

ENGAGING OUR WORLD

Sunday School Resource for UN
Sustainable Development Goals

GOALS



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As people of faith, we long for the time when God's realm of shalom will find a fuller, more concrete expression in the lives of people all over the world. To that end, the church has long sought to address intractable issues such as poverty, hunger, and the exploitation of the earth and its people. These issues and others inflict deep wounds on the creation and diminish the promise of an abundant life for all.

And if that were not enough, in 2020 we have been brought to our knees by a global health pandemic of unprecedented scope--a crisis that threatens to inflict devastation from which our world may not fully heal for decades, if ever. Partnership, dialogue, and concerted action has never been more urgently needed.

Throughout the 75 years of its existence, the nations joined together in the United Nations have worked to address both the critical issues that impact health and wholeness and the intractable and powerful systems that underly those issues. In September 2015, the governments of the world adopted the Sustainable Development Goals. In doing so the UN took a significant step, not only toward addressing those issues, but in lifting up the interconnected nature of development and sustainability. The 75th anniversary of the United Nations offers an opportunity for our denomination to partner in new ways and engage the hearts and minds of Christians toward the expansive vision articulated in those Goals one that could not be more timely.

When we are confronted with the critical needs of the people of the world including those of us in the so called developed nations, we are often brought up short by the enormity of the task. To resource congregations, the Presbyterian Ministry at the UN produced the Second Edition of the Study and Devotional Guide on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. And to help adult study groups of Presbyterians discover how to make a difference, this curriculum guide has been designed as a tool to accompany the guide. Through the six sessions, people of faith can become familiar with the scope of the issues addressed by the Goals. We will become more aware of how interconnected the goals are, and how necessary it is to address them as a whole. But there is more: we can explore more fully the ways the church is already working on each of the goals through programs that partner with others engaged in the same work. And each of us can identify ways we can be involved ourselves and collectively with our congregations, by focusing on areas where our passions lie and where we can be the most effective.

My hope is that you will grow as a disciple as you discern how to respond to God's call to walk alongside the world's people. Together we can work to restore the shalom God intends for all.

Sincerely,
Martha Bettis Gee

Martha Bettis Gee is a writer, editor and educational consultant. A certified Christian educator, she has served as Director of Christian Education for churches in Knoxville, Tennessee and Columbus, Indiana. She is retired from the Presbyterian Mission Agency, where she served for sixteen years as Associate for Curriculum Development and for seven years as Associate for Child Advocacy and Networking, as well as convening the Human Trafficking Roundtable. She has written and edited studies for the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church, Abingdon Press, and the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, among others. Presently she edits the adult curriculum The Present Word. She lives in LaGrange, Kentucky with her husband.



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



WHAT is a **Matthew 25** CHURCH?

Matthew 25:31–46 calls all of us to actively engage in the world around us, so our faith comes alive and we wake up to new possibilities. Convicted by this passage, both the 222nd and 223rd General Assemblies (2016 and 2018) exhorted the PC(USA) to act boldly and compassionately to see our neighbors through Jesus' eyes and serve those who are marginalized or in need — people who are hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, imprisoned, strangers, poor or oppressed in other ways and in need of welcoming.

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Notes for the Leader

Welcome to a study of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. This leader guide is intended to accompany the Second Edition of the "Study and Devotional Guide on the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals." It is a tool to help introduce groups to these goals and to explore them more deeply with the hope that persons, together and as individuals, may find meaningful ways to engage the goals and take action.

In his letter of introduction to the Second Edition, Ryan D. Smith, director of the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations, notes that the resource gives us a snapshot into each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), some of their targets and the ways in which the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and our global partners have been working — and continue to work — to achieve this sustainable development agenda. The resource includes:

- A fact sheet for each goal.
- Biblical reflections from staff and mission partners reflecting on each goal and examining it through the lens of Mathew 25.
- Information highlighting the work of the PC(USA) and our partners.
- A bibliography of relevant printed resources (hyperlinks for sites with the same information are included in the online resource).

