission of Christ.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- Give reasons as to why the Church's mission is none other than that of Christ's
- Discuss the priority mission the Church should undertake
- Assess if the Church is faithful in carrying out Christ's mission
- Resolve to actively involve in carrying out Christ's mission

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV])
song chart, offering plate or basket

Biblical Background

Jeremiah 31:8-9 emphasized the affirmation that God will bring the people "from the land of the north" and "from the farthest part of the east" (31:8) and will recall the enemy God raised from those regions to ride into battle against daughter Zion (6:22). The labouring woman, who embodied the community's experience of chaos and anguish (6:24), now stands as a tentative assurance of new life. Even the language of gathering ([I am going to] "gather them", verse 8) recalls Jeremiah's call for the people to "gather" together in the fortified cities, fleeing for safety from the foe from the north (Jeremiah 4:5-6). This is a gathering of those who survived, happy merely not to stumble... and eventually to enjoy good food and wine and company, to laugh and dance (31:12-13).

Newly restored, the people relish ordinary life. But at the same time, they remember the sons and daughters, the brothers and sisters, and the fathers and mothers, who did not survive. They will never forget the trauma of their past, but they will enjoy a certain peace in the future. Moreover, In Jeremiah's restored community, there will be no need for the exhortation to care for the widow and the orphan. The lame and the broken will no longer be relegated to the edges of society, left to glean the leftovers. Instead in this new society, the blind and the lame, and the pregnant and laboring women -will no longer live on the periphery. They will be valued as and at the heart of the community. Images like this one encourage Israel to view its marginalized people as the core of its communal identity. Instead of decrying and

lamenting their marginal status (as an exiled people in Babylon or as a people stifled under Persian rule), their vulnerability should, according to Jeremiah, now define them.

God's act of gathering the people back to the land restores them to God's favour but not necessarily to power. Accordingly, nationalism, military might, and full treasuries are not objects of hope for Jeremiah. Instead, Jeremiah sees hope in the faces of the broken and the forgotten. There he finds the essence of Israelite identity... and the basis for his particular image of renewal.

Ephesians 1:3-14

Ephesians is a letter about living together in the midst of human differences. The author speaks from his experience as a Jew to a largely Gentile audience with the message that in Christ, God has "made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us" (Ephesians 2:14). The letter acknowledges that living with differences requires effort: it takes humility, gentleness, and patience (Ephesians 4:2-3).

In this text, God is praised for having chosen and adopted the church as God's own people. Verse 4 states that "God chose us" to be holy and blameless, and verse 5 adds, "he destined us for adoption as his children." The verb in verse 11, "we have obtained an inheritance", is difficult to translate but also carries the sense of having been appointed or chosen for this inheritance. The author pours out praise to God for having chosen us, regardless if we were Jews or Gentiles.

At the end of the passage the author describes himself as part of one group that was "the first to set our hope on Christ" (Ephesians 1:2), alongside another group, including the recipients of the letter "who also heard the word of truth...and believed in him" (v. 13).

Moreover, the writer's portrait of Christ appears throughout the passage as an important part of God's plan for choosing the people. God chose us "through Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 1:5). God gave grace "that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved" (v. 6). The letter will go on to describe Christ's central role in the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles: "So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near ... So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:17-19). God's will is revealed through the death of Jesus (Ephesians 2:13, 16) as a choice of one community composed of two races (Jews and Gentiles) that previously were hostile to each other.

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn

“Hagit sa Ebanghelyo”

Hymnal of Faith Journey, 364

Ang hagit sa ebanghelyo alang kanato
Higugmaon t aang atong isigkatawo
Apan kon tinud-on ta ang pagserbisyo
Mosubay tag kalbaryo sama sa atong Ginoo.

Refrain: Dili sayon ang pagsunod kang Kristo
Daghang tunok ang dalan nga agian mo
Bug-at ang krus nga pas-anon mo
Ug kamatayon naa naghulat kanimo.

Si Kristo mismo nag-ingon sa mga tinun-an
Pagbantay kay panakpon kamog biay-biayon
Prisohon kamo ug ilhong tampalasan
Ug a ng naa sa gahum, hukman kamog silotan.

Bulahan ang gilutos tungod sa tinohan
Bulahan ang gidaug gibugal-bugalan
Bulahan ang mobarug alang sa katarungan
Magmalipayon sila kay ila ang gingharian.

Opening Prayer

We come as people with visions of a world wherein You will dwell.
May your words that we are about to study will help us understand
what we ought to do as your followers. Bless this gathering Lord of
your faithful servants. Amen

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read [Jeremiah 31:8-9](#)
 - What did God intends to do for the people?
 - Who are supposed to benefit from God’s works?
 - How would God manifest to the people?

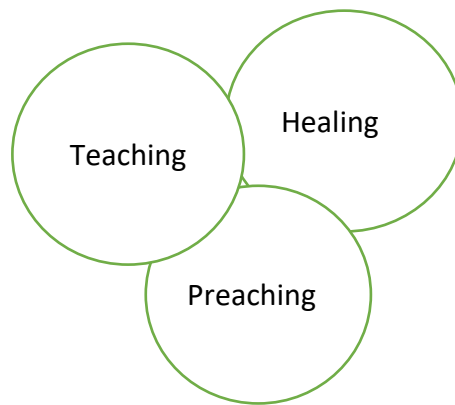
- Read [Ephesians 1:3-14](#)
 - How do Christians understand the work of God in their lives?
 - What do you think is God’s plan for the believers?
 - How does God’s plan be realized in the lives of the believers?

Lessons Learned

The Three-Pronged Works of Jesus. Distribute pieces of paper for the learners to write on their responses. Ask the learners to write what they've learned as the work or tasks, activities of Jesus when he was still alive.

