

WE ARE THE

CHURCH

Week of the Laity Resources
January 24-30, 2016

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Written by Reverend Dr. Beth A. Rupe

General Introduction

When you read the Principles of Identity published in the *Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada 2014 Year Book and Directory*, you will find the following statement, “We affirm the priesthood of all believers, rejoicing in the gifts of the Holy Spirit- which include the gift of leadership – that God has given for the common good” (page 3). This emphasis on the priesthood of all believers is rooted in the Protestant Reformation when Martin Luther stated, “Every Christian is a priest and every Christian woman is a priestess, whether they be young or old, master or servant, mistress or maid, scholar or illiterate. All Christians are, properly speaking, members of the ecclesiastical order, and there is no difference between them except as they hold different offices.” It is a part of the soil in which the Restoration Movement grew. This is seen in Alexander Campbell’s concern over professional ministers who he referred to as “hirelings” and the incremental emergence of the Order of Ministry within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) as a whole. In their book *Disciples: Reclaiming our Identity, Reforming our Practice*, Michael Kinnamon and Jan Linn state, “From the beginning of our movement, lay ministry has never simply been a good idea, but fundamental to what we believe about the Holy Spirit empowering all Christians to do ministry (Acts 2).”¹

Each week in our congregations we live out the understanding that each believer emerges from the waters of baptism as a minister and disciple of Jesus Christ. We do this as elders preside at the Lord’s Table and as deacons, liturgists, musicians and others provide leadership in our weekly worship services. It is seen as greeters provide frontline hospitality and lay leaders provide authoritative interpretation of scripture as they teach in church school classes. This understanding of the role of the laity does not end in worship but extends throughout the life of the church. Clergy and laity are partners in leadership and in ministry. As a people who claim scripture as a primary source of authority, this should not surprise us. The Greek term *laos* always refers to all of God’s people not a specific or elite group within the community. It reflects the reality that down through history much of the work of the church has been done by the laity.

As members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) we seek to embrace and empower all believers as they make their unique contributions to the continuing work of Christ in the world today. Today, more than ever it is essential that we are intentional in lifting up and celebrating the ministry of all members of

the church. In her book *Whole: A Call to Unity in our Fragmented World*, our General Minister and President Sharon Watkins writes, “We represent a God who lives in the world through us and who calls upon us to join in the work of making this world a place where justice reigns, where peace prevails, and where all God’s children are sheltered and fed and cherished. We bring the promise of wholeness into existence by living it already.”ⁱⁱ If this is to be true each congregation must empower each member to claim his or her place and ministry within the body of Christ. If this is to be true we must recognize and respect the gifts that each believer brings to the community and provide opportunities for those individuals to use those gifts in responding to the needs of the world around us.

With this understanding forming a part of the helix of our ecclesiastical DNA, the Week of the Laity is an opportunity to highlight and to celebrate the ministry of all believers of the church. In planning for Laity Sunday, it is important to keep in mind that this day is more than just recruiting people to participate in different roles for leadership in worship. Laity Sunday is a time to celebrate the reality that **We Are the Church**. It is a time to name and proclaim the variety of ways in which your particular manifestation of the church is living out and into its vocation as the church through the lives of its members. It is a time to consider our call to be set apart for the ongoing work of Jesus Christ in the world today. It is also a time for individuals to consider how they might serve more passionately as they use the gifts that they have already identified, as well as consider what new gifts they are being called to develop.

Vocation is the place where our deep gladness meets the world's deep need

Frederick Buechner

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free.

*Jesus
Luke 4: 18*

This resource will provide you with adult study materials worship suggestions for Laity Sunday. While a **Call to Worship** and a **Bidding Prayer** has been provided, feel free to modify these or to use them as templates as individual in your congregation find their own words to celebrate the work of the laity.

May the use of these materials lead to a deeper understanding of each person’s call to servant ministry and to the building up of the body of Christ.

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Bible Study Materials for Small Group Use



WE ARE THE CHURCH

(W)Holy Servants of God

OPENING PRAYER

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Throughout the Bible, we hear of God calling individuals to come along beside God. Abraham and Sarah were called to leave their homelands to travel to a new and foreign land in order to establish a people set aside for God. Moses was called to go back to a threatening land in order to lead God's people to a place of freedom where they could live giving testimony to the power and promise of God. Prophets

were called for the difficult task of pointing the errors of the people's ways and the consequences of their choices as they urged a return to covenantal living. John the Baptist was called to herald the way for the coming Messiah. And, Jesus called men and women to leave what they were doing and to follow him into a new way of living and being. Each time God calls, we hear how God equips the people for the task for which they have been called. This pattern of calling and equipping continues in the church today. Our story is one in which we see God's people doing great

Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy; for I am the Lord your God. Keep my statutes, and observe them; I am the Lord; I sanctify you.... You shall be holy to me; for I the Lord am holy, and I have separated you from the other peoples to be mine.

