



A CALL TO PRAYER AND SELF DENIAL 2016 WOMEN AT WORK

Economic Justice and Empowerment

By Darlene DiDomineck

OBJECTIVE

That United Methodist Women members will know the impact of their giving, experience a creative way of interpreting blessedness in their own lives and be able to interpret the legacy of ministry of justice and empowerment with women, children and youth.



notes

Prepare

Prayerfully read through this program, thinking about what the women of your group need to know to have a better relationship with God and participate in God's mission as well as ways to make this time together meaningful for everyone attending the gathering.

A recipe swap and potluck meal are a part of this program. Ask participants in advance to make a covered dish to share, along with copies of their recipe to distribute to each participant.

MATERIALS

Gather the following items to use during the program:

- Offering basket or pottery bowls for each table.
- Candles for each table.
- Plates, napkins, utensils and cups for the meal.

RESOURCES

Make the following available for the program:

- *Global Praise 2: Songs for Worship and Witness.*
- United Methodist Women Bible (NRSV).

PARTICIPANTS

Before the meeting, ask individual women to help in the following roles:

- Read Jeremiah 29:7, 11–12.
- Lead songs.
- Read selected readings (five people are needed).
- Pray to bless the meal.
- Help prepare the space for the meal and activities.
- Lead the Closing Litany.

ROOM SETUP

Set up the room with sufficient space for everyone to sit and move around as needed for the business meeting and the program.

Arrange chairs around tables and set for dinner with candles and baskets or pottery bowls (for offering) as centerpieces. Consider inviting participants to volunteer to decorate and set each table.

Meditate and Reflect (10 minutes) ⌚



notes

PRAY

God of Blessing, stir in us this day a passion for justice and joy, compassion and peace. **Amen.**



READ: Jeremiah 29:7, 11–12

SING

“For Everyone Born: A Place at the Table,” *Global Praise 2: Songs for Worship and Witness*, no. 34

MEDITATE

Reader 1: Jeremiah’s community was in exile. He offers a word of hope for a people afraid and feeling hopeless. He calls his community to work together as co-creators of justice and joy, compassion and peace in the community where they live. He calls them to look around and see the blessings they have around them, to build homes for those without homes, plant community gardens and share what is grown. Jeremiah reminds his community that their liberation is bound up with that of their neighbor and that God has a plan to give them a future with hope if they care for one another.

Leader: There were many challenges facing his community, but there were also many blessings. In the early days of our movement, Methodist women also heard a sacred story and responded with faith, hope and love in action.

Reader 2: In 1869, Mrs. William Butler and Mrs. Edwin Parker, wives of missionaries, were home on furlough. They spoke to a group of only six women in Boston. Mrs. Butler shared the desperate spiritual and physical needs of women living in poverty in India. Male doctors could not treat women. Schooling for girls in poverty was almost non-existent. Single, trained and dedicated women were needed for medical and educational work. In response, they formed the Women’s Foreign Missionary Society and raised funds through sacrificial giving to send Isabella Thoburn, an educator, and Dr. Clara Swain, a doctor, to India.

Ms. Thoburn began a school with six young girls in Lucknow. This school expanded to include Isabella Thoburn College, the first women’s college in Asia. Dr. Swain began her medical work, resulting in the establishment of the first women’s hospital in Asia. Both of these institutions are still serving the people of India.⁶

Leader: Like Jeremiah’s community, women living in 1869 faced a multitude of challenges and turned those challenges into a blessing. Deaconesses, home missioners, missionaries and staff of mission institutions continue in the legacy of Dr. Swain and Ms. Thoburn today.



Cambodian woman winnows rice

A woman winnows rice in the Cambodian village of Char.
(Paul Jeffrey)



Reader 3: Deaconess Darlene DiDomineck serves in Philadelphia coordinating a ministry called Grace Café. Grace Café is a Sunday evening service and community meal. She describes her ministry of economic justice and empowerment in this way:

At Grace Café we invite neighbors and volunteers to share in a sacred story of a future with hope. Our stories are of struggle, faith, community and justice. Grace Café is jointly a ministry with our neighbors who struggle with food insecurity and homelessness and a ministry with our volunteers struggling to find a way to change that narrative. Each year, we serve more neighbors and more volunteers. Grace Café is a safe place to explore faith and justice, eat a hot meal and connect to community resources for justice and empowerment. We are partners, co-creators of justice and co-sharers in a sacred story.