The facilitator may draw three interlinking circles on the board. Tell the learners to paste their paper to where they think it falls in.

Ex. Jesus' mission



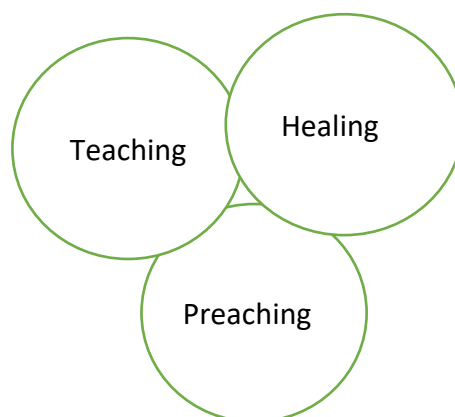
After they have all pasted their papers, the facilitator may process the activity:

- Why is there difficulty for others to identify to which the particular activity or work of Jesus belongs or falls into?
- What do the three circles try to teach us as believers?
- Why does the Church's mission be patterned to that of Christ's?

Applying the Lessons Learned

Using the same three- circles graph, ask the learners to fill in as to what specific tasks or programs of activities the church today is engaged in. They may start looking at their own local church.

Ex. The Church's mission today



Ask the following:

- Do you think our church is faithful in doing the mission of Christ?
- If our church is not doing the mission of Christ today, what have we been doing all this time?
- Do you see yourself and our church a faithful follower of Christ?

Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn. "Work in Your Kingdom"

Hymnal of Faith Journey, 302

Work in your Kingdom advances and continues
Even through hard times, all odds and tribulations
Despite our human infirmities and weakness,
Use us O Savior, till the task is done.

Lord, all our time we now offer in your service
All the resources to us you have entrusted
Use all our knowledge, our intellect and wisdom,
Our enthusiasm, strength and might, O God.

Closing Prayer

We have no other mission than the mission of Christ. We are grateful O Lord to fully understand that we as your body is tasked to continue the work of your Son, our Savior. We have no other worthy offering but our commitment to participate in doing the mission. Equip us Lord with skills, gifts and faith in your abiding presence so that despite adversities we as your church can effectively work in your kingdom.
Amen

Lesson 31: What does it mean to establish the community of faith?

Baptism of the Lord

First Sunday after the Epiphany

January 12, 2020

General Concept: To establish the community of faith means to firmly root, propagate and strengthen it in order for it to last.

Biblical References: [Isaiah 42:5-9](#), [Matthew 13:1-23](#)

Age Level Concepts

- To establish the community of faith means it has to be firmly rooted in its beliefs, has to embrace its heritage, own its guiding principles and actualize its ministries.
- In order for a community of faith to be established, it has to expand its growth and proliferate.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- Give their understanding of the phrase “to establish the faith community”
- Discuss how far church members have understood and embraced the beliefs, principles and ministries of the Church
- Evaluate how far the Church has grown and spread
- Suggest strategies on how to effectively establish a faith community

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV])
song chart, offering plate or basket

Biblical Background

Isaiah 42: 5-9

The result of the servant's work will be the salvation of people from many nations. Through his servant, the Creator will send the message of his salvation to the people of his creation, to turn them from darkness to light, from bondage to freedom (5-7). Yahweh, the eternal God and all-powerful redeemer, needs no help from idols in this. He will bring his purposes to fulfillment through his servant. The Jews' salvation out of bondage in Babylon will be a sign and a guarantee of a much wider salvation that is yet to come (8-9). (Bridgeway Bible Commentary) God intends to establish a community of faith deeply rooted in their faith through a servant.

Matthew 13: 1-23

The Gospel according to Matthew tells the good news that Jesus is the promised Savior, the one through whom God fulfilled the promises made to the people in the Old Testament. This good news is not only for the Jewish people, among whom Jesus was born and lived, but for the whole world.

The accounts in Matthew is carefully arranged. It begins with the birth of Jesus, describes his baptism and temptation, and then takes up his ministry of preaching, teaching and healing in Galilee. After this the Gospel records Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem and the events of Jesus' last week, culminating in his crucifixion and resurrection.

Jesus made many of his points by means of parables – stories that were meant to teach people the kingdom of God

“The parable of the sower draws its lessons from the four different kinds of soil rather than from the work of the sower. The preacher puts the message of the kingdom into people's hearts as a farmer puts seed into the ground. But people's hearts vary just as the soil in different places varies. Some people hear the message but do not understand it because they are not interested. Others show early interest but soon give up because they have no deep spiritual concern. Others are too worried about the affairs of everyday life. Only a few respond to the message in faith, but when they do their lives are changed and a spiritual harvest results (Matthew 13:3b-9,18-23; Mark 4:3-9; Mark 4:13-20).

Parables may provide a pictorial way to teach truth, but they are more than just illustrations. Their purpose is to make the hearers think about the teaching. Those who gladly receive Jesus' teaching will find the parables full of meaning. As a result their ability to understand God's truth will increase. But those who have no genuine interest in Jesus' teaching will see no meaning in the parables at all. “ (Bridgeway Bible Commentary)

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn “We Are One in Community”

Hymnal of Faith Journey, 56

We are one in community, united by the spirit

And bound with freedom and love

We are called to be brothers, sisters, family

We are bound in Jesus Christ

In whom we work and praise the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

The good news of salvation, proclaimed in words and deeds.

Opening Prayer

Bless our gathering today Lord, we pray. May your words help us translate our faith in the situations of our lives. Make us a community that takes joy in learning and serving You and others. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read Isaiah 42:5-9
 - How would God establish the people?
 - What are expected to happen when God send the servant with whom God is pleased?
- Read Matthew 13:1-23
 - Who is the sower in the story?