Leviticus 20: 7 -8, 26

EXPECT GREAT THINGS FROM GOD. ATTEMPT GREAT THINGS FOR GOD.

WILLIAM CAREY

*British missionary
Baptist Minister and Activist*

things as they respond to God's call and as they use the talents that God has given them.

In the First Testament, the children of Israel are called to be holy as God is holy. *Read Leviticus 20: 7 - 8, 26* While Leviticus may seem to many to be a strange and foreign book, filled with obscure

references and strange rituals, it stands at the very heart of the Torah as it contains instructions on a way of life and worship that is divinely spoken by God. It speaks of **how** one comes along beside God.

Leviticus 20 comes to us from what is often referred to as the Holiness Code (chapters 17 – 26). To understand this chapter, one needs to look at it within this context. Chapter 19 outlines what it means for us to be holy as God is holy. Here the people are reminded that as God’s covenant people they have been set apart for holiness. Referring back to chapter 19 we find that holiness is characterized by genuine love for the neighbor and by demonstrating kindness and justice to the stranger. Following up on the understanding of holiness that is outlined in chapter 19, chapter 20 specifies the punishments associated with violations of the holiness code. In this chapter, specifically in verses 7- 8 and 26, the people are instructed to set themselves aside from all that is corrupt in the nations around them and to be a holy people.

In the First Testament, holiness is not innate – only God is holy and God is the source of holiness. Here we read that Israel is called to consecrate themselves to holiness. This does not mean that the people can imitate God’s holiness. They do not become innately holy. Rather, it means that the people are called to live holy lives, lives ordered by the instruction of God. They are consecrated for holiness.

*You are my Lord, because you
have no need of my goodness.
Augustine of Hippo
Confessions*

Questions

1. How do you define holiness? How does being innately holy differ than consecrating yourself for holiness?
2. What does it mean to you to order your life by the instruction of God? Is this the same thing as merely following a set of rules or a code of behavior? Why or why not?
3. Thérèse de Lisieux stated, “Holiness consists simply in doing God’s will, and being just what God wants us to be.” What do you think she means by that? Do you agree or disagree?

NOTE –

While Leviticus contains specific instructions for the priests, it is notable that this call to be set apart – to holiness – is a call for all God’s people.

NOT ALL OF US CAN DO GREAT THINGS. BE WE CAN DO SMALL THINGS WITH GREAT LOVE.

MOTHER TERESA

In the gospels, we are told that that Jesus called his disciples to serve along side him. He invites them to leave their former ways of life and journey with him

as he engages the people humbly and compassionately. He demonstrates what it means to serve and invites them to be servants too. We see the best example of this in **John 1: 1 – 7** when Jesus washes the feet of his disciples and then reminds them that as his followers they are to follow his example. This same invitation to come alongside and to serve with Jesus is the same invitation that we receive today.

Questions for Discussion

1. How do you consider your membership/participation in the church a calling from God? How is it a call to holiness?
2. Share William Carey's quote from the box above. In Mark 10: 35 – 37, we read of James' and John's request to sit at the right and left hand. **Read Mark 10: 35 – 37** the passage. How does Jesus respond? What is the difference between being great, or exercising power over others, and in attempting "great things" for God?
3. Share Mother Teresa's quote. How is this quote different than William Carey's quote? How is this quote similar to William Carey's quote?
4. **Read I Peter 1: 14 – 16** Here the Epistle writer draws on the teaching of Leviticus to describe the calling of Christians. How does holiness relate to servanthood?
5. Thomas Merton in *The Seven Storey Mountain* states, "People have no idea what one saint can do: for sanctity is stronger than the whole of hell." What do you think that he means by that? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
6. How do you come alongside Jesus engaging in ministries of servanthood? How does your congregation define servanthood? How is the congregation engaged in servanthood ministries? What are the obstacles to servanthood ministries?
7. Read the following: *Ministry involves a response to God in daily living. It recognizes the sacred in the mundane and the reality that we live in the now and the not yet of the kingdom of God. Everyone is called to ministry. Everyone is gifted for ministry by God with the talents needed to minister in the capacity to which he or she is called. These gifts work for building, nurturing, and strengthening the community and the world.* What does it mean to respond to God in daily living? How is this relating to holiness and servanthood? What does it mean to live in the now and the not yet of the kingdom of God? How does this relate to holiness and servanthood. How does holiness and servanthood build up the church and strengthen the world?

