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**IOWA, NEBRASKA
& SOUTH DAKOTA**
• C O N F E R E N C E S •
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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To our valued Congregations,

Church has been anything but normal since the beginning of the pandemic. Just as Covid-19 has affected the way you experience church, we are aware that this is especially true for pastors.

Perhaps you have been hearing the term, “The Great Resignation.” It is a term recognizing the growing trend of people who are burned out from the pandemic; fighting decision fatigue, resigning from their jobs, feeling that it just isn’t worth it anymore. This is not just a corporate phenomenon. It’s happening with teachers, nurses, and pastors along with many other professions. We want to be sure that the pastors within the Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota Conferences know they have support, from Conference staff as well as from congregational members.

We have a request of you and a gift for your congregation to help make it happen! Please give your pastor(s) an extra paid week off this fall (including Sunday) in addition to their regular vacation and personal time off. Thank them for having journeyed with your congregation through the challenges and encourage them to take the extra time for renewal and Sabbath. We invite you to also use the gift of the attached Lay-led Worship Service for a Compassion Driven Congregation to easily worship together while your pastor is away.

Generosity is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and it is our hope that you will be generous at this time by caring well for your pastor. Help them care for you by caring for them. What a wonderful cycle to be in!

Thank you for using this gift. Thank you for the ways you appreciate your pastor! Do more of it! Pastoring is not easy, but it is worth it - especially when there is mutual caring in the covenant relationship we have between pastors and congregations.

If you would, please let us know which week your congregation uses this gift and send us a picture or two of your laity leading worship! We hope that you will experience joy in the sharing of your gifts with the congregation as you lead this service.

In grace,

Your Conference Staff



A Lay Led Worship Service for a Compassion Driven Congregation

There are hymn suggestions in this worship service. We encourage your leadership team to look at CDC guidelines, the Conference recommendations as well as your contextual needs to determine what will be best for your worship setting in terms of parameters set around congregational singing. The latest Conference recommendations can be found at ucctcm.org/covid-19.

Scripture Text:

Genesis 1-2:3 Psalm 146 Mathew 11:28-30

Alternate readings are available further on in this resource. If you choose to utilize the alternate readings you might preface each scripture reading with the statement, ‘An alternative reading of the story from (scripture) for today...’ and then read the story.



Prelude:

Hymn suggestions: Just as I Am, Softly and Tenderly, Come Thou Font



Call To Worship:

*To make this invocation more accessible to pre-literate or visually impaired congregants, introduce the congregational response before you begin, introducing a gesture you will make that will cue their response, “**God of rest, grant that our souls can find rest in you**” If this practice is new to the congregation, practice this call and response a few times before beginning the invocation, encouraging them to speak their response as a fervent prayer.*

Leader:

We gather as those who are restless; convincing ourselves that to rest means to fail. We must keep up the routine. We fear that if we do not, we will be ruined, fall behind somehow, become restrained by a modest way of life, be left alone, lose too much.

All: God of rest, grant that our souls can find rest in you.

Leader:

We gather as those who are busy; just sure that writing a killer paper, or speaking wise words to our friends, or committing to another program, or establishing a daily rhythm of doing all the 'right' things will fill us.

All: God of rest, grant that our souls can find rest in you.

Leader:

We gather as those who do not yet realize that we are already famished, already ensnared, already isolated. We gather as those who wrestle with what we must lose in order to be saved. We gather as those who have yet to find a way to truly take a breath, pause with intention, and rest.

All: God of rest, grant that our souls can find rest in you.

Leader:

We gather to name a holy no this day, to the drivers that we give way to throughout our week and to practice with one another a holy and sacred style of resting.

All: God of rest, grant that our souls can find rest in you.

**Prayer for Tired Worship Leaders:**

Written by Dorcas

(Based on Matthew 11:28-29)

Leader:

From the gospel of Matthew, we hear Jesus say, 'Come to me...

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. For I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

And the people prayed:

All: God, we have become proficient in religious planning and performance. We can say all the correct words, but sometimes we leave our hearts far behind.