- What were to be done in order to gain a good harvest?
- How can we connect the story to establishing of a faith community?

Lessons Learned

DEFINITION. Ask the learners the following:

- How do we understand “faith community”?
- How do we understand “establishing the faith community”?

CHECKLIST. Distribute the checklist to the learners. Make this a tool to assess the faith community.

Points of Assessment	Yes /No	Contributing Factors	
1. Are you familiar with the Statement of Faith of the UCCP?			
2. Have you memorized our Statement of Faith?			
3. Have you went through study of the Statement of Faith?			
4. Have you done a thorough study of our UCCP Constitution and By-Laws?			
5. Are you familiar with our guiding principles?			
6. Can you identify the basic ministries of the Church?			
7. Did our Church membership grow in number?			
8. Do you think that the members have become more committed in their faith and service?			

Applying the Lessons Learned

Tell the learners to hold on to their graph. Using the same sheet, ask them to suggest strategies on how to effectively establish the faith community based on the assessment.

Points of Assessment	Yes/No	Contributing Factors	Suggest Strategies

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Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn "It Takes A Lot of Growing" Hymnal of Faith Journey,

185

It takes a lot of growing for a tree to reach the sky,
It takes a lot of rain to let it grow,
It takes a lot of runnin' for a child to catch the wind,
It takes a lot of walking to learn to run.

Yes, I'm walking in Jesus, growing stronger
Each and every day, in every way
"Cause Jesus is growing in me.

Closing Prayer

We are grateful Lord that we belong to a faith community whose faith and commitment to serve is rooted in Jesus' life, teachings and works. We pray that with the Holy Spirit working in us, we may grow not just in numbers but also grow in faith, in service and love for each other. Help us Lord, we pray. Amen

Lesson 32: Why do we need to establish the community of faith?

Second Sunday after the

Epiphany

January 19, 2020

General Concept: We need to establish the community of faith so that it becomes a stronghold of faithful witnesses.

Biblical References: Isaiah 49:1-7, 1 Corinthians 1:4-9, John 1:29-41

Age Level Concepts

- We need to establish the community of faith so that it becomes a stronghold of faithful witnesses.
- We need to establish the community of faith so that it becomes a wellspring of resources for doing mission.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- Discuss why there is a need to establish the community of faith
- Characterize an established community of faith
- Tell how establishing the faith community can help in the accomplishment of Christ's mission

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV])
song chart, offering plate or basket

Biblical Background

It is God's intention for God's people to gather and establish a community of faith. Not the other way around that people are gathering themselves just for the sake of fun. Qahal means gathered people of God. This is the Hebrew concept of Church as a gathered people of God called for a purpose and that is to be the light to all nations.

In Isaiah 49:1-7, the prophet Isaiah described what the Servant of the Lord looks like, his character and calling. God knew him from his conception in his mother's womb to the process of making his mouth like a sharpened sword, making him a polished arrow and concealed him in God's quiver. Isaiah's narration about the servant portrays a covenantal relationship between God and the Servant - a relationship that is intimate and characterized by the obedience and loyalty.

John 1:29-41

The gospel of Jesus according to John 1:29-41 validates Jesus' Messianic claim as testified by John the Baptist himself and the experiences of the Disciples encountered with Jesus. Gathering the disciples involved an indirect and direct invitation from Jesus. There were those who Jesus invited personally but there were those disciples who were invited by their brothers and friends. The sense of awesomeness drew them to Christ Jesus himself. First, it was a sort of tagging along and later on, they became martyrs of Christ's sake and cause.

1 Corinthians 1:4-9

Being together as a community of faith gives a great advantage. In the letter of Paul to the church in Corinth, 1 Corinthians 1:4-9, Paul encouraged the believers about the value of coming together where Christ enriched them in every way- with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge. Through such gathering, God was confirming their testimony about Christ and making each one firm in their faith in Christ to the end.

Gathering the community of faith is not an option but a natural flow of expanding God's mission to the ends of the world. It is both here and abroad, now and till the end of time, and it involves every person and creature of God's cosmic reality.

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn

"Christ Is Made Sure Foundation"

Hymnal of Faith Journey, 237

Christ is made the sure foundation, Christ the head and cornerstone

Chosen of our God and precious, binding all the church in one.
Holy Zion's help forever, and our confidence alone.

To this temple, where we call you, come O God of hosts, today,
With your constant, loving kindness, hear your people as they pray,
Give your fullest benediction: grace to follow Christ the Way.

Opening Prayer

We pray O Lord that You may see our presence here today as a reflection of our faithfulness to You. We seek wisdom from your words and knowledge of your will for us today. In Jesus 'name, Amen.

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read Isaiah 49:1-7
 - What affirmations about God and God's work did the prophet declares?
 - What visible signs of an established faith community is reflected in the prophet's words?
- Read 1 Corinthians 1:4-9
 - What visible signs of an established faith community is reflected in the words of Paul?
 - How would you explain the phrase, "called into the fellowship?"
- Read John 1:29-41
 - What important event was witnessed by John the Baptist?
 - How does this experience affect the way John the Baptist's look at Jesus and his work?

Lessons Learned

PICK A QUESTION. Write questions on pieces of paper. Place them in a box and ask the learners to pick one and let them respond.

Questions:

1. Why do you think we should establish the faith community?
2. What characteristic can you think of that is reflective of an established faith community?
3. What can an established faith community do or help to accomplish Jesus' mission?

Synthesize the answers of the learners. From their responses, ask them to complete the sentence.

“A truly established faith community becomes a _____.”

