
**DISCIPLES WOMEN
GENERAL PROGRAMS**

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Easter Program

Who Do You Say That I Am?



Purpose

To study Disciples historical traditions and to awake to future possibilities. The study also calls participants to become personally involved and to acknowledge that our Disciple roots call us to openness and affirmation.

Suggestions to the Leader

1. The presentation can be made by one person, but including more participants is better. Choose a *Narrator*, a *Reader*, *Caroline*, *Rosa*, *Friend One*, *Friend Two*, *Friend Three*, *Friend Four*, and *children*. Distribute the parts to the women in your group who can speak with much feeling and emotion.
2. Set up a worship center, because the lesson flows directly into worship. Drape a cloth over a table and place on it either a dandelion or a picture of a dandelion and an Easter lily.
3. You may prepare postcards or note cards for women to send to one another, encouraging each other and saying, "Thank you."
4. Open the session by presenting the readings.
5. Allow a few moments to hear participants' reactions.
6. Conclude with worship.

Introduction

The Renaissance (REN-uh-sahns) was a rare period of genius in the world's history. It began in Italy during the fourteenth century and was a time of great expansion of people's imagination, creativity, writing, education, and joy. To be a Renaissance woman today is to face the future with hope and creativity, to look at doing things a new and exciting way, and to find a new path.

Who Do You Say That I Am? (Readings)

Reader: Mark 8:27-33

Narrator: We have just heard the scripture about Jesus taking his friends to Caesarea Philippi, where, away from the swelling crowds, he could talk to the inner circle. "What is public opinion of me?" he bravely asked his friends.

By the response, "John the Baptist, Elijah, and an other prophet," it was clear that the people still viewed Jesus as a forerunner to the Messiah. They just didn't get it!

Reader: If you had taken a poll of first-century Israel, you would have found that most

people had a strongly held opinion about the coming of the Messiah, what the Messiah would be like, and what the Messiah would do. How many do you think ever envisioned a suffering, crucified Messiah?

Narrator: Keep this in the back of your mind as we look at stories from our history as Disciples of Christ. These stories make us who we are today.

Our church began when the United States was a very young nation. We are a frontier church that has had its peaks and valleys. In the early days of the movement, women were not involved in leadership roles. Oh yes, they were active in the church, even more than men. They sang and gave their money, but they were often reminded by the men in leadership roles of Paul's vivid exhortation for women to keep silent in the church.

Reader: Lois White wrote in 1901: "Up to a quarter of a century ago perhaps no religious body held more conservative views than ours in regard to the participation of women in the work or services of the church, nor more fully conformed its practice to those ideas. Without any creed-article on the subject, there was a universal custom of prohibition. Here and there a woman ripe in years, godliness and wisdom offered a prayer in devotional meeting; here and there, among the churches, was a woman's prayer meeting; but further than this, nothing was expected of women, nothing desired by them."¹

Narrator: In this climate appeared a man who was ahead of his time in his treatment of women. Thomas Munnell was corresponding secretary of the American Christian Missionary Society. He was a good secretary, but not a fund raiser. While he was in office, finances ran to a very low point and missions were closing.

Munnell's strength, though, was his ability to write. He used his mighty pen effectively. The book *A Comprehensive History of the Disciples of Christ*, by William T. Moore, includes an article by Munnell entitled "Indifference to Things Indifferent." William Moore admonishes that this article "deserves to be written in letters of gold, and read by every Disciple of Christ, at least once a year, if not more frequently."² Here are a few portions of that Disciple thought, as written by Thomas Munnell.

Reader: "There is a certain degree of spiritual development which only renders a man unhappy, morose, and unkind. It is that degree that has merely learned to *hate sin*, but that has not yet attained to the love of humanity. Such a Christian is always censorious, impatient of imperfection in others, and inclined to be very exacting about the ceremonial of religion. He understands the law better than the Gospel, he will have sacrifice rather than

mercy, makes little allowance for circumstances, and has the narrow gate narrower than it really is. There may be a true work of grace begun in his heart, but then it is only begun "

Narrator: "Not so with Paul. His sympathy for humanity, his love of souls, his knowledge of their weakness, his broad philosophy of spiritual growth, and above all, the influence of the Holy Spirit, all lead him to make much allowance for men, to wait on their development, and to accommodate him to their prejudice and ignorance, that he might win them to Christ."³

Reader: "The narrowest-minded men are always the most confident of their own opinions, they are the most denunciatory, and always claim to be the standards of orthodoxy. The more you focalize [sic] the rays of heat, the more intense the heat becomes in its contracted circumference; the more general a man's knowledge and sympathies, the more he is disposed, like the sun, to flood the world with his love and gentleness."⁴

Narrator: The influence of this article was worth the whole cost of Munnell's service as secretary, but this article was not the only epistle of value that he wrote.