Have we practiced our worship to make it predictable and safe, becoming as bored as we are proud?

Where you find it, break through false religious pride. Surprise us with Your supremacy. Stun us with how dangerous You are!

We have sometimes kept ourselves busy.

But for many, self-sufficiency has left exhaustion in its wake, and we are left anxious and bereft.

We give up trying to get our act together!

We come to you now, as you have summoned us. Show us your heart and train us in humility.

We ask for insight to see and to seize opportunities for rest. Thank you, gentle Savior. Amen.

Hymn:

Suggestions: I love to tell the story, Spirit of God, All things bright and beautiful

**Scripture Story Hour:****A retelling of Creation**

In the beginning God was there. Hovering over all that was. And the Spirit was alongside God. And just. Like. That. God decided to create light. And there was light. And with the light came darkness and all the variations that are in between.

And then God decided to maneuver the waters that were all around. And with that maneuvering, there became a sky. And below the sky was the waters of the earth. And then, God felt like playing in the water.

And with that playfulness dry land separated the oceans.

And THEN...God wanted to get dirty in the land and created all kinds of growing things from within the nutritious sands and soils and marshes.

And after THAT, God looked at the sky and felt an urge to place the moon and stars and other planets and the sun and galaxies and comets and asteroids and black holes. And then God breathed life into the creatures of the air and of the sea and of the water; all the birds...probably even the ones that didn't fly. And all the fish and squishy creatures that live in our rivers and lakes and oceans.

And THEN God breathed life into all the creatures that moved about on the land; the livestock and the wild beasts and the lizards and the bugs and even humans. And the MOST consistent happening in ALL of this is that each new kind of creation was marked by an evening and then a morning.

After each piece of creation there was evening and there was morning before God set to the next bit of creation.

And after the sixth day of creation God looked at everything and called it all 'VERY good' right before the marking of an evening and then a morning. And on the seventh day, creation, in all of its glory, was SO full of God's love... and God was SO full of love for creation that the whole of the day was marked as a day of blessed rest.

May we find rest in God's love this day. Amen.

A retelling of the Psalm

Praise our covenant God! Hallelujah from the bottom of my heart! I will praise our covenant God as long as I live; I will sing to our God my whole life long.

Don't put your trust in even the most generous of mortals. They still have no real power. Like everyone else, when they run out of breath, they return to dust; on that very day their influence ends.

Happy are those who trust the God of Jacob. Blessed are those who hope in our covenant-keeping God; who made sky, land and sea, and everything in them; who is forever faithful; who is all about justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry; who frees the imprisoned. Our God opens the eyes of the blind, lifts up those who are bent over and loves those who are working for real justice.

Our covenant with God watches over the immigrants, supports orphans and widows, but disrupts the corrupt.

Over covenant God will reign like a king forever – your God, O Zion, will rule for all generations.

A retelling of taking on Jesus' yoke

The Christian tradition has been passed from generation to generation in the form of stories told and retold. Stories told around dinner tables and campfires, on fishing boats and family road trips, in holy places and in places where God's presence was wholly unimaginable until the moment the story was spoken aloud.

Today we enter into a story that has been unfolding. Jesus has performed 12 miracles already and the spiritual leaders are refusing to believe in him and because of their sway they are creating a mindset among the rest of the community that there is a right side and a wrong side. You might take a guess as to who is on the wrong side in their mind's eye.

Now, Jesus, being brought up in the rabbinical teachings understands that the yoke of the kin-dom of humanity is in direct contrast to the yoke of the kin-dom of divinity.

That if one wears the yoke of the kin-dom of humanity, one is taking on the yoke of government and the yoke of worldly concern and therefore breaking the yoke of the divine.

Jesus understands that carrying the yoke of humanity...the yoke of government and of worldly goods is a heavy yoke to carry. And so, in this piece of the story we hear him take a deep breath and, in the exhale, he says to each of us;

'Come to me, you with the weight of the world on your shoulders, you who bear so much of the burden, you who are weary and I will give you rest. This weightiness isn't the only way to be in the world. There is another yoke, the yoke of the divine; that will break you of the hefty constrictions of this worldly one that you currently carry. And you will find rest for your soul.'