Applying the Lessons Learned

Ask the learners to mention what resources their faith community has that can be useful in the accomplishment of Christ’s mission.

Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn “Christian Unity” Hymnal of Faith Journey, 272

Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray, that our life shall be
Living channels of faith and love, Christian unity.
Bless O Christ we humbly pray, this our Christian unity,
So our faith and love shall be following your way.

Our commitment be renewed to your mission Lord,
Make us channels of unity, following your way.
Bless O Christ, we humbly pray, this our Christian unity
So our faith and love shall be following your way.

Closing Prayer

Lord, forgive us when at times we fail to understand that we are to do Christ’s mission. Aside from being your followers, we ought to be faithful witnesses of your life and works, and that with whatever we have can be used to help do your mission. Accept our offerings of life and commitment to your cause. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Lesson 33: What does it mean to unite the community of faith?

Third Sunday after the
Epiphany
June 16, 2020

General Concept: To unite the community of faith means to become one in beliefs, aspirations and principles towards a common prophetic witness.

Biblical References: Isaiah 9:2, 1 Corinthians 1:10

Age Level Concepts

- To unite the community of faith means to become one in beliefs and aspirations.
- To unite the community of faith means to become one in principles towards a common prophetic witness.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- Cite examples of beliefs, principles and aspirations that have been formed as a result of pressing issues and concerns of the community of faith
- Discuss how these beliefs, principles and aspirations are factors in bringing the community of faith together
- Resolve to embrace and own these beliefs, principles and aspirations

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV])
song chart, offering plate or basket

Biblical Background

1 Corinthians 1:10

The Apostle Paul witnessed the way of life of the Christians in Corinth. They are quarreling and establishing faction among them threatening the unity of the household of God. Therefore, Paul urges them to stop quarreling and be united. Paul heard from Chloe's household that the Christians have divided themselves into factions. Some were from Chloe's, others from Apollo's and even from Paul's party. Paul rebuke all parties and even thankful that he baptized only a few people from Corinth. No one can accuse him of baptizing people for personal gain. Nor did he attempt to attract followers by displaying much wisdom or ability in his preaching. His sole objective was to preach the gospel of Christ; his love and care, so that people might be saved. (*Bridgeway Commentary*)

Isaiah 9:2

Unity in the community comes with the self-realization of one's situation and the determination to make an impact that will give a better and more meaningful life. In Isaiah 9:2, the prophet Isaiah gave hope to the people of Israel in spite of the series of tribulation happened to both Kingdoms. The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; and for those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has dawned. The light which Isaiah mentioned was the promised Messiah that will reign in everlasting peace.

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn. "Why We Are UCCP" Hymnal of Faith Journey, 243

We believe in one God – Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer of everyone's life,

In Jesus Christ God became human and rules as Lord of Lords,
In spirit, God guides us all along.

Refrain:

That's why we are UCCP for we are taught what the Lord has said;

To live a life in community with God and all,
Assured of life even after death, no more sorrows and no more defeat,
There's only love, justice and peace, all creation new

(4th stanza) peace, UCCP!

As persons we are created reflecting God's image,
The Lord made us stewards of the world.
The Church is the Body of Christ redeemed and reconciled
Entrusted with God's own ministry.

The Bible is God's revelation in his'try and in Christ
A faithful witness to God's work, to guide and illumine believers
And build them up in faith, equip them to witness to the world.

The Kingdom of God is present where faith in Christ is shared,
Where healing is given to the sick, where food is bestowed to the
 hungry
And light to the blind and freedom for captives and oppressed.

Opening Prayer

We thank you Lord for this new day. Thank you for giving us this opportunity to come together as a community of faith bound by your love and empowered by your spirit. Be with us as we discuss and share our experiences and understanding of our beliefs in relation to what is happening around us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read Isaiah 9:1-4
 - What experiences are being shared by the united community of faith?
 - What could be the uniting factor of the people?
- Read 1 Corinthians 1:10
 - How would you describe the community of faith that is united?
 - What do you think are the factors that create division in the faith community?

Lessons Learned

RE-READING OF STATEMENTS. Divide the learners into three or groups. Give each group copies of our statements. Task each group to respond to the following:

- What could be the issues and concerns which the Church tries to confront that resulted to the formulation of the statement?
- Do you think the statement helped unite the community of faith?
- In what way did the statements help unite our community of faith?

(Sample of statements) _____

A STATEMENT OF CONCERN ON THE EFFECT OF THE PHILIPPINE MINING ACT OF
1995

“Our ideals, laws and customs should be based on the proposition that each generation in turn becomes the custodian rather than the absolute owner of our resources and each generation has the obligation to pass this inheritance on to the future.” Alden Whitman

The Philippine Mining Act of 1995 (Republic Act 7942) opens the era to unprecedented exploitation of the mineral resources of the country, aimed at spurring the economy to reach the targets of the Medium Term Philippine Development Plan.

This law provides the unhampered entry, control and exploitation of big foreign mining companies to the Philippines. With a minimum investment of US\$50 million, a company may apply for 81,000 hectares of mineral land for a maximum of fifty years. The government provides fiscal and non-fiscal incentives like 100% equity, 100% repatriation of capital and profit, 5-years tax holiday extendible to another 5 years, tax-free capital investment, double acceleration of depreciation costs and Auxiliary Rights such as Water, Timber, and Easement Rights.

The law allows the use of modern technology, such as open-pit mining and bulk mining, that will mine low-grade ore profitably. This, however, will result in the vast destruction of the fertility of the lands, irreparable damage to the environment, and the wiping away of the livelihood sources of people in the affected areas.