About this time a woman, a minister's wife from Iowa City, Iowa, was contemplating the sad situation in our closing missions and the exclusion of women from the opportunity to effect some change. She was a Renaissance woman who rose from a dark time in the church. She was just finishing her morning devotions when a voice came to her and said, "The women are ready to take leadership roles, but they need a leader." Then the voice continued, "Why cannot you be that leader?" It was ten o'clock on the morning of April 10, 1874, when Caroline Neville Pearre (Purr-a) made the momentous decision to lead the women into active service for Christ. And who do you think was the first person she notified?



Caroline: "I promptly conferred with Brother Thomas Munnell, corresponding secretary of the General Missionary Convention."

Reader: He responded at once: "This is the flame of the Lord's kindling, and no man can extinguish it." Then Munnell began a letter writing campaign on behalf of the women. What an effect the women had on the face of the church! There began a new day for the New Testament missionary endeavor! In fact, the work was regarded as phenomenal, conducted without friction or noise. These godly women did great things in the name of the Lord.

Go with me, in your mind, as we take Caroline Neville Pearre and some of her friends to that same place Christ went with his friends-to Caesarea Philippi. Overhear a similar conversation. Caroline asks her friends:

Caroline: Who do people say that I am?

Friend One: They think you've lost your mind, if you want a truthful answer, Sister Caroline! They wonder if you think you're Carrie Nation or Elizabeth Cady Stanton!"

Friend Two: My husband thinks you should keep still and he certainly expects me to do the same.

Narrator: If they knew her inner heart, they would reply, "You are a Renaissance woman whose flame is of the Lord's kindling! You are a daughter of the Lord Jesus Christ. You are a woman who understands that we are all called into service-men and women, slave and free, Gentile and Jew."

The church entered a time of great growth, increasing numbers in membership, wealth, and certainly climaxed in the heyday years of the 1950s. A series of peaks!

Reader: Then we entered the turbulent 1960s, with the divisive Vietnam War, riots on American streets, and disturbances on college campuses. We entered a valley in America and in the church. One of the darkest parts of that valley was the division of races-blacks and whites so separate, with unfair treatment for many of our brothers and sisters of varying color. President Kennedy was killed and then Martin Luther King.

Narrator: In the midst of this darkness, our church produced a true Renaissance woman who made a dynamic impact on our Disciples of Christ churches. She was born in Port Gibson, Mississippi, with an ancestry that included both slaves and slaveholders, a Creek Indian, and strong Christian Church roots. She attended the Southern Christian Institute in Edwards, Mississippi, a school for children of former slaves, founded by the women of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Quite by coincidence (or was it an act of God?), Rosa Page Welch was called to the attention of a Vice President of the United Christian Missionary Society, when he heard Rosa sing in Chicago, Illinois. Mr. Cahill was so taken by this lovely young woman with a beautiful voice that he made her name available to groups, suggesting that she sing, speak, and touch people's lives with her spirit.



Reader: Rosa Page Welch was warm, accepting, and so full of Christ's love that she was invited repeatedly to spend weeks at camp with children who had never come in contact with an African American person. She traveled all over the states, often becoming the first person of color to set foot inside our Christian Churches. In effect, she opened doors of understanding to people who previously had no contact with anyone from a different background. Many, many young people made their decisions to enter Christian ministry after spending time with Rosa Page Welch. She saw the big picture and flooded the world with love and gentleness.

Go with me in your mind, as we take Rosa Page Welch and some of her friends and family to that same place Christ went with his friends-to Caesarea Philippi-and overhear a similar conversation. Rosa asks her friends:

Rosa: Who do people say that I am?

Friend Three: They wonder if you think you're Rosa Parks or Mahalia Jackson! Honestly, sister, they wonder if you're doing the right thing by traveling so much. What about your family?

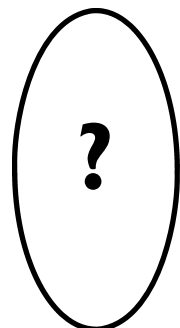
Friend Four: Rosa, you are the only one who could integrate our churches like you have. We need you desperately. You must come!

Rosa's Children: Mama, stay with us! We need you! Those folks are just using you. Mama, stay with us.

Rosa: But who do you say that I am?

Narrator: If they really knew her inner heart, they would reply, "You are a Renaissance woman whose flame is of the Lord's kindling! Rosa, you are a daughter of the Lord Jesus Christ. You understand that we are all called into service - men and women, black and white, slave and free. We are one."

Where is the Renaissance woman today? Who is today's Caroline Neville Pearre? Where is a new Rosa Page Welch going to come from? Who will God raise to bring our church today the very right word? Who will follow the lead of Jean Woolfolk, the first woman elected moderator of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and past president of Church Finance Council and Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins, the first woman President and General Minister? Who will come forth to lead?