At first glance, the 17 SDGs are daunting in both their scope and depth. Studying and addressing all of the SDGs in one course may seem to be an impossible task. It may be helpful for both leaders and participants to keep the following in mind:

- **The study intends to present a snapshot.** No six-session study could possibly be comprehensive; rather it gives participants the opportunity to become more familiar with this important agenda as each session introduces participants to several SDGs.
- **The leader's guide employs four different approaches to small group work, each in a separate session.** As leader, you may employ all four ways with pairs or small groups of participants, or you may choose to use only one or two approaches. Choose activities that best suit both your group of participants and your own leadership style.
- **The overall goal of such a study must be to go beyond simply becoming familiar with the SDGs.** Rather the hope is that participants will commit to responding to the SDGs in one or more specific ways. Some persons may identify a particular project or program of the church, either locally or globally, to which they might commit time, financial resources or other support. Individually or as a congregation, others may find effective ways to advocate for legislation or other actions that are consistent with the work of the SDGs. Regardless of other responses, all participants can commit to sustained prayer.

Preparation for the Study

- Pray for yourself as leader and for the participants who will engage in the study with you.
- Carefully review the resource that is the basis for the study, the Second Edition of the "Study and Devotional Guide on the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals."
- Read and reflect on Matthew 25:31–46 and review the Bible study on the passage included in Session 1. Note that Matthew was written to a particular community of faith that was facing urgent issues in living faithfully in their own time. Ask yourself what urgent crises we face today in living as Christians in our own context.
- Refer to the webpages of the United Nations for more in-depth information about the SDGs. The study guide assumes a time period available for adult study groups of about 45 minutes. While suggested times for activities are listed, the actual time a group may spend on activities will vary widely. Consider the suggested times as just that. For groups that have an hour or more for a session, additional activities are suggested.

Ten Things to Know About

Sustainable Development Goals

The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs, adopted by world leaders in September 2015, officially came into force on January 1, 2016. The agenda articulates a concrete call to action, encouraging us to take the bold and transformative steps urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path. Here are 10 important things to know about the SDGs:

- 1. Sustainable development has been defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.** Eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions is an indispensable requirement for sustainable development.
- 2. The 2030 Agenda is a culmination of more than four decades of dialogue and debate.** This ambitious blueprint for eliminating extreme poverty, reducing inequality and protecting the planet Earth is a plan of action for the whole world community of nations. The goals and targets came after years of development practice, civil society engagement and government negotiations.
- 3. By endorsing the 2030 Agenda, the world community reaffirmed its commitment to sustainable development.** In 2015 the 193 member states of the United Nations unanimously adopted the plan for action and pledged to ensure sustained and inclusive economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection, fostering peaceful, just and inclusive societies through a new global partnership.
- 4. The SDGs build on the success of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)** and aim to go further to end all forms of poverty, ensuring that no one is left behind. The new SDGs are unique in that they call for action by all countries — poor, rich and middle-income — to promote prosperity, while at the same time protecting the planet. The 17 SDGs are broader in scope and go further than the MDGs by addressing the root causes of poverty and the universal need for development that works for all people.
- 5. A core feature of the SDGs is their strong focus on how they may be implemented.** They emphasize the mobilization of financial resources, the building of capacity and the use of technology, as well as data and institutions.
- 6. The new SDGs recognize that tackling climate change is essential for sustainable development and poverty eradication.** Tackling climate change and fostering sustainable development are two mutually reinforcing sides of the same coin — sustainable development cannot be achieved without climate action. Conversely, many of the SDGs are addressing the core drivers of climate change.
- 7. The 2030 Agenda rests on the interconnected and indivisible nature of its 17 SDGs.** In implementing the SDGs, it is important to treat them in their entirety instead of approaching them as a menu list of individual goals from which to pick and choose.
- 8. At the heart of the 2030 Agenda are five critical dimensions: people, prosperity, the planet Earth, partnership and peace, also known as the Five P's.** We have traditionally viewed sustainable development through the lens of three core elements — social inclusion (people), economic growth (prosperity) and environmental protection (planet) , but the 2030 Agenda builds on this approach by adding two critical components: partnership and peace.
- 9. While some of the 17 SDGs appear more overarching or “final” in nature, others can be seen as the means to those final goals.** For example, we not only pursue the water and energy goals for their own sake, but because clean water and energy are means to the true goal of health and well-being. But since clean energy and water are such crucial issues, they demand a specific focus. Looking at some SDGs as means to others can help us appreciate the interrelated nature of the SDGs.
- 10. This is work that the church has been engaged in for centuries.** From eradication of hunger and poverty to treating the earth with respect, our church has been working to achieve these SDGs since before their existence.

