

PLANTING THE PROMISE: FROM PROMISE TO PENTECOST



Worship Series and Curriculum



Sponsored by GroupLife Ministry and
Bold Service & Social Justice Practice Committee
Los Altos United Methodist Church

PLANTING THE PROMISE - INTRODUCTION

Each fall since 2013, Los Altos United Methodist Church engages in Compassion Weekend/Week – a time we devote to performing service and social justice for others in our community and the world. But we have the opportunity to help others and grow spiritually year-round. We draw inspiration from Jesus: “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me” (Matthew 25:35-44). Bold Service & Social Justice is one of our five key discipleship practices, meaning we intentionally strive to carry out this idea throughout our lives, not just for one week in the fall.

When we show compassion by serving others, we “plant seeds”: we hope to make a difference in their lives, we share God’s love with them, which can nurture them on their journey, we form relationships as Jesus modeled, and we grow in our own faith. Sometimes we have the opportunity to keep watering and fertilizing those seeds; sometimes others will come after us and continue the gardening. Those seeds can blossom into hope and a better world. That is touching heaven and changing earth with head, heart, and hands.

During this experience, your group will do four things:

- 1) Use your HEAD – discuss why we serve, ways to serve, and how that relates to discipleship.
- 2) Use your HEART – explore areas of need about which you (or your group) are passionate, and discern which project(s) you would like to pursue.
- 3) Use your HANDS – go and do your service project together.
- 4) SHARE – review your experience as a group and share it so others can benefit.

Thank you for your participation. On behalf of the GroupLife Team and the Bold Service & Social Justice Practice Committee, we wish you a blessed growing experience and look forward to hearing your stories.

Kim Jones, chairperson, GroupLife Team

Jan McDaniel and Leslie Carmichael, co-chairs, Bold Service & Social Justice

SESSION 1: PLANTING



Getting to know the group

Share a personal story about gardening/gardens.

Opening prayer

Dear God, thank you for beautiful gardens, for flowers, trees, fruit, vegetables. Thank you for the opportunity to come together and plant seeds to make the world better and to enrich our relationship with you and each other. Guide our time together, Amen.

Scripture verses

“Serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: Love your neighbor as yourself.” – Galatians 5:13-1

“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” – Matthew 25:40

Video

Watch the Compassion Week 2014 video: <http://bit.ly/CWvideo2014>

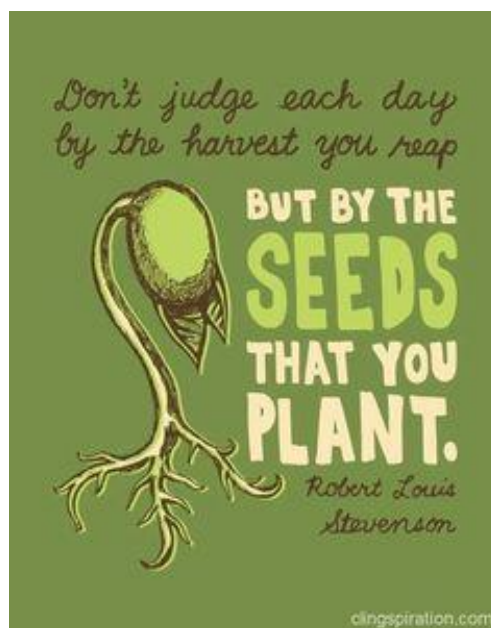
Discussion questions

1. What does bold service mean? What does social justice mean? Why is Bold Service & Social Justice one of our five practices of discipleship?

2. Is there a difference between Christian and secular community service and social justice? If so, what is the difference and why is it important?
3. What excites you about doing a project together as a group? What makes you less enthusiastic about this idea? What are you hoping for through this experience? How do you think your group would benefit from experiencing service together?
4. Spend some time as a group brainstorming ideas about service opportunities. Consider using a white board or flip chart so all can see. These questions may trigger your ideas:
 - a. What social issues/problems concern you the most?
 - b. Whom do you know that is struggling and needs help?
 - c. What service experiences have you had in the past that were valuable?
 - d. What nonprofits/organizations do you know of or have experience with?
 - e. What gifts/talents/skills/resources do you have that you could offer to others in service?
5. Discuss the options you have mentioned and try to narrow it down to 3–5 possibilities for categories or projects. Make a plan to explore these options further between now and your next group session. Everyone can take a role to find out more information. Remember it is important to be in prayer for wisdom and direction. *(See the FAQ page at the end of this document for additional helpful information.)*

Closing prayer

God, thank you for providing us with so many rich blessings. Guide us to know where to share those blessings and plant seeds. Help us determine how we can best serve as a group, in order that we may love others and grow closer to you and each other. Use us to bring justice, compassion, and mercy to those who need it. Amen.



SESSION 2: WATERING



Getting to know the group

When have you experienced an act of compassion or participated in an act of compassion that impacted your life? Share the circumstances, how you felt, and the outcome.

