

To begin addressing “Families Called to Justice” in your congregation, establish a family ministry team. The first task of the team is to pray for families in your congregation and in your community. Through their prayer and discernment, ask them to help the congregation identify ways families in the congregation and in the community can be engaged in justice. Ask those recruited for the team to pray for every family in the church during the month of May (or whichever month you choose for Christian Home Month). Ask them to lead the congregation in prayer for families in your community and to challenge the congregation to see where God is already acting in the community to advocate for justice.

Let Christian Home Month be the beginning of an entire year of deepening our understanding of God’s justice and our ability to act for justice. During the month and throughout the rest of the year, provide programs, dinners, parenting classes, worship opportunities, learning activities, and times of prayer for supporting families in their faith journeys. As God intended, the home is a place for living justly with one another and daily practicing the Christian faith.

- Rev. MaryJane Pierce Norton, Retired Staff, Discipleship Ministries

### **Called to Justice: Worship Service Resources**

The following helps are suggested for use in worship for celebrating Christian Home Sunday. For additional resources, use *The United Methodist Book of Worship*.

#### **Call to Worship**

Leader: We come together to praise God, who is the source of our life and our love.

**People: We lift our voices in praise for God, who loves us always.**

Leader: We come to celebrate and support families whose daily living embodies justice in their homes and communities.

**People: We lift our voices in thanks for families who speak out against injustice and cruelty.**

Leader: We come praying for families who struggle for fair treatment, who are without communities to care for them.

**People:** We lift our voices in sorrow for those who hurt because of the actions of others.

**ALL:** Let us worship, trusting in God's love and mercy. Praise be to God!

## **Hymns**

*(Choose hymns that best fit your worship service.)*

"Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise," 103, *The United Methodist Hymnal (UMH)*

"Lord, You Give the Great Commission," 584, *UMH*

"We Shall Overcome," 533, *UMH*

"We Are Called," 2172, *The Faith We Sing (TFWS)*

"What Does the Lord Require of You," 2174, *TFWS*

"Sent Out in Jesus' Name," 2184, *TFWS*

"The Family Prayer Song," 2188, *TFWS*

"View the Present Through the Promise," 3048, *Worship & Song (W&S)*

"A Place at the Table," 3149, *W&S*

## **Scripture Readings**

*Lectionary readings for the day may be used, or you may choose from the following:*

Old Testament: Micah 6:6-8

Psalter: Psalm 146

Gospel: Matthew 25:31-40

Epistle: 1 John 3:17-18

## **Prayer for Families**

“For Courage to Do Justice,” *United Methodist Hymnal*, 456

“Bread and Justice,” *United Methodist Hymnal*, 639

Gracious God, who created all of humankind and showed us the importance of relationships with one another, we commend to your care all the families of this congregation, community, and world. We pray that each home may be a home where justice is practiced. We pray for homes where fairness and mutual care does not exist – where there is danger, violence, and hurtful words. We pray for families who struggle because of lack of opportunity, lack of jobs, and lack of fair treatment in their daily lives. We pray for children, youth, and adults, recognizing the importance of and the gift of every age as we grow. May your grace be present to all. Grant us wisdom to seek God’s justice in our homes, communities, and world. Grant us courage to speak out when we see injustice. Grant us hope for those times when, all around us, we see only hurtful language and deeds. Remind us, O God, of your caring presence surrounding us and guiding us each day. We pray, always reminded of your love for us through your son, Jesus. **Amen.**

## **A Litany for Families**

Leader: Gracious God, you created us to dwell in community. We thank you for the witness of families in the scripture who help us know we do not have to be perfect to receive your love.

**People: Help us remember the witness of the scripture, O God.**

Leader: You created us to follow your vision. We thank you for the vision of your kingdom, where all are included and all needs are met.

**People: Help us recall your words of justice, O God.**

Leader: You gave us Jesus to teach us ways to live in community with one another, not with violence nor with hatred, but with equality and love.

**People: Help us follow the path that Jesus has shown, O God.**

Leader: You created us to act in ways that help those around us know the true meaning of justice.

**People: Help us act upon your ways that lead to justice, O God.**

Leader: For all families, bless us in our lifelong quest to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

**People: Hear our prayer, O God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.**

For additional resources, The *United Methodist Book of Worship* contains prayers for the blessings of people at important times through the lifespan, as well as worship suggestions for *Festival of the Christian Home* and for *Mother's Day* and *Father's Day*.