Adapted from information at <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>

SESSION 1

Introducing the Sustainable Development Goals



Main Idea/Goal

Participants will be introduced to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), explore biblical foundations and reflect on ways to respond as people of faith.

Scriptural Foundation:

Matthew 25:31–46

Preparing

Pray for participants and for yourself as leader.

Review the entire “Study and Devotional Guide: on the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals.” Note that the three-fold intent of the study is to (1) give participants a snapshot of the 17 SDGs and their comprehensive nature, (2) connect participants with the ongoing work of the church to address each aspect of the goals, and (3) elicit responses from participants.

While some participants may be conversant with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 SDGs, for others this may be new information. Review “Ten Things to Know About the Sustainable Development Goals” in this guide. Make copies of this page for the participants. More in-depth information can be found at <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>.

Participants will need to bring a journal to each session, either a pen-and-paper journal or a tablet into which they can record observations. Plan to provide paper and pens for those who do not bring their own journal.

On a sheet of newsprint paper or a board, print the following: **Sustainable development is _____** .

Since a key dimension of the 2030 Agenda is our endangered planet, the use of newsprint sheets and photocopies may seem counterintuitive. Weigh for yourself the relative environmental impact of the use of paper versus the energy involved in the use of computers to record and project information. If you choose to record information on a chalk or white board, be sure to enter the insights and observations participants make into a computer file following the session and save the file for subsequent sessions, or make laptops available and ask each small group or pair to enter their own information and send the file on to you. If a video projector and a screen are available, you might also enter information as groups provide it and project it for the group to see.

In most sessions, there is a closing activity that uses Scripture in a litany, reading or hymn. If your time is limited, you may choose not to use this activity. A few optional activities are also suggested for those who want to dig deeper or for leaders who would like alternative choices.

Materials Needed

- Copies of “Study and Devotional Guide: on the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals” for each participant.
- Nametags
- Copies of “Ten Things to Know About the Sustainable Development Goals” (p. 00) for each participant.
- Writing paper and pens.
- Copies of “Matthew 25:31–46” (p. 00) for each participant.
- Copies of Psalm 96:10–13 (p. 00) for each participant (optional).
- Bibles
- Newsprint or whiteboard and markers, chalkboard and chalk or laptops or tablets and a video projector.

🕒 Opening (10 minutes)

As participants arrive, greet them. If group members are not familiar with one another, provide nametags. Call attention to the posted, open-ended prompt and invite participants to jot down on the board or newsprint sheet the first words that come to mind when they read those words.

1. Gather Together.

When most participants have arrived, gather together. Invite participants to introduce themselves and to name the words or phrase they added to the posted, open-ended phrase. Then read aloud the definition of sustainable development listed as the first item on “Ten Things to Know About the Sustainable Development Goals,” and jot it down along with participants’ comments. Tell the group that in the course of this study, they will have the opportunity to explore in depth the dimensions of sustainable development, how the church has been and is now working to implement the goals, and how we as Christians can be more effective partners in this important work.

2. Pray an Opening Prayer.

Pray the following, or a prayer of your choosing:

Sustaining God, make us aware of your presence with us today. By your spirit, open our eyes and ears to what you would have us to see and hear about your whole created world and all that lives in it. Trouble the waters of our complacency, that from what we learn our minds and hearts may be receptive to what you would have us to do. Amen.

