The all-new United Women in Faith Circles Program Resource shows how we can answer our calling today as women of passion committed to helping women, children, and youth.

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The programs are grounded in Mark 8:27–30 as an invitation to reclaim and explore our identity as children of God and as a community of women of faith. Through the lens of this passage, we will use one of four guiding questions to focus our study in each quarter of the year:

- Who do you say that I am?
- Who am I that I should go ________________?
- Who are we through Christ?
- Are we our siblings’ keepers?

Monthly Bible studies, reflections, program activities, as well as weekly activities to do on your own between each program session will help guide us through this year as we look at who we are in Christ and what that means for how we live in community as United Women in Faith members called to action in local and global communities.

Again, this year you will have an opportunity to experience this resource in an online platform via Mighty Networks. Come and participate in local programs to grow your faith, participate in action, and connect with sisters!
Mosaic of Faith
We Are All Part of God’s Story

Ilka Vega

United Women in Faith
Circles Program Resource
2022–2023
United Women in Faith

Mission

United Women in Faith seeks to connect and nurture women through Christian spiritual formation, leadership development, creative fellowship, and education so that they can inspire, influence, and impact local and global communities.

Vision

Turning faith, hope, and love into action on behalf of women, children, and youth around the world.

Purpose

To be a community of women whose purpose is to know God and to experience freedom as whole persons through Jesus Christ; to develop a creative, supportive fellowship; and to expand concepts of mission through participation in the global ministries of the church.
Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say that I am?”
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Introduction

The purpose of this Program Resource is to rebuild stronger relationships with ourselves, God, our loved ones, and our beloved communities. From the beginning, members of United Women in Faith, formerly United Methodist Women, have come together to take action and be in solidarity with those in need—those at the margins.

We live in times of change and diverse challenges that have fractured many of our relationships with our family members and loved ones, with institutions that we are supposed to trust, perhaps even with our own bodies.

These programs seek to highlight our interconnectedness as children of God, each with a unique gift, each beloved, each an essential part of the body of Christ. The visual of a mosaic exemplifies that interconnectedness and our role in supporting one another as a faith community and as part of all of God's big story.

Reclaiming Our Identity

The programs will center around Mark 8:27–30 as an invitation to reclaim and explore our identity as children of God and as a community of women of faith. Throughout the programs, we will share stories of faith, justice, and sisterhood to inspire and support our learning journey in community.

Jesus’ question in this passage, “Who do you say that I am?” is an invitation to dig deep and reflect on how as people of faith—as people of the Messiah—we have a calling to take a stand for justice and liberation in this world.

Just as Jesus challenges his disciples with these important questions, we must ask ourselves difficult questions and wrestle together to answer to God’s call. We must look to change our ways and bring the good news to people living in the margins. In this same spirit, we will focus on four main questions in this program year, focusing on one each quarter. The questions will encourage participants to critically engage with Scripture and offer their own answers and questions.

We understand community as mutual accountability and as something that must be built and rebuilt when necessary. In our work of building and rebuilding community, we get to do the work of justice. We must unlearn unhelpful practices and seek to dismantle oppressive systems that deprive people of God’s love. To do this, we also work intersectionality towards the liberation of all of God’s children, acknowledging the unique way in which the divine is present. Isaiah 66:13 reminds us that God’s love is like a mother’s love. It is through such love that our efforts of love in action and justice must follow. To strengthen our language for resistance and liberation, the programs will refer to God using the pronouns she/her. You are also welcome to use neutral pronouns or Godself in the application of these programs.
Soul-Care

As we embark on God’s work of love and liberation and community building, we must ground ourselves in God’s work and actively practice soul-care practices that serve our spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental health needs. Understanding ourselves and our soul-care practices in a holistic manner helps us find sustainable ways to better care for ourselves and serve and love those around us. Through engaging in soul-care, we also invite the divine to be more present in our daily routines. Similar to other United Women in Faith programming, our approach to soul-care embraces both self-care and spiritual rejuvenation.

This Program Resource incorporates key values of the United Women in Faith sisterhood through intentional inclusivity and multi-generational sharing as well as a justice-oriented approach to strive to be in continual renewal of our commitment to justice and God’s people through intersectional, transformative, and anti-racist learning, unlearning, and action.

HOW TO USE THE PROGRAM RESOURCE

This Program Resource consists of 12 monthly sessions divided into quarterly themes. Each quarter invites us to explore questions of faith, identity, and relationships. In each, we will explore Scripture and activities to put our faith into action.

Each program is structured to check in with participants, engage with Scripture in creative ways, and encourage meaning-making and discussion. Program facilitators are encouraged to read each program in advance as preparation for the session and prepare available materials. We also encourage different people to alternate as facilitators to give everyone a chance to share their leadership and stewardship gifts.

The sessions are between 40 and 60 minutes and generally follow the outline segments below:

• Welcome and Intention Setting
• Living Scripture
• Unpacking
• Hands-On Activity
• Closing and Taking Home

Each session also will include a first-person video story. At the end of each session activities are suggested to be carried out throughout the month. These activities are thematically divided to intentionally focus on spiritual growth, soul-care, community building, and justice seeking. We suggest assigning one theme of activities per week and to ask one group member to be responsible to share the resources and activity reminders each week. It can be one person per month to share the reminders or one person per week.

Pledge service and A Call to Prayer and Self-Denial service are included after the monthly programs.
PROGRAM SETUP AND SUPPLIES

Participants and program facilitators can make use of different safe spaces where they feel comfortable engaging with the activities and conversation. As part of the setup we recommend sitting in circles to encourage equal participation. Meetings will preferably take place in quiet environments. This could be a room in your local church or community center, someone’s home, or another space that is accessible to participants where people feel welcomed. Keep in mind that some sessions will require the use of screens for playing videos as well as tables for different activities and crafts.

Materials for every program:

- Internet connection
- Projector/screen for playing videos
- Extra Bibles
- Any needed printouts
- Scissors
- Pens
- White paper
- Calming sensory items such as images of nature, relaxing background sounds, soft fabrics or textures

Participants should bring to every program:

- Notebook/journal for notetaking, recording their thoughts, etc.
- Bible
- Pen/pencil

ONLINE ADAPTATIONS

When it’s necessary to meet online for a program or to offer a hybrid option, we recommend using a space with access to a computer, screen or projector, speakers, and a microphone, if possible. Zoom or other free software can be used for virtual meetings for the programs. When small groups are suggested, virtual participants can be split into breakout rooms to facilitate sharing. Where Zoom or video call software may not be accessible for participants, facilitators can discuss offering a phone number to connect to the virtual meeting. A list of needed supplies may also be shared prior to each session so participants can gather them in advance as well as any links for media and additional resources.

As part of creating safe spaces, we encourage checking in at the beginning of each session through the suggested activities. However, there may also be other ways that the group prefers. We want to encourage these programs to be a place where people can share from their own worldviews and ask questions with the knowledge that we are all a work in progress, a mosaic of faith in the need of each other to take shape.

Note: For a digital version of the Program Resource go to uwfaith.mn.co and purchase it right from there. If you are already on MN you can go to the Resources section in Mighty Networks to purchase it.
Outline of the Programs

Each quarter will focus on a different question as we explore our identity as children of God.

First Quarter | Fall 2022: Who do you say that I am?
- September: Who Do You Say That I Am?
- October: God Is Not Neutral Towards Injustice
- November: World Thank Offering: Life-Giving Creation and Transformation

Second Quarter | Winter 2022-2023: Who am I that I should go__________?
- December: Answering the Call
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Rebuilding community through the work of justice and liberation
- June: Faith in Action Dismantles Oppressive Structures
- July: Healing Together
- August: Working in Community Towards Liberation
About the Author

ILKA VEGA

Originally from Ciudad, Juárez, Mexico, and El Paso, Texas, borderlands, Ilka Vega holds a B.A. in Sustainability, Culture, and Social Justice and is currently finishing a master of science in Innovation, Human Development, and Sustainability at the University of Geneva. Vega has worked for more than 10 years with NGOs in the United States, Mexico, and Switzerland in the areas of immigration, racial justice, and climate-action capacity building. Vega began her advocacy and community organizing efforts with United Methodist Women while still in high school at Lydia Patterson Institute in El Paso. She currently serves in United Women in Faith’s Charter for Racial Justice. Vega is passionate about music, intersectionality, and the intersections of faith and social and environmental justice.