## **Called to Justice: Family Devotional Times**

**Family Devotion.** Prepare a gathering place for family worship. Create a centerpiece on the table where you eat your meals or in another area of your home where you can gather as a family. Include a candle. Write Hosea 12:6 or another verse of your choice and place the verse next to the candle. Include other items that remind you of God. During your time of devotions, follow this worship sequence:

Praise: Praise God with a song, or simply start your time, saying together, "We praise God."

Prayer: Use a family prayer, or say the Lord's Prayer. Hold hands as you pray.

Reading: Read a scripture passage of your choice, a short devotional passage from *The Upper Room Daily Devotional Guide*, or another devotion of your choice.

Reflection: Ask each person to answer this question, "What was your favorite part of this scripture or devotion? What have you learned from this scripture or devotion? What actions do you think we need to take because of this scripture or devotion?"

Sharing: Each person shares joys, concerns, and prayers for himself/herself and others.

Blessing: Use a hymn such as the “Doxology” or “Blest Be the Tie that Binds” to end your time together, or use a simple dismissal and say together, “God be with you” or “God’s peace surrounds you.”

**Family Night.** Set aside a regular time for sharing activities of family fun together. You could do the same activity each time (play board games, cook special treats, volunteer as a family in service to others, learn about people who live lives that are different from yours). Each family night could be planned by a different family member, with the activity based on agreed-upon criteria.

**Count Your Blessings.** Discuss together what each person in the family sees as justice or injustice. Justice is when all of God’s creation (the earth, animals, people) is treated with love and care, so that all have what they need. We have injustice when some do not have food or shelter; when the earth and its creatures are harmed; when there is inequality because of culture, ethnicity, religion, economics, or other differences. At dinner each week, go around the table and ask family members to name where they saw or experienced justice. Make a list of these blessings. Thank God for these experiences and for being able to share them with one another.

**Study Scripture Together.** Some of the key scripture passages that mention justice are Psalm 33:5, Psalm 106:3, Proverbs 31:9, Jeremiah 22:3, Amos 5:24, Matthew 7:12, Luke 10:29-37, and Romans 12:15-18. Ask one family member to read the scripture. After family members have heard the scripture, ask them to state what the scripture made them think about related to justice in the world.

**Refrigerator Reminders.** On the refrigerator, post a scripture passage, a line from a hymn or song, an inspirational thought, or a brief prayer. Change the passage each Saturday. Place this reminder on the refrigerator at a level where all members of the family can see it.

**Scripture/Prayer/Thought-for-the-Day Cards.** Buy a spiral notebook of index cards; write a favorite scripture verse, short prayer, or thought for the day on each card. Daily, turn over one of the cards to reveal a scripture verse, short prayer, or thought for the day about justice to read aloud. Illustrate each card.

### **Idea Starters for Conversations around the Table or at Any Time:**

- Tell about an act of justice you’ve read about in the paper or seen on television and talk about why you think it is important.
- Name someone who you know prays for you. Why do you think this person prays for you?

- Tell about something you've seen this week that you feel was unjust. Explain why you feel it was unjust.
- Where did you see someone taking care of God's earth this week? What did they do?
- Tell about something you saw in nature that made you glad for God's creation.
- Who are the people you feel sorriest for? Why? What could you do to help them?
- Complete one of these sentences (and create your own):

God is with me when . . .

A person I know who cares for those who are hungry is . . .

My favorite story Jesus told about how we should act is . . .

The best time I have ever had working for justice is . . .

If I preached a sermon about justice, I would say . . .

I like to be with my family when we . . .

**Establish a Family Covenant for Living Justly.** This covenant can be renewed every three months; however, the basic elements of the covenant stay intact. The promise of love, forgiveness, acceptance, truthfulness, growth, and witness is the basis of the covenant.

### *Family Covenant for Living Justly*

Create a covenant together as you promise to grow together as a family in living justly. Every month, take time to ask, "How have we lived into our covenant?" Celebrate how you have shown God's justice to one another. Then make any changes that might be needed for the next month.