🕒 Exploring (25 minutes)

3. Encounter Scripture.

Remind the group that as Christians, our mandate for considering sustainable development is grounded in Scripture. Distribute copies of “Matthew 25:31–46.” Form two small groups to join you in the reading.

Remind the group of the following information about the context of Matthew’s gospel¹:

Despite the fact that the gospel bears the name of Matthew, we do not know the author’s name. We do have some clues about who the author might be — he was a Jew who was thoroughly familiar with Hebrew Scriptures and also well-versed in writing in Greek.

Since Matthew’s gospel refers to the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, it must have been written after 70 CE when those events occurred. Scholars generally agree it was likely written between 80–85 CE.

- The gospel is addressed to a community of Jewish believers that was beginning to include Gentile members. It was likely in a prosperous Greek-speaking city with a sizeable Jewish population — possibly Antioch, Syria’s capital.
- Its structure is defined by a series of five discourses gathering together the teachings of Jesus and connected by narrative sections. Today’s Scripture passage is part of the fifth discourse, Jesus’ teachings about the future judgment.
- Discuss some of the following together:
- In the Introduction to her commentary on Matthew, theologian Anna Case-Winters observes:

This gospel was written in a time when:

- There was conflict and division in the community of faith.
- Some were insiders and others were outsiders.
- Political and religious leaders were co-opted, mistrusted, and discredited.

The great majority of the common people were without power.

Cultures clashed.²

Does this description of Matthew’s context resonate with you? In what ways is our present context similar? What would you add to this description about our own time?

- What insights surfaced for you in this passage?
- Many Christians today are put off by the idea of judgment, viewing it as a negative concept. What is your response? Why?
- Case-Winters suggests that we diminish the meaning of the idea of judgment if we separate it from the understanding of redemption.³ How do you respond to the idea that judgment is ordered toward redemption? Do you agree that judgment is ultimately about setting things right, establishing justice? How do you think powerful persons and institutions view judgment? How, if at all, might their viewpoint differ from that of those who are powerless and vulnerable?
- Biblical commentators note that this is the only scene in the New Testament that depicts the details of the Last Judgment. What criterion that we normally consider primary in determining salvation is missing here? Are you surprised to find that confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord is not a part of this scene?
- According to this passage, how does the divine judge evaluate people from all cultures and walks of life?
- The Greek word Matthew uses that is translated as “righteous” joins the ideas of justice and mercy. In this parable, what marks the “sheep” as righteous?
- Scholars suggest that the real question in the Last Judgment is not when the Son of Man will come, but rather how shall we live while we wait. What is your answer?

4. Introduce “Ten Things to Know.”

Distribute copies of “Ten Things to Know About the Sustainable Development Goals” to participants. Note that the group has already discussed the first fact on the list: a definition for sustainable development. Invite group members to make observations or ask questions about the definition. Review with the group facts 2 and 3 on the sheet that give the context of how the SDGs were developed. Then, depending on the size of your group, form pairs or small groups and assign one of the following facts to each: 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 (in a very small group, assign one or more of the facts to individual participants).

Ask each pair or small group to quickly review their assigned fact. After allowing a few minutes to work, ask each pair or small group to report relevant information about their fact with the full group. Ask group members to highlight what they consider to be key information about the nature of the SDGs, and to surface any questions they have. Jot these observations and facts down and save for future sessions.


 **Responding** (5 minutes)

5. Consider Faithful Actions.

Invite the group to revisit the ideas that surfaced as they encountered Matthew’s parable of the Last Judgment. Remind them that one truth that emerges from the parable is that if we want to encounter Christ, we need to look among those who are vulnerable, whose voices and agency may be muffled by their circumstances. When we commit to acts of justice and compassion there, we may encounter God’s presence at any moment.

Ask participants to reflect on the following in writing in their journals:

- When and how, if at all, have I made myself available to encounter Christ among the least of these?
- Is it possible that I have failed to encounter God because I have been looking in all the wrong places? What actions might I consider taking to be more faithful?

