

2020 CHRISTIAN HOME MONTH

PLANNING RESOURCES FOR CONGREGATIONS & CONFERENCES



Families: Many Forms, Living Faithfully! Called to Hope

The Christian Home Month resource is for family ministry leaders, ministry teams, and council chairpersons/coordinators in local congregations. It is designed to help local congregations develop and strengthen faith in the home and to celebrate Christian Home Month. Although Christian Home Month is typically celebrated during the month of May, congregations may choose any month of the year to focus on the Christian home and its key role as a center for faith formation.

Our theme for 2020 is **Families Called to Hope**. This is an appropriate theme for the current context in which we find our daily lives. We live in a tumultuous time; the COVID-19 pandemic has completely changed the way we view the world. Television news and social media inundate us with images and stories of the pandemic, including accounts of political controversy, inequality, and protest. The church is not exempt from what is happening in the society around us. Sin, violence, and corruption surround us and take the joy out of living. We have much to fear. Yet, we know that as Christians, we are called to be a people of hope. We hope for a better world, where everyone will feel and experience God's love, peace, justice, and grace.

All people—no matter their age or place on their spiritual journey—are susceptible to the fear, tragedy, and

devastation that our culture seems to focus on. Many families live in situations that seem hopeless. They are experiencing drug or alcohol problems, abuse, chronic illness, or the death of a family member. Families may be separated because of military service, incarceration, home quarantine, or financial circumstances. Some families are worn out from balancing work, church, and home responsibilities during these trying times. How can the body of Christ be a beacon of hope to all who despair? How can we help cultivate a culture of hope for our families, our church, and our world?

We can start by sharing and modeling ways for our families to practice hopeful living in the home and the world. We offer hope to our communities by:

CHRISTIAN HOME MONTH QUADRENNIAL THEMES 2017-2020

- 2017: Families Called to Love
- 2018: Families Called to Peace
- 2019: Families Called to Justice
- 2020: Families Called to Hope**

- providing clothing, food, or shelter for those without these basics. Schools continue to provide free lunches for students daily during times of quarantine.
- providing classes on parenting, marriage, finance management, and English as a second language.
- offering places of belonging to children, youth, and adults.

This Christian Home Month resource, **Families: Called to Hope**, includes worship service resources, a virtual retreat plan, and devotional activities for families as they foster a spirit of hope in their homes. We trust that you will find something in this resource that will inspire, encourage, and affirm you as you continue in this important work to which you are called.

CALLED TO HOPE: WORSHIP SERVICE RESOURCES

*Here are some suggestions that may be useful in celebrating Christian Home Month or Family Life Sunday as part of a worship service. For additional resources, see *The United Methodist Book of Worship*.*

Call to Worship

Leader: The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.

People: We come, giving thanks to God, who is our light and hope.

Leader: When we are tired, afraid, or downtrodden, God is our comforter and our strength.

People: We come, seeking God's compassion, comfort, and peace.

Leader: When we are afraid, God calls us by name and leads us to safety.

People: We come, seeking God's protection and guidance.

Leader: Christ calls us to live in hope, sharing Christ's love with a hurting world.

People: We come, seeking ways to share Christ's light with others.

Leader: Come, Holy Spirit, and rest upon us.

All: Come, Holy Spirit and help us to be people of hope.

Hymns

(Choose which hymns most fit your worship service)

- "Amazing Grace," 378, *UMH*
- "Hymn of Promise," 707, *UMH*
- "My Hope is Built," 368, *UMH*
- "O God, Our Help in Ages Past," 117, *UMH*
- "Light of the World," 2204, *The Faith We Sing*
- "The Family Prayer Song," 2188, *The Faith We Sing*
- "Song of Hope," 2186, *The Faith We Sing*
- "Amazing Grace" ("My Chains Are Gone"), 3104, *Worship & Song*
- "Lord of All Hopefulness," 2197, *The Faith We Sing*
- "Cornerstone" by Hillsong
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QvLxZEU02uI>
- "In Christ Alone," 3105, *Worship & Song*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RY4CW5pte98>

Scripture Readings

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

- Old Testament: Isaiah 9:2-7
- Psalter: Psalm 65, Psalter 789, *UMH*
- Gospel: John 14:15-21
- Epistle: Revelation 22:1-6

Prayer for Families

A song of preparation for the prayer:

"Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying," 2193, *TFWS*

(Sing it before the prayer for families and again after the litany to envelop all of it.)