*This covenant will be in effect from \_\_\_\_\_(beginning date) to \_\_\_\_\_(ending date)*

*In order that our family may be one that promotes justice as we learn to live in this world together, we promise one another to:*

1. *Spend time eating, playing, and praying together.*

2. *Listen with respect to what one another has to say and speak our minds without yelling or blaming.*
3. *Explore actions that promote justice for the environment as part of being God's stewards. Determine what our family can do, such as recycling, planting trees, visiting a nature center, and eliminating the use of plastic in our home.*
4. *Learn about hunger. Do a day of service together at our local food bank or community garden. Volunteer to work as a family at a local food bank.*
5. *Seek out stories of justice at church, in the newspaper, on the internet, at school, at work, at home. Once a week at family dinner, talk together about what we have learned.*
6. *Educate our family about justice issues in our church and community and together write two letters to officials in local, state, or national government. Write one letter to an official who has worked for justice to thank and praise that person. Write another letter to an official, asking him/her to take action for justice in an area of concern in the community.*

Signed by: \_\_\_\_\_

*All family members sign the covenant.*

### **Congregational Activities for Christian Home Month**

- For congregational planners, reprint the “Family Devotional Times” material in your church newsletter, or place it on your website. List one suggestion a month. Ask families who followed the suggestions to write about their experience (or tell you about it). Create a “We Did It!” column in your newsletter or on your website and feature what those families did in following through with the suggestions.
- Plan a family fun time at church. Include a meal. Ask families to bring relief supplies needed by the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and assemble kits to be delivered at one of the UMCOR Depots. For instructions, contact your annual conference office, or go to [umcmision.org](http://umcmision.org) and search for UMCOR relief supplies.
- Encourage families to adopt the “Family Covenant for Justice” and carry out the practices for at least a month. Suggest a starting day for all in the congregation who want to participate. As part of worship, ask those who intend to live with the covenant to stand. Pray for the families. On the ending date, ask

all families who lived with the covenant to stand. Recognize each family by name and join in singing the Doxology to voice your thanks to God for their efforts.

## Called to Justice: **Retreat Model**

### **Planning for the Retreat:**

1. The congregation prays for the retreat, the participants, and the team that will plan the retreat.
2. A retreat planning team is created, made up of 6-8 people in the congregation.
3. The retreat team meets and plans the retreat:
  - Chooses a date and secures a location.
  - Decides on the retreat schedule, including times for prayer and worship.
  - Prepares a budget.
  - Recruits leaders.
  - Arranges all food needs.
  - Plans an offering for an organization in the community that helps families in need.
  - Designs a flyer that includes a registration form and information about fees, dates, and location.
4. ***Publicity and promotion.*** Someone from the team prepares information and distributes it through the church newsletter, e-newsletters, worship bulletins, social media, bulletin boards, and other avenues in the congregation. Regular notices, with sign-up forms, should appear beginning six months prior to the retreat and leading up to the week prior to the retreat.
5. The team collects the following supplies: songbooks/sheets; Bibles; (see the list of books recommended books below.); board games; sports equipment; bag of miscellaneous items (e.g., painters' tape, box of tissues, car keys; hula hoop, basketball, running shoes, toothbrush, roll of toilet paper, towel, spatula, hat, etc.) one poster board per small group; markers; writing paper; magazines; scissors; glue; Play-Doh; chenille sticks.

### **Retreat Plan**

#### **Friday**

4:00 – 6:00 p.m.



## Registration

6:30 – 7:00 p.m.

Dinner (A served meal or bring-your-own-supper)

7:15 – 7:30 p.m.

Gathering Time. Share announcements and opening prayer. Sing familiar camp songs, favorite hymns, and praise choruses. Explain the theme of justice to the group. Use examples that those of all ages can understand.

7:40 – 8:15 p.m.

Divide participants into “family” groups of four to six people (mixing up actual family members with others in the congregation). Have a bag of miscellaneous items available and let each group choose one item. Instruct all participants that each family group gets the next thirty minutes to prepare a short commercial that should be no longer than 90 seconds. The commercial must advertise the object the family chose and must be on the theme of justice.

8:15 – 9:00 p.m.

Have the participants present the commercials. Have emcees (whom you have recruited ahead of time) guide the groups through presenting their family commercials. At the conclusion, ask the total group to list some key words or phrases they heard that help us focus on justice. End with a prayer, using the words or phrases lifted up by the group.

9:30 – 10:00 p.m.

Snack and Game Time. Share snacks. Have board games available, music to listen to, and other activities for all ages. If the setting allows, have a campfire or take a flashlight walk.

## Saturday

8:00 – 9:00 a.m.