 **Closing** (5 minutes)

6. Wrap Up.

Remind participants that in the coming sessions they will be exploring responses they might make in order to be a part of faithful action toward achieving the SDGs. Encourage them to read over and reflect on SDGs 1–5 in the coming week. These SDGs focus on one of five critical dimensions of the 2030 Agenda: people.

7. Read a Psalm. (Optional)

Recall for the group that we diminish the meaning of the idea of judgment if we separate it from the understanding of redemption—that without judgment there is no justice. The coming of a just judge should be received with gladness, as is expressed in Psalm 96. Distribute copies of “Psalm 96” and invite participants to read the verses responsively.

8. Pray a Closing Prayer.

Point out that in recent days the following meme—a quotation from Angela Y. Davis—has been circulating on social media. It is a riff on the Serenity Prayer used by Alcoholics Anonymous:

I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept.

Pray the following closing prayer, or one of your own choosing:

God of shalom, when we are confronted with the overwhelming problems faced by our world today, we sometimes find ourselves frozen into inaction. So many people lack even the basics for surviving, let alone for living the abundant life you intend. A few have far more resources than anyone could ever use, while too many have access to far too little.

Powers and principalities muffle the voices and the agency of those who are vulnerable. The very earth cries out for change.

By your spirit, stir us from inaction. Prod us out of our indecision. Open our eyes to your presence and to what we must do to change those systems that we cannot accept. Amen.

More Activities (Optional)

Create Visual Representations. Invite participants to create visual representations for their assigned fact from “Ten Things to Know About the SDGs”. Distribute a sheet of newsprint and markers to each pair or small group. Ask them to use symbols, line drawings, or words and phrases to explain their assigned fact. In the total group, have pairs or groups report. Display the sheets in your learning space as reminders of these facts.

Read an Official Document about the Agenda. Download and make copies of “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” for a more in-depth treatment of the facts about the Agenda and the SDGs.

Matthew 25:31-46

Leader: 31 When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, 33 and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. 34 Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35 for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ 37 Then the righteous will answer him:

Group 1: ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38 And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39 And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ 40

Leader: And the king will answer them, ‘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.’ 41 Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; 42 for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ 44 Then they also will answer,

Group 2: ‘**Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?**’

Leader: 45 Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ 46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Psalm 96:10–13

Group 1: Tell it out among the nations: “The LORD is king!”

Group 2: **The one who made the world so firm that it cannot be moved will judge the peoples with equity.”**

Group 1: Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad;
let the sea thunder and all that is in it; let the field be joyful
and all that is therein.

Group 2: **Then shall all the trees of the wood shout for joy
at your coming, O LORD,**

Group 1: for you come to judge the earth.

All: You will judge the world with righteousness
and the peoples with your truth.

SESSION 2

The Dimension of People



Main Idea/Goal

Participants will explore the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to the dimension of people, examine programs and initiatives of the church, and reflect on how to respond as people of faith.

Scriptural Foundation

Matthew 25:31–46

Other relevant passages: Proverbs 22:6; Matthew 7:7; 10:8; 26:11; Luke 4:16–20; 7:21–22.

Sustainable Development Goals — People

Goal 1: No Poverty

Goal 2: Zero Hunger

Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being

Goal 4: Quality Education

Goal 5: Gender Equality

Preparing

- Keep in mind that the 2030 Agenda rests on the interconnected and indivisible nature of its 17 SDGs. Be aware that while in this session the group will examine the first five SDGs, focusing on the dimension of people, the remaining SDGs obviously also involve social interactions in significant ways. As participants continue with the study, they will have the opportunity to explore those connections.
- List on newsprint or a board the bold-faced descriptors for numbers 4–9 of the “Ten Things to Know About the Sustainable Development Goals” (for example, for SDG 4, jot down “The SDGs build on the success of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).”)
- Read over the Spiritual Reading of Scripture so that you will be familiar with the steps involved in this approach to encountering the Word.
- Make copies of “The Spirit of the Lord” (p. 00) for each participant (optional).