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."

Mark 10: 35 – 37

CLOSING PRAYER

Worship Resources

Note to the planning team

The word liturgy comes to us from the Greek work *leitourgia* that is formed from the two root words *laos* (work) and *ergas* (work). *Leitourgia* describes acts of public service that are offered to God and that transforms the world. Understood in this way, liturgy is not about personal preference or taste, it is not about style of music or level of formality or informality. Liturgy is about the gathered people of God bringing an offering to God so that they, and ultimately the world in which they live, may be transformed. When we look to the Bible, we find a model for worship that focuses on the formation of a community that is called into partnership for creating and recreating God's purpose for the world. Worship points us to a world that **might be** as we are transformed by God.

Laity Sunday provides us with the opportunity to highlight the connection between worship and the ministries of transformation that we engage in throughout the week. In identifying leadership for this service, take advantage of this opportunity to intentionally make these connections by asking your various ministry leaders to take part in the service. Individuals on the membership team can make announcements and invite worshippers to take part in upcoming events. Outreach Team members can highlight activities as they invite the congregation to contribute time, talent and resources to the weekly offering. Evangelism Team members can give the invitation to discipleship and invite long time members to share their faith with others.

Be creative as you highlight and celebrate the ministries of your congregation. Prepare displays of photos of what you have accomplished over the past year. As you do this, invite members to share what ministries they are engaged in throughout the community. For example does anyone volunteer with the local hospital Befrienders Program or school mentoring program? Has anyone assisted with the local Habitat for Humanity Program or with a prison ministry? Remember that the church is not only present when you organize and plan a program or mission opportunity. The church is present when your members are present, for we are the church! Assist your congregation to make the connection between how they spend their time outside of the building and how this embodies their faith as a part of the body of Christ.

Call to Worship

One Voice: The Spirit of the Lord is upon us
anointing us to share the good news.

**Many Voices: Here I am Lord !
Send Me !**

One Voice: God declares, "I have raised up the righteous
And set forth my covenant with the people."

**Many Voices: As for me and my house, O Lord
We will serve you today and forevermore.**

One Voice: God looks down and declares,
"Here are my servants, whom I have chosen.
In them I take delight."

**Many Voices: Blessed is the one who seeks the Lord
Who lives in the light of God.**

ALTERNATIVE CALL TO WORSHIP

Prior to the worship service have members of your planning team invite members of the congregation to share their places of ministry. You can use a call and response format such as the following or choose your own words of celebration. During the worship service have members stand and from their place within the congregation share the ministries in which they take point. Conclude with an invitation to praise and thank God.

Example:

One Voice – We come today after feeding the hungry at the Men’s Shelter

Many Voices – Alleluia ! We gather to renew ourselves to serve the Lord.

One Voice – We come today after knitting prayer shawls for cancer patients.

Many Voices – Alleluia ! We gather to renew ourselves to serve the Lord.

Keep adding ways in which your members are living out their vocation.

Bidding Prayer

Elder or Deacon – Adonai, you are Lord of our lives and we are your servants. You have uniquely created each of us and called us together so that we may strengthen and support one another in the work of your kingdom. Help us, O LORD to embrace our differences as we live in covenant with you and with one another.

We give thanks for the blessings and challenges of shared ministry. We confess O God that we have not always given freely of our talents. We have waited for others to step up. We have feared that we were not adequate relying on our own understanding rather than trusting in you. Help us, O Lord step out in faith as we seek to give all for the advancement of the kingdom.

Many Voices: LORD, we ask your forgiveness and give thanks for your grace.

Elder or Deacon – El Shadai you are the source of all blessings and the giver of all good things. We thank you for the blessings and the challenges of shared ministry. We pray for our elders. We ask O LORD that you would fill them with your Spirit of Wisdom. Deepen their faith, O LORD and assist them as they seek to discern where you would lead us. Given them confidence in their abilities and humility in their understanding that it is through your grace that they lead.

Time of silent prayer

Many Voices: LORD, we thank you for these men and women and the gifts that they bring. We ask you to fill them with wisdom and guide them by your grace.

Elder or Deacon – Elohim you are the source of our strength and our power, through you all things were created and given into our care. We thank you God for ministries of oversight and care. We pray for our deacons, O LORD, fill them with your Spirit and deepen their faith O LORD. Lead them as they serve within our community.