Scripture verses

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” – Galatians 5:23

“God gives seed to farmers and provides everyone with food. He will increase what you have, so that you can give even more to those in need. You will be blessed in every way, and you will be able to keep on being generous.” – 2 Corinthians 9:10-11, CEV

Opening prayer

Let the rain come and wash away the ancient grudges,
 The bitter hatreds held and nurtured over generations.
Let the rain wash away the memory of hurt, the neglect.
 Then let the sun come out and fill the sky with rainbows.
Let the warmth of the sun heal us wherever we are broken.
 Let it burn away the fog so that we can see each other clearly.
So that we can see beyond labels, beyond accents
 Beyond gender, beyond skin color.
Let the warmth and brightness of the sun melt our selfishness.
 So that we can share the joys and feel the sorrows of our neighbors.
And let the light of the sun be so strong
 That we will see all people as our neighbors.
Let the earth, nourished by rain, bring forth flowers

To surround us with beauty.
And let the mountains teach our hearts to reach upward to heaven.

Amen (by Rabbi Harold S. Kushner)

Discussion

Before your group discusses the list of projects and research together, reflect on this:

In the chapter “Compassion” in Father Gregory Boyle’s book *Tattoos on the Heart*, Father Boyle states, “Scripture scholars contend that the original language of the Beatitudes should not be rendered as ‘Blessed are the single-hearted’ or ‘Blessed are the peacemakers’ or ‘Blessed are those who struggle for justice.’ Greater precision in translation would say ‘You are in the right place if—you are single-hearted or work for peace.’ The Beatitudes is not a spirituality, after all. It’s a geography. It tells us where to stand. Compassion isn’t just about feeling the pain of others; it’s about bringing them in toward yourself. If we love what God loves, then in compassion, margins get erased. ‘Be compassionate as God is compassionate’ means the dismantling of barriers that exclude.”

Discuss why “compassion” is being used to describe our week of service scheduled in October and how this interpretation of compassion might help inform your group’s decision on which worthwhile project to serve.

Now it’s time for each person to share updates on potential service opportunities for your group.

Decide whom you will serve, how, and when.

Keep in mind that group members may have differing levels of passion for the ideas you come up with. Please be flexible and focus on choosing the best opportunity for the entire group based on interest, skills, logistics, and of course God’s leading.

Write down your plans here:

Closing prayer

Dear Lord, You are wonderful in everything you do.
In marvelous ways You take the full, rich life of the plant and carefully fold it into tiny seeds.
You form the seeds according to many different shapes and sizes and colors.
When they are placed the earth they may look dry and dead,
But when they are watered by the life-giving rain and nourished by the warm sun,
they lose all their lifeless look and grow in an almost miraculous manner.
By the power You gave them, they take the dead minerals of the earth and build nourishment
and beauty that we need to sustain life.

Soon, dear Lord,
we will plant these seeds of love and compassion that You have given us.
Bless them, and watch over them, and bring them to the full growth and rich harvest.
Make the seeds of grace that You have given us grow to flower and fruit
in the full Christian life that You intend for us. Amen.



SESSION 3: GROWING



Go and serve with God's love!

Scripture verse

"If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ." - 1 Peter 4:11

Opening prayer

Dear God,

Thank you for this opportunity to plant seeds for your kingdom. Guide us and those we are serving today. Be with us and strengthen us. May everyone be safe and experience your power and love in a new way. Amen.

Closing prayer at the completion of the project time

Dear God,

We are grateful we could plant seeds of compassion, mercy, and justice today. We pray for continued water, soil, and sun to nourish these seeds. Enable us and others to continue planting and nourishing. May those folks we served today realize new hope and peace. Nudge us to continue praying for them and these seeds as they become plants. Stir in us a desire to continue serving as you have called us to do. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Discussion

At the completion of the project, plan a time to get together and share about it – that could be immediately afterward or at a future designated time. Here are some questions to consider as you share, discuss, and debrief:

1. What did you enjoy most about doing the service project?
2. What was the most challenging element of the project?
3. What surprised you most about participating in the project?
4. How did you/your group benefit from doing the project?
5. What was the outcome of the project on those you served? How could that have been improved, or how could the outcome be extended further?
6. If others consider doing a project like this, what would you recommend?
7. Is there an opportunity for your group to continue a relationship with the people or organization you served? What might that look like? Would you like to continue serving this organization during Compassion Week?
8. How did this project enhance your understanding of how service/social justice is a key part of discipleship?

Please share a short description of your project and your experience with the rest of our community. You may email it to grouplife@laumc.org. Thank you!



GROUPLIFE SERVICE CURRICULUM FAQ'S

1. Why should my GroupLife group engage in service?

Los Altos United Methodist Church (LAUMC) is a church dedicated to helping everyone understand the value of becoming a deeply committed follower of Christ. Through the engagement of head, heart, and hands, LAUMC offers different worship opportunities to realize this goal. The act of Bold Service and Social Justice was at the heart of Jesus's ministry. We learn from scripture that God is compassionate, loving, and kind. Compassion and kindness are not emotions but a way of life, and service is a wonderful expression of worship.