Materials Needed

- Copies of “Study and Devotional Guide: on the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals” for each participant.
- Nametags
- Copies of “Ten Things to Know About the Sustainable Development Goals” (p. 00) for each participant.
- Copies of “The Spirit of the Lord” for each participant (optional).
- Bibles
- Newsprint or whiteboard and markers, chalkboard and chalk, or laptops/tablets and video projector.
- Writing materials for those who do not bring a journal.



Opening (5 minutes)

As participants arrive, welcome them. If there are persons who were not present for the first session, give them a copy of “Ten Things to Know About the Sustainable Development Goals” and ask them to read it over quickly as a way of getting on board.

1. Gather Together.

When most participants have arrived, gather together. As a way to review, call the group’s attention to the newsprint sheet where you listed the 10 facts about the SDGs (in abbreviated form) and invite volunteers to respond to the following:

- One important fact I recall about the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs is
- A fact I have questions about is
- When I consider the scope and depth of the 17 SDGs, I feel

2. Pray an Opening Prayer.

Pray the following prayer from the study guide, written by Jo Ella Holman, regional liaison for the Caribbean Presbyterian World Mission:

God of Justice, help us as we listen to the voices of the poor in our midst. Guide us as we continue to grapple with what it means to do your will and transform the systems and structures that perpetuate poverty today. Amen.

Exploring (25 minutes)

3. Engage in a Spiritual Reading of Scripture.

Remind the group that in session 1, they explored the parable of the Last Judgment in Matthew 25:31–46. In this session, they will again encounter the parable in a different way through a spiritual reading of Scripture.

- Invite the group to settle into silence, taking a few deep breaths and breathing out any distractions as they breathe in a sense of God’s presence.
- Read the passage aloud once, encouraging the group to reflect in silence.
- Read the passage a second time. On concluding the reading, ask participants to name aloud a word or phrase that particularly struck them.
- Read a third time. Invite volunteers to name whatever answering response was evoked in them.
- Read a final time. Invite participants to reflect in silence on what God might be calling them to do in response.
- Close with a short period of silence.

4. Explore Five SDGs.

Invite a volunteer to read aloud the five SDGs the group will be considering in this session.

Because SDG 1 addresses the elimination of poverty, which is also one of the overarching aims of the 2030 Agenda, invite participants to turn to SDG 1 in the “Study and Devotional Guide: on the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals” (pp. 1–4). Quickly review SDG 1, inviting volunteers to read the targets. Then ask them to review in silence the relevant partnerships listed for this goal, as well as the three longer reflections found in the vignettes from staff persons, program staff and mission co-workers. Discuss the following:

- is your response to the targets listed for this SDG 1? Do you find them overwhelming? Unrealistic? Are they worthy targets that we are challenged to reach for? Or some other response?
- In what ways do the programs and partnerships used as examples for addressing this goal get at the identified targets?
- In addition to the suggestions for getting involved, what are local initiatives our congregation and our other governing bodies are involved in? What about you personally?

To address the other four SDGs, form four pairs or small groups (or in a very small group, assign goals to individual participants). Invite them to read over and discuss all the information in the Study Guide relevant to their assigned goal, and after discussion, to determine how they would like to report on their goal to the full group. Have them choose one person to act as a scribe to record brief information on the newsprint sheet (or in a digital file) for their goal.

- Allow each pair or small group several minutes to work; then ask them to report. Discuss some of the following, if these questions do not surface in the reporting:
- What relationship do you see between your goal and SDG 1: End Poverty?
- Which of the targets for your goal seem the most attainable? Which seem the most daunting?
- What connections do you see between your goal and other SDGs we are considering in this session?
- What connections do you see between these SDGs, with their focus on people and other dimensions (prosperity, planet, partnership and peace)?
- How do the programs and initiatives of the church you read about get at the targets for this goal?