The words of God for the people of God. Amen.



Sermon Activity:

Because the work of the church is more than the work of the pastor and because you all have said a holy and enthusiastic yes to offering a grace filled sabbath time of rest for your beloved pastor; this is the time within the worship service you, as a whole congregation are called on to do the work of the church alongside each other.

Our hope is that you will be able to find ways to fully participate online AND we realize that many congregations are worshiping in person so these suggestions can be altered to suit both of those realities with any number of alterations for the vast ways in which we are showing up for worship these days.

You can invite a 'water fall' style of comments on YouTube/Zoom, post news reels on walls, lay out eraser boards on tables, leave the back of the bulletins blank for writing, invite different iterations of families (single humans, married couples with kids, married couples without kids, newlyweds, young adults, widow(er)s, the kids in a family, etc) to share video

clips or to come speak to a few of these questions, leave minutes of silence after audibly asking these questions (have someone keep track of the time so that you are leaving actual minutes) with the invitation that folks will send them in after church and they will be a part of the newsletter or bulletin for the rest of the year, invite leaders in the church to give testimony (on screen or in person), or some other wonderful way of offering insight.

The questions to ponder on for this week are:

- In what ways are you weary on the journey of life?
- What are the burdens you carry that make your soul weary?
- In what ways is worry robbing you of peace?
- How might your soul be restored?
- Is there something that is stopping you from coming to God for rest?
- Is there another place you find yourself turning to find rest other than God?



Prayer of the People:

You may want to invite folk in the congregation to name if there are any prayers to hold as a congregation. You can take this time to make a list for the pastor when they return from their time away. You might also name your pastor and their family. It would be powerful if all of our churches offered prayer for all of our pastors (all pastors in general even) since we are the 'C'hurch united.

Leader:

Let us pray.

God of all that is, we collectively take a big, deep breath in. *(breath in audibly so people follow your lead, once you're ready you may continue)*

Saint Augustine made this confession, 'God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.' We confess this today as well. We are tied to the yoke of all the 'things'. Help us to remember that we are here to find rest in you, O God.

We give thanks in the ability to search for that rest, to be granted the degrees to which we know freedom and justice. May we strive to work toward peace and justice for all of your children on this earth and may we choose to act with compassion in that work.

We give thanks for your love. A love that shows up in the actions of our family and friends, as well as in people we barely know or have never even met. May they know your love and may they be guided to safe keeping in your care. May those that are ill; in body, mind or spirit, be comforted. May those that have lost love find ways to be held in their grief.

We give thanks for your creation, for the earth and the water and the air, all that sustains the living creatures of your design including us. May these elements be made clean and whole. And may the balance move toward restoration rather than further destruction.

Hear these prayers spoken aloud as well as the prayers that rest within our hearts as we now join our voices to say the Lord's prayer, using the words most comfortable to us:

Our God, who is in heaven, hallowed is your name. your kin-dom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we

forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.



Offering:

Leader:

God's love creates all that is, Jesus' love offers a new way of being, Spirit manifests love in each of us, and we embody divine love in all kinds of ways. Let us take this time to share our love through our financial gifts and offerings today.

Doxology

Dedication

All: Covenant keeping God we offer these tangible signs of hope as well as the hope we carry within us trusting that by the power of the Holy Spirit; the kingdom of God might be made known more fully in us and through us. Amen.



Benediction

Leader:

We are made in the image of God, blessed by the creator as 'very good', honored for being filled so completely with love that God delighted and rested in and among us and all of creation. May we carry that blessing, and may we offer that blessing as we leave this place.

All: Amen.



Hymn

Suggestions: Blessed Assurance, Be Thou My Vision

Thank you for joining us in this worship service! A reminder to let us know which week your congregation uses this gift and to send us a picture or two of your laity leading worship. If you're not sure how to contact Conference staff, visit ucctcm.org/staff.

WHY are we called to be the United Church of Christ in this time and place? To live into God's extravagant welcome and advocate for justice. So that all may know love, safety, belonging and dignity.