Time of silent prayer

Many Voices: LORD, thank you for these men and women and the gifts they bring. May we partner with them in seeing that the needs of our community are fulfilled.

Elder or Deacon – Elohay Tehilati, you are worthy of our praise and deserving of our worship for you are holy and just, merciful and loving. We thank you God for the ministries of music and arts within our congregation. We pray for those who enrich our worship with song and creativity. We ask O LORD that you fill them with your Spirit so that they may partner with you in creating that which is beautiful and inspiring.

Time of silent prayer

Many Voices: LORD, thank you for these men and women and the gifts that they bring to you. May we join them in praising you as we look to the world with eyes of wonder and hearts full of awe.

Elder or Deacon – El De'ot, you are the source of knowledge and wisdom you lead us in the paths of righteousness and instruct us in the ways of holiness. We thank you God for the teachers within our congregation. We celebrate their gifts when they are offered formally in classrooms and in meeting spaces and when they are given spontaneously in the teachable moments of life. May we seek to learn from old and young so that our community may be enriched by the presence of all.

Time of silent prayer

Many Voices: LORD, thank you for these men and women, may they continue to grow in wisdom and knowledge, may they deepen in faith as they seek to walk faithfully in your ways.

*Elder or Deacon – Yahweh Yireh, you see us and provide us with all that we need, we thank you calling us together and gifting us with all that we need to minister in your name. We ask O LORD that you would bless each person here today. Help us to value each person and to respect what he or she offers to our community as we grow and serve together as your people. May we grow closer to you and to one another as we grow in love, live in hope and serve with compassion. We thank you LORD for the opportunities that we have to be your hands and feet in the community. We especially thank you for time and talent given when we *insert specific ministries in which your congregation takes part, i.e. serve meals at the Men’s Shelter, bring dinner to the afterschool program, mentor children at our local grade school, drive shut-ins to doctors and to buy groceries, host the neighborhood back to school carnival, etc.**

Time of silent prayer

Many Voices: LORD, thank you for all who are present LORD and the gifts that they bring. May each of us give freely and fully as we devote ourselves to the continued ministry of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Unison – Amen.

Children’s Moment

Scripture Reference – Luke 10: 1 – 20

In planning the Children’s Moment it is important to keep in mind that each child differs developmentally and physically. Therefore as you plan keep in mind who may be present on Sunday morning. Most children do not develop the ability to engage in abstract thinking until early adolescent, generally 10 years or older. Therefore, it is generally a good idea to use concrete and specific examples when you are talking with younger children. Allow time for the children to share their thoughts and validate what they are saying. While it is important to keep your theme in mind, it is also important to listen to what is being said and to incorporate the children’s understandings into your message as possible.

Supplies needed: Bible

Outline for Message - *Being a Helper !*

1. Begin by asking the children to find your Bible. When they have brought the Bible to you, ask one of the older children to help you find the book of Luke in your Bible.
2. Thank the children for being “helpers.” Talk about how there are many helpers in the church. Identify how different helpers have different skills and abilities, i.e. the older child’s ability to read helped them to find the book of Luke in the Bible. Talk about how these differences allow us to accomplish different tasks within the church. Ask them to identify some of the helpers.
3. Introduce the Bible story to the children.
4. Talk about how Jesus called individuals to be helpers during his earthly ministry. Talk about how Jesus continues to call us to be helpers.
5. Conclude by introducing the term “laity” and by stating that today is Laity Sunday. Talk about how Laity Sunday provides us with an opportunity to identify and celebrate how we can all be God’s helpers in sharing in Jesus’s ministry. Identify opportunities for the children to be helpers in the community. Conclude by stating that everyone within the church is called to be a helper.

Sermon Resource

Scripture Focus: Luke 10: 1 – 20

Sermon Title – Kingdom Envoys

Theme of Sermon – As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are commissioned and sent to prepare the way for Jesus as we proclaim the good news of the kingdom through table fellowship and acts of compassion and wholeness.

Suggested Structure for the Sermon

SERMON IDEA

Consider shaping your morning message around a series of testimonies in which members share how they have shared the good news of Jesus Christ in your community.

The sermon on Laity Sunday can be given in several ways. You may choose to have the pastor or a member of the congregation preach. You may choose to invite several individuals to give testimonies about how they have been commissioned by Jesus and sent into the community to proclaim the hope of the kingdom. Remember this is not merely about people trying out different roles, it is about celebrating the priesthood of all believers and the understanding

that everyone has a ministry to which he or she is called as you lift up how your community is living into that reality.