 **Responding** (10 minutes)

5. Consider Faithful Actions.

Revisit the Scripture passage, inviting a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 25:37–39 and another to read verses 44–45. Note that both of these groups — those who were commended and those subject to judgment — were surprised by the divine judge’s word about their actions. In neither case did the commended nor the judged recognize that they had encountered Christ.

Observe that to recognize Christ in the faces of those who are vulnerable to poverty and to its causative factors and resulting conditions — such as the issues exemplified in the SDGs of ending hunger and ensuring health and well-being, access to quality education, and gender equity — we must be willing to put ourselves in places where we have the chance of seeing Christ in vulnerable people. Invite the group to identify some of the suggested ways to get involved.


Discuss:

- Which of these suggestions are concrete actions we might take in our own communities?
- How can we further educate ourselves about critical needs just outside our doors? For example, how can we find out the child poverty rate in our own state or the rate of those uninsured?
- What connections can we make with programs and initiatives of the church nationally and internationally?

Invite the group to begin to make notes in their journals about possible ways they might get involved in addressing one or more of the SDGs explored today.

Ask group members to reflect in writing on the following

- How can we be more intentional about looking for Christ’s presence in the persons with whom we interact daily?
- How can we seek to open our eyes to those who are vulnerable in our communities?

 **Closing** (5 minutes)

6. Wrap Up.

In the coming week, encourage participants to choose a different vignette from those included under each SDG for each day's devotional time. Pray the prayers included with each vignette.

Remind them to read over the information for SDGs 6–7 and 12–15 in preparation for the next session.

7. Read a Scriptural Litany. (Optional)

Remind the group that in studying Matthew 25:31–46, they encountered the idea that judgment and redemption are connected — that without judgment there is no justice. The coming of a just judge should be received with gladness. Note that in Luke 4:16–20, a Scripture cited for one of the SDGs, Jesus reads from the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue. Invite the group to join in the litany based on Isaiah 61:1–3, 10 and 11.

8. Pray a Closing Prayer.

Assign to each participant, or to volunteers, one of the prayers that conclude the vignettes for the five SDGs explored in this session. Encourage the group to settle into silence; then have them pray their assigned prayers in turn. Following the prayers, enter into a brief time of silence, and conclude by saying, “Let the people of God say, ‘Amen.’ ” Or pray a closing prayer of your choosing.

More Activities (Optional)

Explore a Reading on Gender Justice. Invite the group to explore the Prayer for Gender Justice included in SDG 5, using a print or online concordance to identify each woman in Scripture and encounter their stories. Read the litany together.

Explore Websites. Have participants download the study guide on their smartphones, or make laptops or tablets available for them to do so. Encourage them to access the websites listed for their assigned SDG to find out more information about programs and initiatives of the church.

The Spirit of the Lord

Isaiah 61:1–3, 10, 11

Refrain: The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me;
... to bring good news to the oppressed.

Leader: The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me;
... to bring good news to the oppressed;
... to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,

ALL: and release to the prisoners
Leader:... to comfort all who mourn;
... to give them a garland instead of ashes,

ALL: the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.

(Refrain)

Leader: They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, to display God's glory. **ALL:** I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
my whole being shall exult in my God;

Leader: for God has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
God has covered me with the robe of righteousness,

All: so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise,
to spring up before all the nations.

(Refrain)

SESSION 3

The Dimension of Planet



Main Idea/ Goal

Participants will explore the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to the dimension of the planet, examine programs and initiatives of the church, and reflect on how to respond as people of faith.

Scriptural Foundation

Matthew 25:31–46

Other relevant passages: Genesis 6:9–20; Leviticus 23:22; Psalm 8; Isaiah 11:6–9; Micah 2:1–2; Matthew 4:4; 5:16; 6:25; 7:12; 10:42; 18:20; Luke 3:3–6, 10–11; Acts 4:33–35.

Sustainable Development Goals — Planet Earth

Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation

Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy

Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production

Goal 13: Climate Action

Goal 14: Life Below Water

Goal 15: Life on Land

Preparing


In this session, participants will explore six SDGs—the most of any of the six sessions. Encourage the group to keep in mind that with the limited time in a session, they are experiencing snapshots of the SDGs, not full, in-depth treatments of them.