Breakfast

9:00 – 9:30 a.m.

Morning Worship. Lead the group in singing, scripture, and prayer.

9:30 – 10:30 a.m.

Ask the participants to reassemble in the same “family groups” as the previous night. Provide a Bible, markers, paper, and a piece of poster board for each group. Ask each group to read Amos 5:24. After they have had time to read the scripture, ask each group to talk together about what would make “justice” flow in their community. What would need to change? What would need to continue to happen? Make a list of these items. Next to each item, ask the group to list agencies or places that address each of the issues of justice the group has raised. Ask each group to find pictures in magazines (that have been provided to the groups) that would show what is needed to make each item on their list “just” in the community. For instance, if “not everyone has enough food” is listed, the group could add pictures of food to the poster board. If they can’t find the pictures they need, encourage them to have group members draw what they think is needed on the poster board.

10:30 – 11:00 a.m.

Break

11:00 – 11:30 a.m.

Distribute hymnals or songbooks to each group. Give them 15 minutes to locate a hymn or song that talks about justice. Ask them to rehearse the song so that they can teach it to the total group. Call the groups together, and invite the family groups to share their posters and teach their song to everyone.

Noon – 1:00 p.m.

Lunch

1:00 – 5:30 p.m.

Afternoon Fun. Encourage naps, renewal time, or nature time. Provide walking/hiking trail maps, recreational/sports equipment, and arts and crafts materials.

5:30 – 6:30 p.m.

## Dinner

6:30 – 7:30 p.m.

Read to the group the children's picture book, *God's Dream*, written by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Douglas Carlton Abrams and illustrated by LeUyen Pham. Ask each family group to gather together. Distribute chenille sticks, Play-Doh, or art materials. Ask individuals within the groups to form a symbol that visually shows a view of *God's Dream*. Encourage group members to help one another in remembering images or words from the book that seemed most important to them.

7:30 – 8:00 p.m.

Gather the group together and allow each family group to share the symbols they created.

8:00 – 8:15 p.m.

## Break

8:15 – 8:45 p.m.

Lead the group in sharing and praying about their joys and concerns. Ask for volunteers to name a song, or a scripture verse, or something they have seen this day that helped them understand God's justice and how we can share God's justice with others.

## Sunday

8:00 – 9:00 a.m.

## Breakfast

9:00 – 10:00 a.m.

Closing worship. The retreat leadership team can lead in a planned worship service, or use experiences from the weekend for a time of music, prayer, and praise.

10:00 – 11:00 a.m.

Clean up and journey home.

## **Christian Home Month Planning Calendar May 2019 – April 2020**

**May:** Carry out plans made for celebrating the Christian home. Ask families to bring to the church pictures and written statements about how they participate in acts of justice at home and in their communities. Use these to create a bulletin board and (with permission) posts on your church's Facebook page and/or Instagram account, as well as newsletter and Sunday bulletin items. Recognize women in the congregation who are mothers in families and mothers in faith. Honor graduates of high school and college with prayer in worship. Invite graduates to write a statement about what the church has meant to them as they have grown. Publish these statements in your church newsletter or in another church publication.

**June:** Celebrate Pentecost Sunday. Invite congregation members to wear red on June 9. Make a Pentecost bulletin board, including a poster or drawing of a large tree. Ask individuals and families to add to the tree the names of those in their congregation who have helped the church grow. Carry out plans for "Peace with Justice Sunday" the first Sunday after Pentecost. Use the resources found at [umcjustice.org](http://umcjustice.org). Recognize men in the congregation who are fathers in families and fathers in faith. Provide a devotional guide for families to use on vacation. Include scripture, meditations, and prayers.

**July:** Reach out to your community with a service project that allows families to give a day of service for organizations that address people who are homeless and/or hungry in your community. Plan a fix-up day at church and invite families to help with projects of beautification for the church and the church grounds. Host a movie under the stars night on the church grounds for families in your community. Select a movie that addresses injustice and presents ways to be involved in justice in the world.

**August:** Celebrate the end of summer with an ice cream social. Ask church members to bring school supplies that can be given to local schools for families who cannot afford to buy supplies for their children. Pray in worship for teachers and for students as they begin a new school year. Have a "back to school" Sunday, and invite all students to bring their backpacks to worship. Bless the backpacks, students, and teachers as they begin a new school year.