Gracious God, who created the families of the earth, we commend to your care all the families in this congregation, community, and the world. We pray that each home may be a place where hope gives light to life. We pray for those homes where there is no hope—where there is danger, violence, fear, loneliness, hurtful words, and unceasing activity without reason. We pray for children, youth, and adults. We pray for parents, stepparents, and foster parents. We pray for couples. We pray for those who are alone. We pray for those who have formed families from friendship. May your grace be present to all. Grant us courage to look for signs of hope in our homes, in our communities, and in our world. Grant us hope, so that in times when we see only the mean actions of human to human, we remember your presence and the promise of your kingdom on earth and in heaven. Amen.

A Litany for Families

Leader: Let us pray...

People: For families where children, youth, and adults are nurtured to grow as God intended us to grow.

Leader: Let us pray...

People: For families who do not have shelter, nourishing food to eat, clean water to drink, and clothes to wear.

Leader: Let us pray...

People: For families who struggle with abuse, violence, fear, and stress.

Leader: Let us pray...

People: For families who practice the faith together—reading Scripture, praying together, worshipping together, and seeking to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

All: O God, we are your children. Help us remember the messages of justice, peace, hope, and love in such a way that those messages may be present in our homes, in our communities, and in our world. Amen.

Sing: "Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying," 2193, *TFWS*

CALLED TO HOPE: FAMILY DEVOTIONAL TIMES

PAY ATTENTION: How does your family experience God?

SYMBOL TO LOOK FOR: Fish

The fish is one of the most important symbols of hope for Christians. The unblinking eyes of the fish represent God watching over the people of earth. Jesus was often referred to as the “Big Fish” watching over all the little fish. Early Christians would draw the ICTHUS fish in the sand to demonstrate that they were Christ followers. ICTHUS means Jesus Christ Son of God Savior. As a constant reminder, anytime you see a fish, or the ICTHUS symbol, say: “God, thank you for giving us hope. Help us share your hope and love with others.”

VIRTUE TO PRACTICE: Hope

I WONDER...

- What has given you hope during the days of quarantine?
- How will you share hope with others?

GOD EXPERIENCES

- **Journal:** When you feel hopeful, write it down, or take or draw a picture of your experience.
- **Chalk:** Show others when you experience hope by drawing a picture or writing words on your driveway to share with anyone who passes by your home. Draw the ICTHUS fish on your driveway. Find an adult to drive you to other church members’ residences and draw the fish on their sidewalk or driveways.

TAKE TIME (Read and pray together): Read Psalm 65 together. Take turns reading a few verses every day. Then ask the questions listed below.

Wondering Questions:

- What is your favorite part of Psalm 65?
- How do you experience God in Psalm 65?
- What have you learned from Psalm 65?
- What do you wonder about?

RECOMMENDED BOOK:

Circles of Hope by Karen Lynn Williams

In this story of determination, faith, and love, author Karen Williams introduces readers to the realities of rural life in the mountains of Haiti. Williams frames the tale of a Haitian boy’s struggle to keep a tree alive against the larger story of his country’s struggle against poverty. This uplifting tale suggests that one child can make a difference—a powerful

message of hope for readers. A downloadable teacher’s guide for this book is offered here: http://karenlynnwilliams.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/circles_guide.pdf

FAMILY PRAYER:

God, we give you thanks because you have done and continue to do amazing things! Thank you for giving us hope for a better world during these difficult days. Help each member of this family follow you and bring hope to others in creative ways. Amen.

DO HOLY WORK TOGETHER

Love God

Remember your blessings, individually and as a family. Eat dinner together as a family. During these last few months of “stay-at-home” policies, there have been lots of things that have created struggles for families. Most likely, mealtime has become a time for deep meaning and relationship. Make dinnertime worth the effort; spend time together offering love, giving and receiving. Go around the table and ask family members to share when they felt hopeful that day. Encourage noticing those daily blessings and name them before the meal.

When children have rules during mealtime, they know what is expected of them. Mealtime also involves certain rituals to coincide with rules. In this time of stress and fear of the unknown, create rituals around the meal. Be creative and find ways to maintain these rules. Wash your hands before you eat is an important rule these days. Find a creative way of reminding your family how to see the blessings in these rituals. One such way is to write a blessing on each sheet of a roll of paper towel. As members of the family wash their hands, they will be reminded of the blessing and hope as they tear off a piece of towel to dry their hands. Offer thanks to God for these experiences. Ask God to give hope and blessings to others.

Many families pray before their meal. One suggestion is to have every family member put their thumbs up as they sit down for the meal. The last person to put his/her thumbs up is the one who prays. This creates a lively approach and reminds the entire family to pray together before each meal.