Personal Message

I’m so grateful for the legacy of United Methodist Women and all the bold and inspiring women that have mentored me since my high school years at Lydia Patterson Institute and nurtured in me the love and language of social and environmental justice. To the many women in this journey that always invited me and challenged me to be better, I want to invite you and challenge you to continue growing our spirituality and work of justice together in this new chapter as United Women in Faith. Our community of faith is a unique intergenerational space of women who love God, themselves, and their communities. It is out of love that we seek justice and strive to build a beloved community where the love of God can be manifested to all her children and creation. Unlearning, relearning, and putting our faith into action is not always easy, but through God’s grace and with a committed sisterhood in Christ may we seek to do God’s work of love, justice, and liberation. Special thanks to Praveena Balasundaram and the reviewing team for all their work and support and to my mom, Miriam Vega, and grandmother, Susana Vega, for all their love and spiritual guidance. Thank you again for your love and for being my family in Christ.
November 2022

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- First Sunday of Advent
- All Saints Day
- National Native American Heritage Month
- Thanksgiving Day
- The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence and Human Rights (Nov. 25–Dec. 10)
INTENTION SETTING  |  15 MINUTES

Welcome, sisters in Christ. We come together today to continue growing in our faith journeys. We will welcome one another by sharing for a couple of minutes in pairs about moments of epiphany, creativity, or transformation that have marked us over our lifetimes. These can be insights we might have gotten from loved ones or mentors, something we felt proud of creating that has become part of our identity, or a moment where we decided to turn our lives around or simply start or quit a habit for our benefit. Let's share about the people we were with and what was life-giving about those experiences. Please take about five minutes per person and then we will regroup to share some of these experiences together. A notice will be given when it is time for another person to share.

Allow five minutes for one person to share and then signal for the partners to change roles.

As we regroup, let’s be sure to say our names before we speak (especially if anyone new is here today). We will begin by sharing about the emotions that these transformative moments produced in us as well as a couple of sentences about when this happened and the change it produced in us.
To make tangible the spirit of transformation we will write down on a mind map the emotions that came about through this transformation. We can use the provided “transformation” image as the canvas for our mind maps. There's no wrong answer, joy and happiness is as acceptable as the fear or the anxiety that we might have felt at some points during the transformation. What is important is that we see these changes as life-giving. On another piece of paper, write the reason why it was life-giving to you. We'll share these thoughts later in the month to remind ourselves of these moments.

**PROGRAM SUMMARY**

As we dive into the topic of the session, life-giving creation and transformation, we'll look across different passages from the Bible. We will start with God breathing and speaking creation into existence, and how this models the internal and external wrestling as well as the transformation that happens after gaining a new understanding.

> Powerful moments of transformation often come not only with new insights and opportunities, but also challenges.

Sometimes they occur in high places and in moments of crisis. Some of the challenges we may face could include breaking away from habits or things we connect with our identities. While transformation or change can sometimes scare us, it's important to remember that they are part of life, and very much needed to give us hope and keep us accountable to the needs of our physical and spiritual lives, our communities, and the world.

Creation is in constant transformation That includes us as we go through the cycle of life interconnected with one another. Life-giving transformation is needed for growth and healing in our bodies, minds, spirits, and in all of nature, but it does require a healthy environment and good stewardship.

This month we celebrate World Thank Offering where we bring our gifts of gratitude for the transformation of local and global communities by raising money for women, children, and youth in our neighborhoods and around the world.
Memory Scripture

For this session we’ll play a game of memory with Scripture. On one card is a summary of the Bible verse and the matching card has the reference for where it is found.

We’ll shuffle the cards and turn them facedown. As we go around, each person will choose two cards to flip over. If they are a match, they get to remain faceup, otherwise they will be turned back over again. Read the full passage aloud when you get a matching pair. Others will continue playing to find their Scripture quote and passage pair.

You can take a photo of your Scripture quote to share and use later during the monthly activities or write it down on a piece of paper to take home.

An online option would be to add each of these cards manually to an online platform such as interacty.me and make your own memory game online.

UNPACKING | 10 MINUTES

Let’s discuss the following questions together:

- What are the turning points in these passages?
- What stands out as life-giving to us?
- What do we leave behind from our old selves, what remains?
- What do we accept and nurture, what do we let go of?
- What different types of transformations do we see in the passages and how do they relate to our lives and the transformations needed in today’s world?

HANDS-ON MASTERPIECES | 10 MINUTES

In the spirit of renewal and transformation, we can put our creativity to work and repurpose and upcycle many items we have at home so that instead of becoming waste in our homes they are given a new life and role as art or useful items.

Gather the supplies and materials to upcycle that everyone brought, and offer to participants any extra supplies they may need.
Option 1: Hanging Planter

To make a hanging planter, trim off the top of a plastic bottle. Clean the bottle with soap and water, drying the bottle once it’s clean. Then, paint the bottle freeform or use tape to create lines and angles to paint over or write words like “Grateful” or “Thankful” on the bottle. When the paint is dry, take the jute rope and cut six two-foot segments for a small container or eight two-foot segments for a large container. Using the step-by-step photos as a guide, make a knot that attaches all the segments at one end. Turn the container upside down and place the end knot on top of it. Then, divide the segments into pairs and make another knot with each pair. Afterward, make another knot connecting another two segments coming from different knots made previously. Continue until the container is sufficiently covered. Then connect all the segments again at the end, leaving the container in the middle. When the project is completed participants can add soil and plants to the planter at home.