Reader: Very few of us think of ourselves as candidates to do something as grand as the Renaissance women we've talked about today, but they too never saw what they did as earthshaking. They simply followed their hearts into service. Perhaps we are called to tasks within our local congregations that would resurrect a relationship, or a marriage, or begin a ministry that would really make a difference.

If you went to that mountain-to Caesarea Philippi-with your friends, what would you want to hear when you ask, "Who do people say that I am?"

Narrator: You might hear, "People wonder if you think you've served enough already. After all, you've served this church for years," or, "You have so many irons in the fire, with your job and all, you probably don't have time to do these things we need done at church!"

Reader: But the best thing you could hear is: "Friend, I see strengths in you, special gifts. Let me tell you what I see "

Narrator: Think about those with whom you have worked for years, and take one of these cards I am passing out. Sometime during the next week, write to someone in the group and tell her what you see as her strengths. Say "thank you" for your service to Christ and his church. Say any other encouraging thing you wish in the spirit of Easter time.

Reader: If your friends know your heart of hearts, I trust they will say, "You are a daughter of the Lord Jesus Christ. You are a servant. You are a flame of the Lord's kindling and no one can ever extinguish it!"

Service Action Suggestions and Additional Activities

1. Give out postcards or greeting cards for each woman to write an encouraging note to another woman in the group.
2. Donate as individuals or as a Disciples Women's group to the "Rosa Page Welch Fund for Christian Unity." This fund, administered by the Council on Christian Unity, is used to underwrite the Rosa Page Welch Lecturer at each Quadrennial Assembly (QA) of the IDWM. Checks should be written and mailed to: Council on Christian Unity, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), P.O. Box 1986, Indianapolis, IN 46206.

The 2010 QA lecturer is Jovana Savic from Serbia; she will itinerate in Idaho and Montana. Her lecture will revolve around human trafficking. If you are unable to attend QA, please visit the Disciples Women's website at www.discipleswomen.org to learn more about breaking the chains of human trafficking, the social action emphasis

project for QA 2010 and how you may participate.

3. Copy the entire Thomas Munnell letter from the book *A Comprehensive History of the Disciples of Christ* by William Moore and give it to your pastor with Moore's plea that this should be read by every Disciple of Christ at least once a year!

4. Identify the Renaissance women in your life.

Write a note to express what they have given you and how you have benefited. If, as in the case of Rosa Page Welch, they are gone now, write the family to express your gratitude

5. Learn more about the history of Disciples women, read *In the Fullness of Time: A History of Women in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* available from the Office of Disciples Women via email to odw@dhm.disciples.org

Worship

Worship Setting:

Place a bouquet of dandelions or a picture of a dandelion and an Easter lily on a worship center.

Call to Worship

Unison: All of us are called to be today's Renaissance woman,

Friend One: She who hates sin, yet retains a love of humanity.
She who spares harsh judgment,
is not impatient of imperfection
is not picky or critical about worship.
She is still full of awe and wonder in praise.

Unison: All of us are called to be today's Renaissance woman!

Friend Two: She who is full of mercy for the weak, who sees the big picture so that, like the sun, she floods the world with love and gentleness.

Unison: All of us are called to be today's Renaissance woman!

Meditation

As beautiful and symbolic as the Easter lily is, do you realize that it has to be forced to

bloom in time for Easter? A more appropriate symbol would be the lowly dandelion! No one has to force the dandelion to bloom. It shows its face everywhere right at Easter, coming up through the cracks in the sidewalk and surprising us in our lawns, even though we have dug and poisoned and killed them. You can't kill them!

That's the Easter story of Jesus. They brought him up on charges and put him on trial, but he came back. They hung him on the cross and crucified him, but in three days he came back. His Spirit lives and comes to our lives when our lives are cracked like the sidewalk. He comes to us when we're as ordered as our lawns. In one of his poems, J. Barrie Shepherd described Jesus as our "Hope Weed." We use symbols to express our faith. Perhaps we should use the dandelion to symbolize our hope in the risen Lord.

Offering Sentences

You are the Messiah, my Lord, resurrected and alive in my life today! You are Lord of my material wealth, too. I wish to return to your church a just portion for your glory.

Offering

Benediction

Gather, Renaissance women, gather-then scatter to make a joyful difference right here where we live and to the ends of the earth, even to Caesarea Philippi! Scatter in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Footnotes:

¹Winfred E. Garrison and Alfred T. DeGroot, *The Disciples of Christ: A History*. Christian Board of Publication, 1948, p. 365.

²William Thomas Moore, *A Comprehensive History of the Disciples of Christ*. Fleming H. Revell Company, 1909, p. 611.

³Moore, p. 612.

⁴Moore, p. 615.