Love Neighbor

Identify people in your community who need hope (perhaps you have seen them on the news). Make them a handmade card, sign, or some other symbol of God’s hope. Mail the card (the old-fashioned way). A family member can drive to the location and display the sign outside a neighbor’s home. As a family, Facetime or Zoom call someone in your community who needs encouragement with God’s hope.

BLESS ONE ANOTHER

Genesis 12:1-2 (NRSV)

The Call of Abram

¹Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ²I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Abram was blessed by God, and he became a blessing. Empower your family to become a blessing. The blessing of God is a gift that transforms us. When we acknowledge that we are blessed, we can’t help but bless others.

Using a small ChapStick®, create the shape of a cross on your family member’s hand while saying these words:

God loves you.

Christ is with you.

The Holy Spirit moves through you.

As you share God’s hope with the world.

CONGREGATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR CHRISTIAN HOME MONTH

- Share the “Called to Hope: Family Devotional Times” material with your church, inviting families to try the suggested activities at home later in the year. Have a reunion of the virtual retreat participants later in the year.
- Each month, invite families to practice one hopeful activity listed in the Christian Home Month Planning Calendar.
- Collect stories from families about how they are living hopefully. Share these stories (with their permission) in your church newsletter, on your website, or during worship services.
- Enjoy a meal together at church. Place a question card on the table and invite people to take turns answering the question: “Church Makes Me Hopeful Because...” Invite each table to make a poster that shares people’s thoughts. Display the posters in your church. Use this event to promote future Christian Home Month participation.
- Encourage families to adopt and live into the “Family Covenant for Hopeful Living.” Celebrate families who commit and live into this covenant in worship with a prayer of thanks and spotlighting a family of the month.

FAMILY COVENANT FOR HOPE

Create a covenant together as you promise to grow and share God’s hope. Every month, take time to ask: “How have we lived into our covenant?” Celebrate how you shared God’s hope with one another. Then make any changes that might be needed for the next month. Continue this covenant throughout the remaining months of the year.

This covenant will be in effect from _____ (beginning date) to _____ (ending date).

In order that our family may be one that promotes hopeful living with one another, we promise one another to:

1. Spend time eating, playing, and praying together.
2. Look for hope in our world and share these stories and God’s hope with one another in creative ways.
3. Bless one another every day.
4. Learn about organizations that offer hope to the hopeless. As a family, we will find one way to help them with their work.

Signed by: _____

(All family members sign the covenant.)

CHRISTIAN HOME MONTH: PLANNING CALENDAR

(The schedule may need to change based on the geographic location of your congregation and the plan to reopen that part of the country due to COVID-19. Plan activities accordingly and fully comply with both government and UMC annual conference recommendations).

2020

MAY: Carry out plans made for celebrating the Christian home. Recognize women in the congregation who are mothers in families and mothers in faith. On May 31, Pentecost, have a “wear red” day and recognize those in the congregation who model the presence of God. Host a workshop on family friendly computer sites. Be creative and use online and social media platforms to create virtual ways of recognition.

JUNE: Recognize men in the congregation who are fathers in families and fathers in faith. Publish an online devotional guide for families to use on vacation or at home. Include Scripture, meditations, and prayers. Allow church members to contribute by sharing stories.

JULY: Plan a service project that allows families to help someone in your community who has been affected by COVID-19 and the economy. Ask church members to bring school supplies that can be donated to local schools for families who cannot afford to buy supplies for their children.

AUGUST: Have an “end of quarantine” ice cream social. (If the physical distancing restrictions haven’t been removed yet, plan this later in the year.) Have a “Blessing of the Backpacks” as part of one worship service before school begins. Recruit a leader and set up an intergenerational study using the book, *Let the Children Give* by Delia Halverson (available from Upper Room Books).

SEPTEMBER: Hold a parenting class on *Parents and Grandparents as Spiritual Guides* by Betty Shannon Cloyd (available from Upper

Room Books) to help parents and grandparents reflect on their spiritual lives and how they guide their children.

OCTOBER: Celebrate the Children’s Sabbath (October 16-18). Sponsor a “trunk or treat” in your community. Invite church members to decorate their cars, park in the church parking lot, and distribute treats. Offer a free hot dog/chili dinner beforehand.

NOVEMBER: Provide a bulletin insert with prayers for families to use in celebrating 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 to help those who are without food and shelter during the holiday.