2. How should our GroupLife community decide on a service project?

Many groups discuss the type of activity they want to engage in and also the amount of time they want to invest. As you spend time in your group discerning where you would like to serve, consider the issues in which you are most interested. Are you interested in addressing hunger and food shortages in the immediate area? Do you want to do something for the environment? Are you interested in advocacy versus hands-on service? Is addressing homelessness a priority? Would your group enjoy a more physical or "hands-on" service project?

3. What if our GroupLife group can't decide?

Many groups choose a project based on the time they have available and the day or evening that works best for their group. If, for instance, your group meets on a weekday evening and that is the best time for the group to convene, then look for projects that can be done on a weeknight. If your group meets on Wednesday evenings, then you might choose to serve a meal at City Team ministries or sort food at the Second Harvest Food Bank, because they need support during the week. Some groups enjoy doing a Saturday morning activity and then adding a social component to the project. One small group volunteered to do a beach clean-up and then had a picnic with their families on the beach. Another spent the morning at the Haight Asbury Food Pantry and then all went to lunch in San Francisco.

4. Does it cost money to participate in a service project?

Most service opportunities require your participation and not your money, however this will depend on what your group wants to do. If you want to volunteer to pack meals for Stop Hunger Now at its warehouse, the organization may ask for a donation to cover the costs of the meal packages (27 cents feeds a family of four). Or you might decide that you would like to package kits for United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) to

help with disaster relief efforts. Purchasing the supplies for the kits would be a necessary component of this project.

5. How do we connect with the agency/organization that we have selected?

The best way is to go directly to the agency's website and look for volunteer opportunities. Typically you will be directed to a name and number of a volunteer coordinator, or you might be able to do everything online. You can split up the work and have each person in the group do a little research and come back with a recommendation and a suggested plan for the event. If you are selecting an opportunity with Hope's Corner like serving Saturday morning breakfast or doing Friday afternoon food prep, you can go directly to the volunteer calendar and sign up: http://hopes-corner.force.com/GW_Volunteers_JobCalendar

6. Can my children participate in the service project?

There are many agencies and organizations that allow children to be involved and some that have age restrictions due to insurance or because the projects are not appropriate for children. For instance, Habitat for Humanity requires that volunteers are 18+ for construction projects that use certain tools (typically outside work), but once the home has progressed and the work involves painting, landscaping, cleaning, and minor carpentry, they allow much younger children. Again, the website of each organization is the best place to find out this information.

7. Do we need to keep this service activity to just our GroupLife group or can we invite others to participate?

This can be an excellent opportunity to introduce and invite other LAUMC members to your group or even your neighbors and friends. Again, this depends on the intention of your group and what they want to accomplish with this activity.

8. Why should our group sign up for a service project now? Why not just wait for Compassion Week in October?

We believe that bold service and social justice should be an integral part of your spiritual practice, and what better way to serve than with your small group! Service should not be a once-a-year activity, but if waiting until Compassion Week (October 5–11, 2015) best serves the needs of your group, that's fine. You could also try an activity to help discern what your group would like to do for a Compassion Week activity. We hope that your group finds serving out in the community a wonderful way to experience God's love and to share fellowship with those you have been in study with for a while. In addition, many organizations need volunteers in the summer, when the needs are great but their regular volunteers go on vacation. This could be a great warm-up activity before Compassion Week 2015.

9. Can you suggest some activities that our group might be interested in?

There are many opportunities in our immediate area, but here is a **partial** list to get your creative juices flowing:

Hunger

Second Harvest Food Bank
Glide Memorial United Methodist Church
City Team Ministries
Hope's Corner
Community Services Agency
Salinas First United Methodist Church
Sacred Heart Community Services

Emergency Relief

UMCOR relief kits
San Jose Family Shelter
House of Grace

Homelessness

Bill Wilson Center
Project We Hope
City Team Ministries
Salinas First United Methodist Church
San Jose Family Supportive Housing

Environment

Full Circle Farm
Hidden Villa
San Jose Parks Foundation
Various beach and creek clean-ups

Housing

Habitat for Humanity
LAUMC Tool Trailer activities

Education

Castro Elementary School
Graham Middle School
Escuela Popular

Social Justice (opportunities to participate in LAUMC task force initiatives)

Human trafficking

Fair wages

Gun violence prevention

Immigration reform

Links to many of these organizations are provided on the Los Altos United Methodist Church website: <https://laumc.org/serve/community/>

10. Is there someone at LAUMC that we can connect with to give us guidance?

Jan McDaniel (janmcdaniel2@yahoo.com) can provide insight and advice if needed.

11. What if our group wants to get involved in helping with Compassion Week 2015?

The goal of Compassion Week 2015 is to get everyone at LAUMC involved in worship through service. If you or your group want to participate in helping to plan the week of service, contact Jan McDaniel to learn how you can help make a difference. If your group would like to suggest a project that you want to do during the week, also connect with Jan so she can ensure your efforts are included in the Compassion Week festivities.