We are aware that many of the Financial and Technical Assistance Agreement (FTAA) applications are in areas contested by indigenous people as part of their ancestral land, a matter that still remains unaddressed by the government. In the Cordillera alone no less than 16 FTAA applications are already filed covering more than 50% of its 1.86 million hectares total land area. With the approval of the FTAA applications, the rights of the national minority will again be relegated to the back burner. We do not want to be a part nor do we countenance the national oppression foisted upon our hapless brothers and sister, simply because they are in the minority.

But this is not only a national minority issue. We are convinced that this law is detrimental to the interest of the Filipino people at large.

The damage to our fragile environment is irreparable. Think of mountains and their forests gone from the face of the earth such as the case in Antamok, Benguet. Think of rivers forever unable to sustain life, with toxic mine tailings destroying croplands in San Manuel, Pangasinan, with mercury poisoning in Davao, and with the Marcopper disaster in Marinduque. As Bertrand de Jouvenal puts it, "He [the strip-mining engineer] has a well-defined purpose, which is to get the [mineral] out by the most efficient means; that these should involve the brutalization of Nature and the spoiling of the environment is irrelevant."

Such massive mining will forever mar and alter the face of the earth, disturb the water cycle, lower the water tables and bring about water pollution, destruction of top soil and soil erosion.

But more than that, this law mocks the sovereignty and the national patrimony of the nation, by favoring the interest of foreign monopoly control and the country's mineral resources. This sell-out is happening at the eve of the country's celebration of the Philippine Revolution makes this mockery all the more insulting to our nationhood.

We would rather remain in the state we are in but free, than become a developed country subservient to foreign interests and dictates. A new tiger in Asia, but one that is caged — this is not the development we seek.

The Church stands by its prophetic task and calls on the State not to sell our birthright for a bowl of porridge. Not to sell our dignity for some pieces of silver or even gold. The Church stands by its mandate as a steward of God's creation and therefore makes known its opposition to the Philippine Mining Act of 1995.

Bishop HILARIO M. GOMEZ, JR., Ph.D.
General Secretary
Committee
UCCP

Atty. JOEL L. BODEGON
Chairperson, Executive
General Assembly, UCCP

STATEMENT ON EVANGELISM

Executive Committee

1971

BIBLICAL BASIS

*He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor
To bind up the hearts that are broken,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
freedom to those in prison ...
to comfort those who mourn ...*

Isaiah 61:1 -2

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor,
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind;
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.*

Luke 4:18-19

*For I was hungry and you gave me food,
I was thirsty and you gave me drink;
I was a stranger and you made me welcome,
naked and you clothed me,
in prison and you came to see me.*

Matthew 25:39

*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all
that I have commanded you; and lo,
I am with you always, to the close of the age.*

Matthew 28:19-20

*But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit
has come upon you,
and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and
in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.*

Acts 1:8

*Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth,
and the life no one comes to the Father, but by me.*

John 14:6

A STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

*The faith and trust given by Jesus Christ
Evangelism is the bearing of our witness,
in Jesus Christ for the world.*

*A witness in word and deed.
A movement from word to deed
the oneness of Word and deed.*

*Not a privilege but a compelling and humbling task
Evangelism is communication with the world,
of the mighty acts of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.*

*Discovering, discerning, and celebrating and sharing
His reconciling acts of love in the midst of Humanity.*

*Evangelism is God's work in us;
A concern for human life
for its potentiality and abundancy.*

*A concern for liberation,
liberating men from all sinful
dehumanizing pressures and systems.*

*A concern for participation,
participating in the task
of love and justice for all.*

*Evangelism is not image building,
But genuine self-giving
springing from Jesus Christ alone and
a commitment to Him
rooted in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.*

*To this task Jesus Christ was obedient,
To this task we commit ourselves,
To this task,
The United Church of Christ in the Philippines commits herself.
Ever conscious that men of courage, dedication and
steadfast purpose in love,
obedient to His Spirit
are channels of God's power and Grace.*

BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR EVANGELISM

*To witness is to Proclaim,
To Proclaim is to Preach,
To Preach is to Live
The Living Word, Jesus Christ.
His Good News of Life,*

*And to Celebrate His Mighty
Act of Redemption in the Cross and His Resurrection.*

The Local Congregation

The local congregation is the concrete reality of the Church Universal. It is the concrete reality of the gathered people of God. It is her liturgical life *Liturgia* (work of the people) offered in worship that witness is proclaimed in the Preaching and the Acting of the Holy Word of God, Jesus Christ our Lord.

We are to strengthen, enrich, and equip the saints in the worship life of the local congregation. For in the gathered community in worship, we are God's people. *It was there from the beginning; we have heard it; we have seen it with our, own eyes; we looked upon it, and felt with our own hands; and it is of this we tell. Our theme is the word of life. This life was made visible; we have seen it and bear our testimony; we have declared to you the eternal life which dwelt with the Father and was made visible to us. What we have seen and heard we declare to you, so that you and we together may share in a common life, that life which we share with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.* (1 John 1:1 -3 NEB).

A Style of Life

The Christian presence is a presence of LOVE. It is the Christian's style of life to be SALT, A LEAVEN, A LIGHT, expressed in individual relationships with one another in the family, and in our daily life of responsibility.

I give you a new commandment: Love one another; as I have loved you, then all will know that you are my disciples. (John 13:34-35 NEB)

A Life of a Citizen

To witness to the concerned love of Jesus Christ is to live a life in the given world of God. Participating in human development and nation-building is the Christian's witnessing life. As Christians, our earthly citizenship should be a manifestation of our citizenship of the Kingdom of God. This is made clear and known in our being good citizens of our country. We are to be deeply involved in the ongoing social process of needed changes in our society and nation, that man may become fully human and that our nation share in the humanization of all mankind.

Stand firm against the device of the devil. For our fight is not against human foes, but against cosmic powers, against the authorities and potentates of this dark world, against the super forces of evil in the heavens. Therefore, take up God's armour; then you will be able to stand your ground when things are at their worst, to complete every task and still to stand. (Ephesians 6:12-13 NEB)

Ecumenical Life

The whole body of Christ, local, national and universal is the witness, the Mission of God's loving concern here on earth. To live in Division is Sin. Where there is no unity, the vision is blurred, and the evangelistic task of liberating men from sin is dimmed.

In the pursuance of our evangelistic task we affirm Unity without Uniformity, and Unity in the midst of Diversity. We shall join to witness an ecumenical life together, any local congregation, denomination, religious or non-religious bodies where God is active in love, hope, and faith for the glory of God and the salvation of Mankind.

Ref: *Executive Committee, Action # 71-171 , 1971.*

MISSION STATEMENT ON THE HEALING MINISTRY

Executive Committee

20-27 August 1987

The UCCP engages itself in wholistic health ministry in obedience to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ for abundant life for all.

In affirmation of this conviction, we thus further state that health is a basic human right.

While it is the duty of the State to provide health care, the Church has a moral responsibility towards the attainment of a wholesome and healthy life for everyone as God intended, recognizing that the art and science of healing is an integral part of the message of salvation.

The active participation of the people of God through her various institutions shall enable the Church to fulfill her healing ministry.

Though the Church focuses her attention upon people, she cannot close her eyes to the ills of society which give rise to poverty of body and spirit. It is therefore necessary for the Church to address herself to the historic problems of domination, unequal distribution of land, inequality in economic opportunities and resources, and oppression and exploitation of less privileged and marginalized Filipinos.

Ref: *Executive Committee, 20-27 August 1987*

A DECLARATION OF UCCP CHURCHES AS SANCTUARIES AND ZONES OF PEACE

Executive Committee

23 February 1990

The United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP), committed to peace and justice, is strongly advocating for the establishment of a society where peace prevails. Following up and strengthening its previous statements *Peace Making: Our Ministry* (August 21, 1986) and its *Pastoral Letter and Advent Message* (December, 1989), the United Church of Christ in the Philippines through its Council of Bishops and the Executive Committee in session on February 21-23, 1990 declares as sanctuaries and zones of peace all its church buildings, parsonages and lands, hospitals and schools, and other church-owned institutions and their premises.

As sanctuaries, these places and premises are *open to all people* — regardless of color and creed, sex and status, and of political and religious affiliation — at all times in all circumstances of need. We welcome those needing sanctuary to use these places for protection, study, reflection, retreat, prayers and meditation, or simply for rest and quiet.

As zones of peace, these church places and premises are to be used for activities that build community and contribute to a deeper understanding of and commitment to peace and justice.

- No arms, except those of employed security guards, and weapons of war should be brought to nor stored in these church places and premises.
- No individuals nor groups should be allowed to use these places and premises as camps and assembly points for planning and launching of any kind of armed struggle and conflict.

We call upon

- All armed groups and sectors to *respect* and honor this church declaration for the sake of peace and justice for all.
- All our church people, ecumenical partners and church groups to *support* and abide by this church declaration, and to see to it that it is faithfully obeyed at all times for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

Done on the 23rd day of February 1990 at the National Office Conference Room of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, Quezon City, Philippines.

The General Assembly
Executive Committee
United Church of Christ in the Philippines

Bishop Juan A. Marigza
Northern Luzon Jurisdiction

Bishop Patrocinio A. Apura
Visayas Jurisdiction

Bishop Erme R. Camba
General Secretary

Bishop Gabriel A. Garol
Southern Luzon Jurisdiction

Bishop Lorenzo C. Genotiva
Mindanao Jurisdiction

Atty. Emilio C. Capulong, Jr.
Chair, General Assembly Executive Committee

Applying the Lessons Learned
Ask the groups to read the statements before the class.

Closing Worship
Offertory

Closing Hymn : "Why We Are UCCP" Hymnal of Faith Journey, 243

We believe in one God – Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer of everyone's
life,
In Jesus Christ God became human and rules as Lord of Lords,
In spirit, God guides us all along.

Refrain:

That's why we are UCCP for we are taught what the Lord has said;
To live a life in community with God and all,
Assured of life even after death, no more sorrows and no more defeat,
There's only love, justice and peace, all creation new

Closing Prayer

We hold our beliefs, principles and aspirations steadfastly knowing that these keep us strong as a community of believers. Our faith and trust in You unite us. Our hope for Your Reign keeps us move forward despite difficulties and adversaries. Being mindful of doing Christ's mission kept us conscious of our tasks and roles.

Lesson 34: Why do we need to unite the community of faith?

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

February 2, 2020

General Concept: We need to unite the community of faith to manifest our commitment to effectively carry out Christ's mission and to be in accord with Jesus' prayer "that they may be one".

Biblical References: Micah 6:8, Matthew 5:1-12

Age Level Concepts

- We need to unite the community of faith to manifest our commitment to effectively carry out Christ's mission.
- We need to unite the community of faith to be in accord with Jesus' prayer "that they may be one."

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- Discuss the importance of uniting the community of faith
- Read and study the policy statement of the Church on engaging with other faith communities
- Find the relevance of Jesus' prayer to the life and work of the Church today

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV])
song chart, offering plate or basket

Biblical Background

Micah 6:8

The biblical account reflects the very life-work that God wants from God's people -"to seek justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God." This is the calling not just for the people of Israel but to all people of all colors and different faith and traditions. Initially, this text is based on Balaam to Balak's message that he will not do what the king of Moab commanded him to do. Instead, he follows God's

command and become obedient to God's will. Though Balaam was not an Israelite, God revealed oneself to others and even choose them to make God's people realize God's will for them. Another example in the course of Israel's history is King Cyrus of Persia. He became God -sent so that Israel will return to Jerusalem after a long captivity.