DECEMBER: Offer an online Advent workshop for families. Invite individuals to bring to the church one Advent/Christmas decoration they use in their home and talk about why it is important to them (during children’s moments in worship). Provide a devotional guide for lighting the Advent wreath and praying together at home. Invite families to create Chrismons to hang in the Hanging of the Greens service or at home.

2021

JANUARY: If you haven’t yet used the Covenant of Hope, 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; storytelling about family ancestors; having a stargazing night; picking a favorite Bible story and acting it out.

FEBRUARY: Have a father-daughter dance the Friday before Valentine’s Day for the entire community. Celebrate marriage ministries on the Sunday nearest Valentine’s Day. Recognize anniversaries, engagements, and milestones in the lives of couples in the congregation. Encourage families to have pancakes the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday (February 17), remembering that with Ash Wednesday, we begin Lent and a time of study and self-denial.

MARCH: Begin plans for celebrating Christian Home Month in May. Host a mother-son tea get-together for the community. Plan a family spring break retreat at one of the United Methodist church camps and retreat centers. For more information and a list of locations, visit the UMCRM website:

<http://umcrm.camp>

APRIL: Easter is April 4. Publish ideas for celebrating Holy Week and Easter in the home. Find creative ways from last year’s COVID-19 resources (i.e. “Stay at Home Easter Egg Hunt”). Include prayers, meditations, and activities that help focus on Jesus’ resurrection. Welcome spring. Hold a family workday at church. Invite those of all ages to come and clean areas of the church that might not have been cleaned for a while. Sort through toys and supplies, removing those that are broken or no longer useable.

CALLED TO HOPE: A VIRTUAL RETREAT MODEL

Planning for the Retreat

Due to the lingering effects of COVID-19, this year's retreat is adapted to an online stay-at-home format. Feel free to adapt the model to make it a beneficial resource for your faith community. Flexibility with this retreat allows the length to be changed or the addition or deletion of certain activities to make it unique to your congregation. You may prefer to begin on Saturday afternoon and conclude Sunday during worship. You may want to plan one activity each night for a week and meet via Zoom video each evening. You may even wait until later in the year and plan a retreat onsite at one of our United Methodist camping and retreat centers. For more information, visit the UMCRM website, <http://umcrm.camp>, to locate the nearest camp to your church.

1. The congregation prays for the virtual retreat, the participating families, and the coordinating team.
2. A retreat planning team is created, made up of six to eight people in the congregation. This team should be knowledgeable in online platforms and technology.
3. The retreat team meets virtually and plans the retreat:
 - Chooses a weekend to offer the virtual retreat.
 - Decides on the retreat schedule, including times for prayer and worship
 - Troubleshoots any technological concerns that may be foreseen.
 - Recruits leaders.
 - Plans all food menus/suggestions.
 - Creates an offering opportunity for an organization in the community that helps families in need or small businesses trying to reopen after COVID-19.
 - Promotes the retreat on the church website and Facebook page.
4. Publicity and promotion. Someone from the team prepares information and distributes it through the church newsletter, e-newsletters, worship bulletins, bulletin boards, and other avenues in the congregation.
5. The team encourages families to collect the following supplies: Hymnals or online access; Bibles; children's books on hope; board games; sports equipment, one poster board per family; magazines; scissors; glue, modeling clay or Play-Doh for each small group; various props for skits.

Friday

6:00–7:00 P.M. – Dinner around your family table. Use the above-mentioned ideas around hand washing and prayer before the meal. Encourage every family participating to enjoy the same meal.

7:15–7:30 P.M. – Gathering Time via Zoom call. Share announcements and opening prayer. Sing familiar camp songs, favorite hymns, and praise choruses. Teach the group “Through It All” (*UMH*, 507).

7:30–8:30 P.M. – Ask each family to create a poster of a hopeful community, either drawing what group members feel needs to be included or using pictures and illustrations from the magazines. Ask each family to then decide on the three most essential features that must be present in a community for it to be a hopeful place to live. Ask each family to talk about its community, including what family members decided were the essentials for hopeful living.

8:30–9:00 P.M. – Have one person read the book *Circle of Hope* by Karen Lynn Williams. Using the guide, discuss the following questions within your family

Wonder together, asking:

- I wonder, “How did you experience God in the story?”
- I wonder, “How do we celebrate birthdays in our family? What other traditions does our family have? “What does hope mean?”
- I wonder, “What gives you hope? How does planting a tree show that Facile is hopeful? How can you work toward the things you hope for?”

