

Belonging & Becoming

A WORSHIP RESOURCE FOR
COLLEGE & YOUNG ADULT SUNDAY

Centered on Jeremiah 1:4-10

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Presbyterian Mission
**Office of Christian
Formation**

Order of Worship

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather, seeking to follow God's call wherever it may lead us.

Together, we make the journey of faith.

Through transitions and turning points, through questions and doubts, we are not alone.

Together, in life and in death, we belong to God.

Whoever we have been, whoever we are today, and whoever we will be tomorrow,

Together, let us worship God!

HYMN OR OTHER SONG

CALL TO CONFESSION

We do not fully live into the vision that God has for us and for the world, individually or as a community. And yet, when we share the truth about our lives in humility and faith, we remind one another of the greater truth that God in Christ meets us in all of our humanity and vulnerability – always welcoming us home with grace. Let us confess both our sin and our trust in God's mercy and transformative love.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Patient and loving God, we confess that our love for you, neighbor, and self are not what they could be. We focus more on our own interests or insecurities than on the needs of others. We seek comfort in systems that harm people and the planet. We are tied up in practices based in fear, scarcity, and power over others, rather than in love, abundance, and mutual empowerment.

Forgive us and help us to keep becoming your people.

Touch us with hope, that we may join you in building the world of your dreams.

Pour out mercy upon us, that we may be compassionate to all who hurt.

Reshape us with your love, that we may be whole.

Amen.

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ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Hear the good news: God forgives us, Christ reconciles us, and the Spirit empowers us to grow in love.

Thanks be to God! Amen.

PASSING OF THE PEACE

As God's forgiven people, we can bring peace, forgiveness, and new life to the world. The peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Holy One, help us to find new meaning and new life in the ancient words of Scripture, that we might be hearers, dreamers, and doers of your life-giving Word, for the good of the world you love. Amen.

READING(S)

First Scripture: Isaiah 58:9b-14

Key Scripture: Jeremiah 1:4-10

SERMON

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

From [The Iona Abbey Worship Book](#) by the Iona Abbey Community (Wild Goose Publications, 2017).

With the whole church,

**we affirm that we are made in God's image,
befriended by Christ, empowered by the Spirit.**

With people everywhere,

**we affirm God's goodness at the heart of humanity
planted more deeply than all that is wrong.**

With all creation,

**we celebrate the miracle and wonder of life, the unfolding purposes of God
forever at work in ourselves and in the world.**

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HYMN OR OTHER SONG

RECOGNIZING YOUNG ADULTS

Before leading the litany below, you might invite the following people to raise their hands, stand, or otherwise be recognized:

- Young adults entering the workforce or a vocational training program.
- Those entering the [Young Adult Volunteer](#) program in the PC(USA) or a similar service-learning program.
- People transitioning to a college, university, graduate or professional school or program.
- Those taking a gap year, or entering their first year beyond secondary school or an educational program.
- People who work with young adults as educators, mentors, counselors, or coaches (such as college faculty and staff, ministers, and lay leaders).

You may present them with a gift to mark the start of the new academic year or a new life venture, such as a journal. If your congregation has a prayer shawl ministry or some talented knitters, consider giving a small “prayer square” with a message that reminds them of the blessings of God who is knitting them together even still, their home congregation’s prayers for them, and their ties to the whole communion of saints.

COMMISSIONING LITANY

For young adults of varied experiences,
that they might receive encouragement on their journeys of faith
as they continue becoming the people God has called them to be,
supporting each other and accepting support:

O God, we pray.

For campus ministries and spiritual communities for young adults,
that they might be settling spaces,
places of welcome, comfort, and rest,
and also places to stretch, change, and grow:

O God, we pray.

Continued on next page.

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COMMISSIONING LITANY (CONTINUED)

For the leaders who guide these communities,
discerning faithful ways to accompany young adults
in the midst of an often-overwhelming world,
and learning from those they serve:

O God, we pray.

For college faculty and staff members,
as well as those who supervise or mentor young adults during formative years:

O God, we pray.

For the siblings of faith who have nurtured each of us along our way,
and the ways we might share that care with the ones who come after us:

O God, we give you thanks.

INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

All we have, and all we are, is a gift from God. We are invited to give back a portion of what we have received, that our offerings, talents, and energy might glorify God and help transform the world God so loves. Trusting in God's abundance, let us give with gratitude, joy, and generosity.

A note from UKirk National: College and Young Adult Sunday is a great time to receive a special offering in support of collegiate ministry! We encourage you to find the UKirk(s) closest to you and ask how you can best support them. (Not sure who's nearby? A map of our network ministries is available at ukirk.org/ministries.) If you'd also like to support the UKirk Collegiate Ministries Association as we seek to support campus ministers, chaplains, and their student faith communities, visit ukirk.org/donate.

PRESENTATION OF THE OFFERING

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Gracious God, bless our offerings and our lives. Transform them into healing for the wounded, hope for the discouraged, courage for the fearful, justice for the oppressed, community for the lonely, and faith for the seeking. Amen.

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UKIRK BEATITUDES

By Rev. Rachel Penmore ([UKirk University of Tennessee](#)) and Rev. Allison Wehrung ([UKirk Ole Miss](#))

Consider using this thematic liturgy in lieu of a traditional Prayers of the People, before the version of the Lord's Prayer below.

Blessed are the college students
in brick buildings and behind computer screens,
those with a trust fund and those on financial aid,
those in their first year, those finishing a fifth, and all the spaces in-between,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are the sports superfans and those who don't know the difference between a
football and a baseball,
for they will both find a place here.

Blessed are the procrastinators and the planners,
for God willing the work will get done.

Blessed are the loud and boisterous and the calm and contemplative,
for they will all be heard.

Blessed are those who feel pressure to define a major before they're ready,
and those who see their calling clearly,
for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who are overworked, overscheduled, and overwhelmed,
for they will find rest.

Blessed are those who feel lonely and isolated,
for they will be comforted by the living body of Christ.

Blessed are the survivors,
for their stories will be heard and believed.

Continued on next page.

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UKIRK BEATITUDES (CONTINUED)

Blessed are those who find affirmation in the Church and those who have been harmed by it, for they will find peace.

Blessed are those whose truest identity is unwelcome in their family of origin, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those living with mental illness or instability, for they will see God, and a plan for moving forward.

Blessed are those in the age of imposter syndrome, feeling crushed by filters, feedback, and followers, for they are created in the image of God.

Blessed are those who invite one another into this family of faith and those who are brave enough to show up.

Blessed are the hopeful,
the hopeless,
the forgotten,
the found,
the closeted,
the open,
the meek,
the proud,
the courageous,
and the coping.

Blessed are those working to make the world a better place, and those who aren't sure where to start.

Blessed are you in all times, in all places, exactly as you are, for yours is the kingdom of heaven.

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THE NEW ZEALAND ANGLICAN LORD'S PRAYER

**Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
Source of all that is and that shall be,
Father and Mother of us all,
Loving God, in whom is heaven:**

**The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on earth.**

**With the bread we need for today, feed us.
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.
From trials too great to endure, spare us.
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and forever.
Amen.**

From [The New Zealand Book of Prayer | He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa](#) by the Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand (HarperOne, 1997).

HYMN OR OTHER SONG

RESPONSIVE CHARGE & BENEDICTION

As our worship service comes to an end, our service to God and neighbor begins again, so go to be God's blessing to others.

We will not measure out our compassion, but share it freely.

Go tell the story of Christ's love and hope for all.

**We will speak of the One who shows everyone they are beloved,
as they are, and as they are becoming.**

Go pour out the Spirit's love in every corner of your lives.

We go in the company of this community, and in the love of the triune God.

Amen.

Sermon Starters

Our primary Scripture, Jeremiah 1:4-10, drops us right into a critical moment in the life of the prophet Jeremiah that has been labeled his “call story.” Especially in conversation with Isaiah 58:9b-14, it evokes a generative tension between the hearer's individual sense of vocation and our shared calling as Christians. Jeremiah's becoming the prophetic leader that God has called him to be is deeply intertwined with his belonging within the community of God's people.

Jeremiah recalls in hindsight his identity-shaping narrative. The story follows a characteristic pattern: call, protest, and divine promise. Moses tells God he's not a gifted speaker. Isaiah tells God he's too much of a mess to be a prophet. Jeremiah says he's too young for people to listen to him. In all these cases, God knows them – both who they are and their limitations, and who they are becoming and their potential.

God's words to Jeremiah are ones we might hear at a baptism or an ordination service: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I set you apart” (v. 5). It is a message of belonging and belovedness, and Jeremiah needed to hear it because his life's work would be difficult. Speaking to an exiled people group during a time of national crisis, he called out the political and religious powers for their idolatry and greed, and was rejected and even imprisoned for unwelcome truth-telling.

God's promise in the often-quoted Jeremiah 29:11, “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope,” was a call to a resilient hope that the world could be better. It was, and is, a call to lead the people in working toward the vision Isaiah paints in our first reading – to rebuild a more just society, to move beyond self-interest and embody care for the neighbor, to restore the streets to safety.