Matthew 5:1-12

In Matthew 5:1-12, the gospel describes how one experiences blessedness in one's life. The word "blessed" does not mean "holy," and neither does it mean "happy" in a sense of being in a good mood. Rather, the word, "blessed" refers to the joy and contentment in God's presence. Jesus calls us to participate in God's kingdom here on earth today. We can participate in continuing the mission of Christ Jesus today through living in solidarity with the poor and oppressed; in our fight against the oppressive powers in Jesus' Name, and to be one with all people and with all God's creation.

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn "Among Pagkahiusa" Hymnal of Faith Journey, 264

Among pagkahiusa, matahum gayud, O Dios,
Sa Imong puluy-an kon maga-ambahan.

Sa pagtinabangay buluhaton mo O Dios,
Bisan kalisdanan nagamalipayon.

Kon managkabalag na, maghinandumay gayud,
Kon kami nabugkos gugma mo, O Dios.

Gipasalamatan ka sa balaang gugma ko,
Busa, tagsa-tagsa maghigugmaay.

Opening Prayer

O God who calls people into a community, grant that Your presence be felt by all who come to study and seek understanding of your will. Embrace us today who are gathered here. In Christ's name, we pray.
Amen

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read Micah 6:8
 - What does God want us to carry out?
 - What does it try to imply when we carry out God's mission?
- Read Matthew 5:1-12
 - How would Jesus' words of blessings (Beatitudes) affect the life of the listeners?
 - What do you think was Jesus' intention in uttering these words?

Lessons Learned

DISCUSSION. Ask the following to the class:

- Why is it important to unite the community of faith?
- Why is it necessary to connect with other faith communities?
- Can we see the signs of unity in our own community of faith?

Applying the Lessons Learned

READING OF STATEMENT. Ask someone to read the UCCP Statement .

TOWARD POLICY STATEMENTS

ON UCCP ECUMENICAL VIEWS AND RELATIONSHIPS

General Assembly

20-24 May 1986

The United Church of Christ in the Philippines is a product of an ecumenical endeavour by the union of five Churches — Presbyterian, United Brethren, Methodist, Disciples, Congregational, and some indigenous churches — and as such has been in the forefront of ecumenical dialogue and movements. By the very nature of its historical background the UCCP is a member of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, the World Council of Churches, Christian Conference of Asia, The World Methodist Council, and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and as such, her concerns are universal and inclusive, her spirit is progressive and her attitude is open-minded.

As such the UCCP is open to the spirit of new ecumenism which goes the traditional denominational lines to the new and progressive sectoral groupings. This new ecumenism has come out of the people's for justice, peace, human dignity, genuine freedom, and democracy. Its objective is not primarily the survival of the churches but the welfare of Filipino masses especially those most depressed and oppressed.

With the above understanding and spirit, the UCCP adopts the following policy statements:

1. For a more united and effective Christian witness and service of the Christian churches, the UCCP relates herself with some churches and denominations and world confessional bodies through the framework and structures of the National Council of Churches (NCCP), World Council of

Churches (WCC), Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), and World Methodist Council (WMC). These relationships are defined in the constitution and by-laws Memorandum of Agreements and Concordat adopted by these churches. The NCCP-member churches with which the UCCP relates are the following: Philippine Independent Church (PIC), United Methodist Church (UMC), Lutheran Church of the Philippines (LCP), Salvation Army Church (SAC), Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches (CPBC), Philippine Episcopal Church (PEC), Iglesia Evangelica Metodista en las Islas Filipinas (IEMELIF), Iglesia Unida de Cristo (UNIDA), and the Christ-Centered Church (CCC).

2. With regards to the non-NCCP Churches and sectoral groups, the UCCP should relate to them in the following manner:
 - a. *On development projects/programs.* The UCCP churches in the local, conference and jurisdictional level may carry on development projects/programs with any religious or non-sectarian groups on the following basis:
 - 1) provided that these projects/programs are mutually agreed upon, after some consultation by the parties concerned.
 - 2) provided also that these are concerned by the following entities, where any of these are concerned:
 - a. local church council or the pastor;
 - b. conference executive committee or the moderator;
 - c. jurisdictional executive committee or the bishop;
 - d. General Assembly Executive Committee or the General Secretary;
 3. Provided further that if these projects/programs use primarily facilities, equipments and involve the UCCP pastors and churches members, said projects/programs should be under the management and control of the UCCP;
 4. Provided furthermore, that in the periodical evaluation of the project/program, the office of the moderator or of the bishop, or their duly authorized representative be invited or whoever is directly concerned, on the basis of the project/program submitted and endorsed.
 - a. *On activities for evangelism, Bible studies, prayer rallies and worships*

The UCCP churches in the local, conference, and jurisdictional levels may participate in as a church in any ecumenical activities and gatherings provided that said activities are truly ecumenical in nature, content, agreed upon, planned and together and participate in by the churches concerned. Otherwise, participation should be left to individual conscience.
 - b. *On the use of the pulpit and other church facilities*

Any local church pastor or church council may invite a non-UCCP preacher to use the pulpit; and may offer the use of church facilities to any person or group which is non-UCCP provided that there is an approval by the church council members and by the moderator of the conference whenever possible. Without such approval no one should be allowed to preach in the pulpit and use church facilities of the UCCP.
 - c. *On Church Worker Participating in any ecumenical movement*

1. Any church worker (or church leader/leaders may participate in any ecumenical group or movement or program on his own individual decision, provided that such action is not inimical to the church and provided further that he or she informs his/her immediate group to which he is responsible;
 2. provided further that in case she or he wants to act on any official way, she or he should get the authority of the body concerned;
 3. Any church worker may be allowed to work fulltime in any ecumenical program or project not considered as conference project;
 - a. provided that he/she secures recognition from the conference.
 - b. provided that he/she does not get benefits from the UCCP insurance and hospitalization plan.
 - c. it is understood that these benefits will now be shouldered by his/her employer.
-

Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn “A United and Uniting Church”

Hymnal of Faith Journey, 244

A united and uniting church, that they may all be one
Reformed and transforming, in mission and in faith
Onward UCCP, building God’s Kingdom of peace.