Encourage participants to locate a scripture passage that mentions “hope” and make it their verse throughout the retreat. Inform participants that these verses will play a part in retreat worship.

Close by leading the group in a time of prayer, sharing joys and concerns; then sing together.

9:00–10:00 P.M. – Family activity: Think about a time that you had a problem. Write or tell a story about how you solved the problem. Share snacks and responses with your family during this time. If your house allows, have a firepit fire or take a flashlight walk in the yard.

Saturday

8:00–9:00 A.M. – Breakfast

9:00–9:30 A.M. – Morning Worship. Lead the group in singing, scripture, and prayer. Begin a responsive prayer by inviting each participant to recite a verse regarding “hope.” Encourage memorization over time. Each time a participant recites a verse, the group will respond with “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119:105 KJV). This encourages everyone to reflect on each verse recited.

9:30–10:30 A.M. – Ask the families to read John 14:15-21. Invite each family to imagine ways of living that reflect Jesus’

commandments. Ask each family team to make up a skit showing how people could live, sharing Christ's light, love, and hope with others. Advise each family to talk through what members will do and what they see as hopeful in the scripture and their situation before moving into creating the skit.

10:30–11:00 A.M. – Break

11:00–11:45 A.M. – Ask the families to present their skits. After each skit, ask the total group to name what was hopeful in each situation.

NOON–1:00 P.M. – Lunch. Encourage the families to have the same meal at each home. Discuss the menu prior to the virtual retreat.

1:00–5:30 P.M. – “I Spy in the Neighborhood” activity. Go on a family walk in the neighborhood. Spice it up with a game of “I Spy.” While you are walking, look for the items from the list below. Take photos to share with the retreat families later in the evening.

I Spy Checklist:

- Something flying in the sky
- A crack in the sidewalk
- Someone walking a dog
- Something blue
- A fire hydrant
- Water (lake, river, fountain, puddle)
- A sprinkler in a yard
- Something that crawls
- An American flag
- Sidewalk chalk art
- A bird
- Someone riding a bike
- Something white
- Something with four legs
- Flowers blooming
- A sign other than a stop sign
- A house that is painted/bricked the same color as yours
- Something that reminds you of “hope”

Encourage backyard recreation. Provide suggestions for outdoor family activities such as corn hole, volleyball, croquet, sidewalk and driveway chalk art, shooting basketball in the driveway, throwing football, riding bikes, or walking in the neighborhood.

5:30–6:30 P.M. – Dinner. Encourage all family members to help in preparing the meal.

6:30–7:30 P.M. – Ask the participants to reassemble in a Zoom call. Read John 14:15-21 and Revelation 22:1-6.

Ask each family to use modeling clay, Legos®, paper, and markers. Invite each group to create its vision of the place Jesus and/or the author of Revelation describes. What does a place where Jesus' light and love is felt and God's presence is known look like? What does it look like to live in hope? Invite each group to reflect on what a place full of hope and God's love looks like. Encourage families to be creative in the artwork and to discuss and share what this looks and feels like.

7:30–8:15 P.M. – Gather the full group together and allow each family to share their vision created and share group members' thoughts.

8:15–8:30 P.M. – Break

8:30–9:00 P.M. – Lead the group in sharing and praying about their joys and concerns. Sing again, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119:105) with the scripture verse recalled. Ask those who wish to name a song, or a second Scripture verse, or something they have seen this day that brought them hope.

9:00–10:00 P.M. – Snack and game time. If weather permits, go outside for stargazing or s'mores around a firepit.

Sunday

8:00–9:00 A.M. – Breakfast together as a family before worship.

9:00–10:00 A.M. – Incorporate a piece of your church's online worship service to reflect on your virtual retreat. If your church doesn't have an online service during this pandemic, plan on worshipping together via Zoom. One way is to incorporate a prayer read by a participant from the virtual retreat into the worship service. The following prayer is an example:

Prayer for Christian Home Month during a Pandemic

God of all time, our hearts are heavy. Many of our foundations have been shaken, we are experiencing communal distancing, and we are not able to gather together as we struggle to make sense of the suffering of the world. Yet, even as we shake, we know that the Christ who prayed in darkness while his friends slept, who endured pain and died on the cross, is with us this day.

Easter was not postponed this year...neither was our Eastertide Christian Home Month retreat. We celebrate that Christ is risen. Give us the courage to give a loud YES! to the signs of new life in the midst of our pain. Send your Spirit to breathe peace upon us. Guide us with your love into the new day. Give us the opportunity to notice hope in our world and to act on those moments with one another.

In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen