

DISCIPLES WOMEN
GENERAL PROGRAM

Date: 2015

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Church
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It's a Blessing



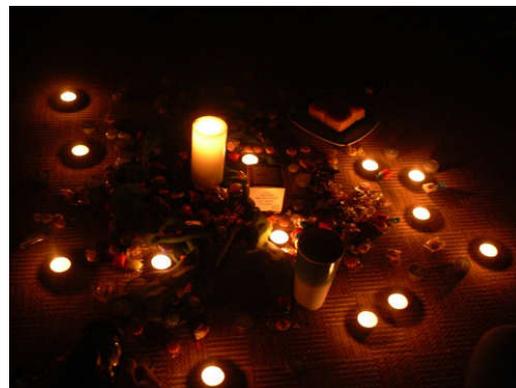
Supplies

A Worship Center with: one large candle (lit at the beginning of the service representing the blessing of the presence of God in our midst), open Bible, a stack of mail (letters, greeting cards, post cards, etc), cell phone (or a landline phone), computer screen (laptop, tablet, Nook, i-Pad, etc), small radio, a newspaper or magazine. Basically items of communication through which we receive news/emails/mail etc. If you have room on the table, a standing cross would add a nice touch. Make the collection attractive with perhaps some flowers and family pictures.

Basket(s) for Blessing Box offerings.

A copy of the worship script for each person (or project it on a screen for all to see).

Enough small candles for each person to have one [you might ask everyone to bring their own candle or, for safety sake, have battery powered votive (or any size) candles for everyone to hold] and light (turn on) at the appropriate time in the service.



1-14 volunteers to read select scriptures from Ecclesiastes as printed on pages 3 and 4 of this guide.

Suggested Music

“Count Your Blessings”, “Make Me A Blessing”, “On Eagles Wings”, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”, “How Firm A Foundation”, “Jesus Loves Me”, “Our God is An Awesome God”, “Day by Day”, and many others. Many of these can be found in The Chalice Hymnal or other hymnals.

If you need musical accompaniment and have a laptop computer, you may Google some of these titles and find them to be played off the internet. You will need to hook up your laptop to speakers and possibly print the lyrics if you wish participants to sing.

These songs are merely suggestions, you may have access to others just as useful. To add inter-generational opportunity, consider enlisting the aid of your younger women/teens to help with this. And, a soloist could do the singing - especially with the Call to Worship.

Order of Worship

Greetings:

(Welcome those in attendance, especially any guests.)

Opening Prayer: *(from The Chalice Hymnal, pages 771-2)*

Gracious God, gentle in your power and strong in your tenderness,
you have brought us forth from the womb of your being
and breathed into us the breath of life.

We know that we do not live by bread alone
but by every word that comes from you.

Feed our deep hungers with the living bread
that you give us in Jesus Christ.

May Jesus' promise, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them," be fulfilled in us. Through the Holy Spirit, make us a joyful company of your people so that with the faithful in every place and time we may praise and honor you, God Most High. Amen.

Litany of Call to Worship: *(from The Chalice Hymnal, # 590 & # 591, a responsive reading with music)*

"For God's Gifts"

O Holy God, open unto me, light for my darkness, courage for my fear, hope for my despair.

Kum ba yah, my Lord, kum ba yah! (first musical phrase)

O loving God, open unto me wisdom for my confusion, forgiveness for my sins, love for my hate.

Kum ba yah, my Lord, kum ba yah! (second musical phrase)

O God of peace, open unto me peace for my turmoil, joy for my sorrow, strength for my weakness.

Kum ba yah, my Lord, kum ba yah! (third musical phrase)

O Generous God, open my heart to receive all your gifts.

O Lord, kum ba jah!

Scripture for today:

Ecclesiastes (*Assign these to 14 volunteers around the group and ask them to stand and read their scripture in turn. If your group is small, have them each read two - such as #1 and #8, #2 and #9, etc. in its turn.*)

The version you are hearing from is The Message Bible, translated by Eugene H. Peterson.

1) **3:9-13** But in the end, does it really make a difference what anyone does? I've had a good look at what God has given us to do - busywork mostly. True, God made everything beautiful in itself and in its time - but he's left us in the dark, so we can never know what God is up to, whether he's coming or going. I've decided that there's nothing better to do than go ahead and have a good time and get the most we can out of life. That's it - eat, drink, and make the most of your job. It's God's gift.

2) **4:9-10** It's better to have a partner than to go it alone. Share the work, share the wealth. And if one falls down, the other helps, but if there's no one to help, tough!

3) **4:12** By yourself you're unprotected. With a friend you can face the worst. Can you round up a third? A three-stranded rope isn't easily snapped.

4) **5:18-20** After looking at the way things are on this earth, here's what I've decided is the best way to live: Take care of yourself, have a good time, and make the most of whatever job you have for as long God gives you life. And that's about it. That's the human lot. Yes, we should make the most of what God gives, both the bounty and the capacity to enjoy it, accepting what's given and delighting in the work. It's God's gift! God deals out joy in the present, the *now*. It's useless to brood over how long we might live.

5) **7:1** A good reputation is better than a fat bank account. Your death date tells more than your birth date.

6) **8:1** There's nothing better than being wise, knowing how to interpret the meaning of life.

Wisdom is light in the eyes, and gives gentleness to words and manners.

7) **10:2** Wise thinking leads to right living; Stupid thinking leads to wrong living.

8) **10:12a** The words of a wise person are gracious.