1. Trim off the top of a plastic bottle. Clean and dry the bottle.

![Diagram of step 1]

2. Knot the six or eight two-foot segments.

![Diagram of step 2]

3. Divide segments in pairs and make another knot with each pair.

![Diagram of step 3]

4. Make another knot connecting another two segments.

![Diagram of step 4]

5. Continue until the container is sufficiently covered.

![Diagram of step 5]

6. Place dirt directly in your planter and plant some seeds. Or place a potted plant inside the planter.

![Diagram of step 6]
Option 2: Vase
To start, cut the top off of a plastic bottle. Clean the bottle with soap and water. When the bottle is dry, with a hot glue gun, glue the end of the jute yarn to the bottom of the bottle. A tip to do this is to create a small circle by rolling the yarn around itself in one direction and gluing it to a small piece of paper the size of a coin. Then glue that piece of paper to the bottom of the bottle, jute side out, and continue coiling and gluing the yarn around the bottle and applying glue in two to three sections around the bottle so that it glues with every turn. It takes about two to three feet of yarn to cover the bottle, but add more if needed. You can use the vase for decoration or to hold gratitude notes.
PUTTING OUR FAITH INTO ACTION

Write your Scripture quote on a piece of paper and place it somewhere visible in your home as a reminder.

Search online for “Tu Sei Sorgente Viva” and listen to a recording from the Taizé Community to reconnect with God, source of life and love.

Search online for “Todo Cambia” by Mercedes Sosa and listen to the song as you reflect on this month’s program.

Continue upcycling articles at home into art and useful items.

Collect and share life-giving stories of transformation with friends and family for inspiration.

Gratitude is transformative. Let us give thanks through our offerings: World Thank Offering: uwfaith.org/give/?form=missiongiving&designationId=EQBNXEVR

Call your congressperson to ask them to pass economic recovery and infrastructure legislation that addresses the harms of climate change and pollution.

Visit our Just Energy 4 All page and learn about our efforts and participate in our ongoing webinars and events: uwfaith.org/what-we-do/serve-and-advocate/just-energy-4-all

UNPACKING | 5 MINUTES

Let’s discuss the following questions together:

- What other upcycling crafts or reusing tips do we do at home?
- How’s it life-giving to be able to use our creativity to transform something with our own hands?
- What transformation is needed in us and the way we consume to see value and abundance instead of waste and scarcity?

CLOSING AND TAKING HOME | 5 MINUTES

Let’s come back together and look at the proposed activities for this month to put our faith into action. Again, we need one person per activity to remind us every week.

GET INSPIRED: EVERY STORY IS PART OF GOD’S STORY

Visit United Women in Faith “Shop and Download” on uwfaith.org to access resources.

PUTTING OUR FAITH INTO ACTION

Spiritual Growth

Write your Scripture quote on a piece of paper and place it somewhere visible in your home as a reminder.

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Soul-Care Moment

Continue upcycling articles at home into art and useful items.

Building the Beloved Community

Collect and share life-giving stories of transformation with friends and family for inspiration.

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Fighting for Justice

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CLOSING PRAYER | 10 MINUTES

Let us take a moment to reflect and share about one thing that has been life-giving to us in these three months together so far. After each response we’ll reply, “Jesus, we thank you.”

Allow five minutes to share and then transition to the next prompt.

Now, let’s share something we want to change in the world through our giving or our lives at the moment and ask for God’s help and transformative energy.

Allow five minutes to share and then transition to the closing below.

After everyone’s shared let us hold up our offerings and say together:

God,
We ask you to open our eyes to the change that is happening and the change that needs to happen. Give us patience when we are to wait for your time and give us courage and impatience when you call us to take action for transformation.

Amen.

Endnote

## MEMORY SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

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<th>Genesis Creation</th>
<th>Jesus' Transfiguration</th>
<th>Be Transformed by the Renewing of Your Mind</th>
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<td>Jacob Wrestling with God</td>
<td>Peter Receives a New Name after Confession of Faith</td>
<td>Faith Like a Mustard Seed</td>
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<td>Genesis 1:1–2:3</td>
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