**September:** Hold a short-term study for adults. Use the book, *The Road to Peace: Writings on Peace and Justice* by Henri Nouwen, edited by John Dear. Celebrate Grandparents Day. Host a dinner and honor the older adults in the church. Involve the

children and youth in serving dinner, providing entertainment, and visiting with the older adults.

**October:** Celebrate the Children's Sabbath on the second Sunday of October. Use resources provided by Children's Defense Fund at [childrensdefense.org](http://childrensdefense.org). Host a fall festival for your community, and include both fun and service opportunities for children, youth, and adults. Get information on what supplies are needed by the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). Challenge families to bring in supplies and put together kits needed for addressing emergency situations.

**November:** Provide a bulletin insert with prayers for families to use as they celebrate Thanksgiving. Plan needed resources for celebrating Advent and Christmas in the home. Provide a list of places needing volunteers that would welcome families volunteering together for Thanksgiving celebrations for those who are without food and shelter.

**December:** Advent begins Sunday, December 1. Offer an Advent workshop for families. Invite individuals to bring to the church one Advent/Christmas decoration they use in their home and talk about why this is important to them. Provide a devotional guide for lighting the Advent wreath and praying together at home.

**January:** If you haven't yet used the "Family Covenant for Justice," invite families to do so as a New Year's Resolution. Publish a list of "beat the winter doldrums" ideas. Include such ideas as playing a board game with the family; telling one another stories of ancestors; having a star-gazing night; picking a favorite Bible story and acting it out.

**February:** Celebrate marriage ministries on the Sunday nearest Valentine's Day. Recognize anniversaries, engagements, and milestones in the lives of couples in the congregation. Plan a justice dinner and fellowship time. Use the children's book, *The Golden Rule* by Ilene Cooper, illustrated by Gabi Swiatkowska. Divide attendees into groups. Ask each group to create a poster or banner. Identify an organization or project that addresses justice needs in your community. Create coin banks to use during Lent with the coins going to support the organization or project you identified. Sponsor a pancake dinner on Tuesday, February 25, before Ash Wednesday on February 26; or encourage families to make pancakes together at home. Observe Ash Wednesday on February 26.

**March:** Beginning Sunday, March 1, provide Covenant Discipleship groups for children, youth, and adults. Offer a churchwide study on prayer, and together write prayers that focus on justice in our homes, communities, and world. Print the prayers

in your church bulletin; include them in your church newsletter; and post the prayers on your church's Facebook or Instagram page.

**April:** Celebrate Easter Sunday on April 12. Hold an Easter egg hunt after worship for all children in attendance. Observe Earth Day by having an inside and out clean-up day at the church. Begin preparations for observing Christian Home Month 2020: Families Called to Hope.

## **Additional Resources**

### **Recommended Reading**

#### **Children's Books**

#### **Picture Books**

*God's Dream* by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Douglas Carleton Abrams; illustrated by LeUyen Pham (Candlewick, 2008).

*The Golden Rule* by Ilene Cooper; illustrated by Gabi Swiatkowska (Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2007).

*It Takes a Village* by Jane Cowen-Fletcher (Scholastic, 1994)

#### **Young Readers**

*Marian Wright Edelman: The Making of a Crusader* by Beatrice Siegel (Simon & Schuster, 1995).

#### **Studies for Elementary-Age Students**

*Friends Around the World Activity Book* by Compassion International, illustrated by Jacob Souva (Tyndale House, 2019).

*Growing Everyday Disciples: Covenant Discipleship with Children* by Melanie Gordon, Susan Groseclose & Gayle Quay (Discipleship Resources, 2016).

#### **Youth Books**

*Everyday Disciples: Covenant Discipleship with Youth* by Chris Wilterdink (Discipleship Resources, 2016).

#### **Adult Books**

*Disciples Making Disciples: A Guide for Covenant Discipleship Groups and Class Leaders* by Steven W. Manskar (Discipleship Resources, 2016).

*40-Day Journey with Maya Angelou*, edited by Henry F. French (Augsburg Fortress, 2009).

*The Ministry of Peace and Justice* by Michael Jordan Laskey (Liturgical Press, 2016).

*The Road to Peace: Writings on Peace and Justice* by Henri Nouwen, edited by John Dear (Orbis Books, 2002).

*Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* by Martin Luther King, Jr.; *Introduction* by Clayborne Carson (Beacon Press, 2010).