Leader: Much has changed over time, however; challenges still remain for many today.

Reflect

- What do you perceive as challenges in each story? (e.g., economic oppression, exile, gender inequality)
- What do you perceive as blessings? (e.g., community, land, volunteers)
- What do we see as challenges and blessings facing women, children and youth in our own community today?

Explore and Discover (30–40 minutes)

RECIPE SWAP AND POTLUCK

Let us share and swap recipes with one another.

During the meal, invite those seated at tables together to discuss why they chose to share this recipe and why it has been a blessing to them. Invite participants to share a time when they have received a blessing from another.

In the early church, sharing meals was central to the formation of Christian community. They were times of prayer, praise and the sharing of the sacred stories of one another's life experiences. For a community living in a time of oppression, this shared meal was both a prayerful sacrifice and a blessing. Those who could gave what they had for the benefit of the whole community. Our foremothers continued this act of prayerful sacrifice and blessing when they formed the Women's Foreign Missionary Society and raised funds to send the first missionaries on our behalf to India. We continue their legacy in our Call to Prayer and Self Denial offering to support ministries of justice and empowerment with women, children and youth.

PRAY

Invite a participant to bless the meal.



notes

SING

“For Everyone Born: A Place at the Table,” *Global Praise 2: Songs for Worship and Witness*, no. 34 (refrain)

Option: Consider compiling the recipes into a simple cookbook as a fundraiser for mission.

Challenge for Mission (10 minutes) ⌚

Leader: Around the world, an increasing number of people struggle to earn enough to provide for their families’ basic needs. In the United States, 1 percent of the population holds one-fourth of the total wealth; for developing countries the gap is even wider. Women experience increased barriers including hiring discrimination and lower wages compared to their male counterparts. In some countries, women are unable to access credit to start a new business, are not allowed to own property and have limited access to job opportunities.

In 2013, the Call to Prayer and Self-Denial offering, “Living Stewardship: Creating Financial Literacy,” supported financial literacy programs throughout the world. Hear the sacred stories of your faith, hope and love in action.

Reader 4: For nearly 150 years, Epworth Children and Family Services, a National Mission Institution in St. Louis, Missouri, has provided the community with essential youth development services that have helped thousands of children overcome severe emotional and behavioral challenges caused by abuse or neglect. In 2013, our Call to Prayer and Self Denial offerings supported the Financial Literacy Among Older Youth project.⁷

Reader 5: The Tbilisi Youth House Foundation in Tbilisi, Georgia, offers classes in foreign languages, computer skills, art, media/journalism, dance, music, drama, video production, small business development and organizational development. The mission of the Tbilisi Youth House is to provide a safe, loving and life-enhancing environment for all. In 2013, our Call to Prayer and Self Denial offerings funded the program: Empowering Women and Youth in Georgia: Fighting Poverty.⁸

Leader: In 2016, our Call to Prayer and Self-Denial offerings will support programs that empower women to gain the resources they need to earn a living wage and care for themselves and their loved ones. Projects may include vocational training, job readiness and life skills training, small business development assistance and advocacy campaigns to educate communities around the area about economic justice at a local, national and global level. We have the opportunity today to continue the legacy of our foremothers. We invite you to give generously as our foremothers did before us.

SING

As we sing the refrain from “For Everyone Born,” please place your offerings in the baskets in the center of your table(s).

“For Everyone Born: A Place at the Table,” *Global Praise 2: Songs for Worship and Witness*, no. 34 (refrain).



Closing Litany

(3 minutes)

Read Psalm 146 responsively.

Leader: Praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord, O my soul!

ALL: I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

Leader: Do not put your trust in princes,
in mortals, in whom there is no help. When their breath departs, they return
to the earth; on that very day their plans perish.

**ALL: Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord their God, who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith forever;**

Leader: Who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.
The Lord sets the prisoners free;

**ALL: The Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
the Lord loves the righteous.**

Leader: The Lord watches over the strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

**ALL: The Lord will reign forever,
your God, O Zion, for all generations.
Praise the Lord!**

Darlene DiDomineck is a deaconess who serves at Arch Street United Methodist Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, coordinating a ministry called Grace Café. She also serves as the district resource assistant for the Central District of the Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference. Darlene earned a Master of Divinity from Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York in 2008 and a Bachelor of Arts in Women's Studies from the University of South Florida in 1998.