That is a call about which the university students and young adults with whom I work remind and teach me every day. College and Young Adult Sunday is an opportune time to highlight the importance of churches and spiritual communities co-creating spaces of belonging with young adults; such communities' roles in shaping how students make sense of their faith, identities, and vocations; and the value of young adults' voices and perspectives – their roles as emerging leaders who stretch the Church to take faithful action toward the vision of a more just society.

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EXPLORING THE THEME OF IDENTITY (BECOMING)

This passage in Jeremiah invites questions about identity, which may be a central theme in the lives of young adults during a formative and extended season of exploration, challenge, and growth. A preacher or speaker might consider how this season of life is a time to:

- Have new experiences and grapple with emerging theories or new-to-you ideas.
- Re-evaluate what you believe is true.
- Form new relationships and let go of those you have outgrown.
- Stretch into new communities, deciding which affiliations from your past still feel authentic and which ones no longer fit.

EXPLORING THE THEME OF COMMUNITY (BELONGING)

Learning how to identify in a complex world is, at its heart, a spiritual journey. And it's one we don't make alone. It has to do with our sense of belonging to particular communities, and with becoming at once the truest versions of ourselves and also part of something much bigger than ourselves.

If you're looking for additional resources, consider contemporary "prophet" Rachel Held Evans' book [Searching for Sunday](#), which invites readers into her journey of healing, meaning-making, and community-seeking outside the Church. Eventually, Evans' re-examination of the evangelical faith she once identified with led her to authors within the Christian tradition who wrestled with Scripture, and into conversation with people whose faith lay at the heart of their commitments to antiracism, environmental sustainability, economic justice, gender equity, and celebration of LGBTQIA+ individuals and families. Evans began to find a church that hardly resembled the born-again faith she had known before – a church being reborn, a church becoming less a defender of a system of belief and more a community of belonging and faith-based practice. Perhaps the young adults in your congregation can identify with Evans' story.

As Jeremiah was called "to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant," so too can new prophets among us help us recognize what systems and structures need to be dismantled to help us build the Church of tomorrow (v. 10).

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The preacher or speaker may encourage young adults to stay in touch with the spiritual dimensions of their college or other experiences, and to seek spiritual communities where they experience belonging as they continue to become the people God calls them to be. He/she/they may likewise encourage the congregation to be receptive to students' and young adults' insights, questions, and challenges as together they stretch the Church toward a more just and inclusive vision.

Supporting Young Adults Throughout the Year

Two student leaders of [UKirk at UVA](#), Madaline Marland and Sarah Child, share their ideas about how your congregation can encourage young adults throughout the year.

IF YOUR FAITH COMMUNITY HAS, OR IS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH, A LOCAL CAMPUS MINISTRY:

- Value students' input. "I think generally asking your student population what they want and need out of a spiritually based community is the best way to support them in programming," Madaline shares. "Questions we asked students when planning our current semester programming were: What programming did you attend last semester? What would you like to see continued? What would you like to see added?"
- Consider their needs. Be attentive to needs students may have that fall outside of the purview of typical campus ministry programming. "As a first-year student without a car, I have really appreciated all the members of the congregation who have offered to provide me with transportation," says Sarah. "Feeling like I am a part of a community separate from my school life this year has been something that I've really appreciated, so anything that adds to that general feeling is helpful." Madaline underscores the importance of considering students' needs in community building. "Hosting holiday meals [UKirk at UVA hosts a Friendsgiving celebration, for example] helps create community for international/out-of-state students or those who have complicated relationships with family celebration."
- Keep them well fed. Offer to bring food from students' favorite restaurants or favorite homemade meals for meetings, social gatherings, or study hours (if there is a designated student space).

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IF YOUR CONGREGATION DOESN'T HAVE A LOCAL CAMPUS MINISTRY, OR IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO SUPPORT YOUNG ADULTS WHO GREW UP AT YOUR CHURCH WHILE THEY ARE AWAY FOR COLLEGE:

- Send care packages. Maintain an updated list of students' names and (school) addresses to send packages twice a year. Sarah and Madaline recommend including homemade cards with supportive messages, coffee or Visa gift cards, school supplies such as pencils and erasers, and nonperishable snacks or foods. You can include a spiritual element, too. "When I graduated, a neighbor gave me a little prayer box," says Madaline. "It's an Altoid-shaped tin, and you can write down prayers on little pieces of paper that came with it. That's always been special to me – plus it's easy to implement, either through direct purchase or by some crafty church people."
- Reach out regularly. Match students with people in the congregation who have similar interests, are alumni of the students' schools, or who have established relationships with the students. Encourage them to text or call students once a quarter to check in and see how they are doing or what kinds of support they may appreciate. If these check-in partners are local, they could offer to meet students for coffee or a meal, or to drop off snacks or homemade food during high-stress times or for special occasions (such as birthdays or milestones).