The Luke passage provides an opportunity to reflect upon Jesus's commissioning of seventy disciples. It addresses the growing mission and the engagement of Jesus' followers in his ministry. The narrative speaks to the urgency of our mission, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few." It helps us define our mission as individuals sent as envoys of the kingdom of God. We go out as citizens of the kingdom to do the work of the kingdom in preparation for the return of Jesus and the fulfillment of the kingdom. It provides us with guidelines in how to engage with those who we encounters as we are sent out.

A possible way to structure the sermon would be to have one person set the context for the scripture. This person would identify how the commissioning of the seventy takes place as Jesus faces the power of empire, with his face set on Jerusalem, and in the midst of setbacks and seeming resistance to his message. Draw parallels to the setting in which you are doing ministry. How do you face the power of empire? How is resistance present in your setting?

Next, have that person or another person define the urgency of the mission and the nature of our commission. What makes the good news of Jesus urgent today? This might be an opportunity to talk about the growing number of unchurched and "nones" in our country today.

Then, have members of the congregation identify how they serve as envoys by highlighting the ministries of the congregation in which they take part. Define envoy – as a citizen of one country sent to another on a special mission. We are envoys Christ's kingdom sent to prepare the way for Christ's coming. You can then go on to address the following questions. How are they breaking down social barriers in their ministries? How are they creating table fellowship? How are they meeting physical needs and proclaiming the good news that the kingdom is near?

Finally, the sermon can conclude by lifting up Jesus' awareness that the seventy would not always succeed. Challenge the congregation that our success is not determined by others' response but in our hope that kingdom of God has drawn near and our faithfulness as we continue to go into the harvest fields.

Suggestions for Communion

Note for Worship Planners

The Week of the Laity provides the congregation with an opportunity to fully express its understanding of the priesthood of all believers. Ordained Disciple pastor and educator, Keith Watkins in his book *The Great Thanksgiving* states that the service of the Table consists of four actions, offertory, thanksgiving prayer, breaking of bread and communion.ⁱⁱⁱ The offering has two parts, the setting of the

table and the offering of gifts brought by the people. The first of these acts the setting the table for the meal that can be done very simply or with great formality. However you decide to prepare the table for Laity Sunday, today is a day to lift up the action of offering as a part of the service of Table. You can do this by physically setting the Table by having the elements for communion brought in and placed on the Table during the communion hymn or you can do this by focusing your communion meditation/ invitation on the act of offering and those who invest their time and efforts in assuring that the table is set and ready for worship. As Watkins states the preparation of the table symbolizes the congregation's presentation of "heart and mind, possessions' to God in thanksgiving for all that God has given them."^{iv} Encourage your congregation to consider the intertwining of God's gift of love and our offering in response to this great love.

If you choose to set the Table during the service, you might choose to sing as elements are brought forward. *We Place Upon Your Table, Lord* CH #417

Benediction

And now let us go and be the good in God's world.

Music Suggestions

Chalice Hymnal

Processional of Opening Hymn *Ours the Journey* – 458

Here, O Lord, Your Servants Gather – 278

Renew Your Church – 463

Communion Hymn *Take Our Bread* - 413

Discipleship Hymn *I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me* – 614

Take My Gifts – 318

Called as Partners in Christ's Service – 453

Lord, You Give the Great Commission – 459

Chalice Praise

Opening Song - *Shout the North* – 40

Lord, Be Glorified – 42

We Fall Down – 67

Discipleship Song – *From this Very Place* – 175

Live for Jesus – 177

Contemporary Music

If We are the Body

Lifesong – Casting Crown

God of the City

Until the Whole World Hears

ⁱ Michael Kinnamon and Jan Linn, *Disciples – Reclaiming Our Identity, Reforming our Practice* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2009) Kindle Electronic Edition Location 1193 of 1550.

ⁱⁱ Sharon Watkins, *Whole: A Call to Unity in Our Fragmented World* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2014) Kindle Electronic Edition Location 1690 of 2465,

ⁱⁱⁱ Keith Watkins, *The Great Thanksgiving: The Eucharistic Norm of Christian Worship* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1995), 114.

^{iv} K. Watkins, 115.



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PO Box 1986

Indianapolis, IN 46206-1986

www.discipleshomeemission.org

Contact information:

Min. Sheila Spencer

Director of Christian Education and Faith Formation

Assistant to the President, Disciples Home Missions

E-mail: sspencer@dhm.disciples.org

Office phone: (317) 713-2634

Wilma Shuffitt

Ministry Associate, Disciples Home Missions

E-mail: wshuffitt@dhm.disciples.org

Office phone: (317) 713-2639