9) **11:1** Be generous: Invest in acts of charity. Charity yields high returns.

10) **11:2** Don't hoard your goods; spread them around. Be a blessing to others. This could be your last night.

11) **11:7-8** Oh, how sweet the light of day, And how wonderful to live in the sunshine! Even if you live a long time, don't take a single day for granted. Take delight in each light-filled hour, Remembering that there will also be a many dark days And that most of what comes your way is smoke.

12) **12:1-2** Honor and enjoy your Creator while you're still young, before the years take their toll and your vigor wanes, before your vision dims and the world blurs and the winter years keep you close to the fire.

13) **12:11** The words of the wise prod us to live well. They're like nails hammered home, holding life together. They are given by God, the one shepherd.

14) **12:12-13** But regarding anything beyond this, dear friend, go easy. There's no end to the publishing of books, and constant study wears you out so you're no good for anything else. The last and final word is this: Fear God. Do what he tells you.

Meditation:

It's easy to give thanks for the good and wonderful things in our world and our lives - sunshine, children, grandchildren, a loving husband, butterflies, and flowers. But what about the not so great things that happen to us? What about an accident, a financial loss or burden, a forced move to a new home, an injury, an illness or disease, the death of a friend or loved one, a divorce or broken relationship? These are all part of life. And we must persevere through the event somehow.

I think it all comes down to this: our attitude toward life. I believe the Bible can be a source of help and encouragement. It's good to read the Psalms and note how the psalmist

combines the negatives of life and the positives of remembering and relying on God's faithfulness and love. I am always looking for ways to find the blessing in the sorrow - not in a Pollyanna way, but in a real examination of ways God is helping me to grow in faith and understanding and how I can use what I've learned about myself to help others.

Years ago I was asked to do a Blessing Box Offering dedication at one of our Regional Church Women's events. Starting with two hands full of coins I began to tell my life story. It's filled with all those things I just mentioned above. After recounting each one of those life events, a coin was placed in the offering basket as I told how that event had become a blessing to me and my family after the initial trauma of the revelation. It wasn't long before the crowd of 700+ women were cheering and clapping as they were bringing to center stage their Blessing Box Offerings. Some began to get out their coin purses and dig for more small change. When they could find none, paper money and checks were brought or handed down from person to person to the offering basket in front of me.

Several weeks later I received a phone call from a woman who identified herself as a participant at that service and then asked through tears, "Tell me again how having breast cancer was a blessing?" At first I thought she was mocking me but I soon understood that she was seeking help in understanding how to deal positively with her own illness. We talked for awhile and shared a prayer over the phone. The experience prompted me to write an upbeat tongue in cheek letter which I have shared with many of my friends who have experienced the trauma of breast cancer and having to go through chemo-therapy, mastectomies, and radiation treatments. It centered on the freedom and benefits that comes from not having any hair on your body and it has brought smiles to many facing such challenges. Think about it, you'll begin to smile too.

What was it again that the writer of Ecclesiastes said? "Fear God, Do what he tells you!"

Micah 6:8 (from The Message Bible also) puts it this way: "But he's already made it plain how to live, what to do, what God is looking for in men and women. It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love, And don't take yourself too seriously - take God seriously."

And all God's people say, AMEN!

The Offering: *(Some appropriate music may be played or presented during this time.)*

Now it is time to offer your collection of blessings by placing your blessing box contents in the basket. As you do this, consider at least one of the more challenging blessings you've experienced in your life. What positive lesson did you learn from that experience? How could it be a blessing to you and others? While you are thinking about this, light or turn on your candle of blessing and hold it out in front of you for all to see.

Prayer of Blessing: *(From some old hymns)*

Purer in heart, O God, Help me to be;

May I devote my life Wholly to Thee.

Watch Thou my wayward feet,

Guide me with counsel sweet;

Purer in heart, Help me to be.

Father Almighty, bless us with Thy blessing, Answer in love thy children's supplication;
Hear thou our prayer, the spoken and unspoken; Hear us, our Father.

Father of mercy, from thy watch and keeping No place can part, nor hour of time remove
us; Give us thy good, and save us from our evil. Infinite Spirit. Amen.

-#343 & #344 in *Christian Worship: A Hymnal*



The following page is a hand-out that can be shared with your attendees to further explain how their blessings are a blessing to others.

To further promote Blessing Box usage in your area, use this coupon code for \$2 off a purchase of a 10 pack of Blessing Boxes via the online system. COUPON CODE: dw-\$2-off-blessing-boxes. This coupon may be used by anyone making a purchase. Visit DisciplesWomen.org to place your order.



Half of all Blessing Box giving goes to support the mission of the whole church through the Disciples Mission Fund.

But what about the other half that supports Disciples Women's ministries?

The following will give you an idea of the far reaching effects of your over-and-above giving and how your blessings in turn bless others:

- ◆ leadership trainings for regional and constituency representatives;
- ◆ *Just Women* magazine and other study materials;
- ◆ *Wisdom of Women* DVD series and study guides;
- ◆ participation and leadership by IDWM officers and DW staff at women's retreats around the country;
- ◆ support of ethnic constituency groups in development of women-specific ministry and leadership education;
- ◆ funding for women's participation with ecumenical entities such as Bread for the World, Church Women United, UCC/DOC partnership, Faith Trust Institute, and USA World Day of Prayer;
- ◆ development of materials and resources in support of social advocacy at the congregational level; and so much more.

In short, the funds become available for the Disciples Women Executive Committee to disperse, as needed, across all areas of women's ministry.