Come, dreamers, visionaries, examples of true witnesses
Leaving the trace of footprints, for people to tread on,
With a burning faith and commitment
Proclaiming God’s message of love.

Closing Prayer

We are grateful that you have called us into a community in which you manifest your empowering presence. Grant, that as we continue to be faithful in doing your mission, may we be united with other communities and become mutual partners in our life and work. This we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen

Lesson 35: What is life-proclamation of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ?

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

February 9, 2020

General Concept: Life-proclamation of the Good News is to make known God's saving grace through Jesus Christ through our life and ministry.

Biblical References: Isaiah 58:1-11, 1 Corinthians 2:1-16, Matthew 5:13-20

Age Level Concepts

- Life-proclamation of the Good News is to make known God's saving grace through Jesus Christ through our life.
- God's saving grace can be proclaimed by doing Christ's mission.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- To check whether members have the same understanding on the concepts of "God's saving grace through Jesus Christ" and "proclamation of the Good News through our life and ministry."
- To name the ministries of the Church that are aimed to proclaim God's saving grace to the world.
- To cite examples how our life exemplifies God's saving grace to others.

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV])
song chart, offering plate or basket

Biblical Background

Isaiah 58:1-11, tells us about true fasting. For Israel, fasting is a way of being nearer to God. Fasting was intended to supplicate the Lord for forgiveness and blessings. Here, the people were asking, "Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?" These are questions that clearly show their dissatisfaction with God. Prophet Isaiah criticized the kind of fasting Israel had. God prefers the kind of fasting where they have to loose the chains of injustice, untie the cord of the yoke, set the oppressed free, break every yoke, giving food to the hungry, shelter for the wanderer, clothing to the naked, and turn away from your greed and pride. Till then, the light will break forth like the dawn, and healing will quickly appear. God does not want mere words or rituals, God wants justice for God's people.

Matthew 5:13-20

Matthew 5:13-20 continues the light which Isaiah was talking about. Matthew added that God's people are the light and salt of the world. "Salt" and "light" relate to the functions of Jesus' faithful followers in the world, so Jesus' emphasis on the law is about doing good. Jesus does not say that he has come to "build up" the law but rather to "fulfill" it. "To fulfill" (pleroo) is frequently understood as "bringing something to an end" or "to complete (something)" but that does not quite fit the immediate context. Jesus, especially Matthew's Jesus, was a law-abiding Jew. But

he chooses to "fulfill" the law in the sense of interpreting their meaning for contemporary practice. Jesus was emphasizing that law should not be observed in rituals, but should be lived out daily.

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn "Wonderful Grace of Jesus"
Hymnal of Faith Journey, 212

Wonderful grace of Jesus, greater than all my sin
How shall my tongue describe it? Where shall its praise begin?
Taking away my burden, setting my spirit free
For the wonderful grace of Jesus reaches me.

Refrain:

Wonderful the matchless grace, the matchless grace of Jesus,
Deeper than the mighty rolling sea, wonderful grace
All sufficient for me, for even me.

Broader than the scope of my transgression, greater than all
my sin and shame, O magnify the precious name of Jesus;
praise His name.

Opening Prayer

Most loving God, we come before you with gratefulness in our hearts.
You sustained us through day and night, showered us blessings and
gave us strength to make it through all the challenges we face. Be
with us now Lord, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read Isaiah 58:1-11
 - What kind of fasting does God accept?
 - What good news is being proclaimed through the words of the prophet?
- Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-16
 - How do we understand the gifts from God?
 - How we speak of the things revealed to us?
- Read Matthew 5: 13-20
 - What message does Jesus want to be fulfilled?
 - How can believers become preachers/proclaimers of the message?

Lessons Learned

Discussion. Ask the following to check if members have the same understanding of the following:

- How do we understand “God’s saving grace through Jesus Christ”?
- How do we understand “Proclamation of the Good News through our life and ministry”?
- What programs of the church do we engage in to proclaim God’s saving grace?
- What concrete actions did we do to proclaim God’s saving grace through our life.

Applying the Lessons Learned

Ask the learners to finish the sentence, “I proclaim the saving grace of God through _____”.

Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn

“You Are Salt for the Earth” Hymnal of Faith Journey, 246

You are salt for the earth, O people, Salt for the kingdom of God
Share the flavor of life O people, life in the kingdom of God.

Refrain:

Bring forth the Kingdom of mercy, bring forth the kingdom of peace
Bring forth the kingdom of justice, bring forth the city of God.

You are a seed of the word O people, bring forth the Kingdom of
God

Seeds of mercy and seeds of justice, grow in the Kingdom of God.

Closing Prayer

You have called us to be your faithful witness to the world. But we sometimes fail to manifest your good news in our daily lives. Forgive us Lord. Remind us always to be salt and a seed to the world so that your Kingdom may grow. This we pray, in Christ’s name. Amen