Also suggest that as they explore an assigned goal and hear reports; they should begin to be alert for a goal that particularly interests them or aligns with a passion they may have.

Materials Needed

- Newsprint sheets and markers.
- Bibles
- Copies of “Study and Devotional Guide: on the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals” for each participant.
- Writing materials for those who do not bring a journal.



 **Opening** (5 minutes)

As participants arrive, welcome them. Suggest that they review the information about the five SDGs they explored in the last session, reading over what pairs or small groups recorded on the newsprint sheets or projecting a digital file from that session.

1. Gather Together.

When most participants have arrived, gather together. If there are those who used the goal vignettes in their devotional time during the week, invite them to comment on the experience. Ask:

What difference, if any, did you find in how you experienced the vignettes when you were reflecting on them in your prayer time than when you read them as a part of exploring the facts about the SDGs?

What insights or observations did you glean?

Point out that in today's session the group will be exploring six SDGs that focus on the planet Earth.

2. Pray an Opening Prayer.

Pray the following prayer, or one of your own choosing:

God of creation,

*we give thanks for the goodness of the earth
that you made and sustain.*

Our voices join in praise with all creation:

with the sea that roars,

*the trees that clap their hands,
and the birds that sing in joy.
Unite us by your spirit,*

*that we may be signs of your abundant mercy
and live in thanksgiving for your grace,*

*as we wait for the completion of your creation
in Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.⁴*

 **Exploring** (25 minutes)

3. Encounter Scripture Through Visualization.

Explain that Matthew 25 is part of a section of Scripture in chapters 23–25 that deals with the theme of judgment. Chapters 24–25 are considered apocalyptic texts, a type of Jewish literature that includes such books as Daniel and Revelation. Such literature deals with visions of cataclysmic events of the end time.

Remind the group of the community of faith that first received Matthew's message —

believers who had been waiting for Jesus' imminent return for decades. They no doubt viewed this message of judgment through the lens of the difficult times they were living in, with the tribulation of the Jewish-Roman war, the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple. While most of us are not focused on the impending return of Jesus, we are nonetheless facing what could be termed an environmental apocalypse: the threat of impending climate change.

With this contemporary reframing of apocalypse in mind, invite participants to settle into silence, breathing in a sense of God's presence and breathing out any distractions. Then read the passage aloud. Following the reading, discuss the following:

As you listened to how the Holy One rendered judgment, what connections, if any, do you see between the climate change crisis we face and "the least of these"?

What persons and groups do you think will suffer the first effects of climate change? Who will be the most profoundly affected?

Encourage group members to continue to reflect on these connections as they explore the SDGs that relate to the crisis faced by our planet.

4. Explore Six SDGs.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud the six goals for this session. Then revisit fact 6 on the list of "Ten Things to Know About the Sustainable Development Goals" — the observation that the goals recognize that tackling climate change is essential for sustainable development and poverty eradication.

Form small groups with six persons in each group. If your group is very small, work as a committee of the whole. Assign one of this session's six SDGs to each person in each small group, so that each group has one person addressing one of the six SDGs. Ask participants to make notes of relevant information about targets, as well as the programs and initiatives of the church that seek to address this SDG. After allowing several minutes for persons to explore their assigned SDG, invite each person to report their findings to the other members of their small group.

In the full group, pool the information and observations by taking each SDG in turn. Ask each person who considered a particular goal in each group to offer one relevant fact or observation about the goal, and record it on the appropriate sheet of newsprint or in a digital file. After each person has reported, ask for any further observations from the group and record those. Continue until all six SDGs have been addressed.

Discuss the following:

In "Ten Things to Know About the Sustainable Development Goals" we noted that while some of the 17 SDGs appear more overarching or final in nature, others can be seen as means to those final goals. Which of today's SDGs can you identify as a means to achieving overarching goals like eradicating poverty?

How are today's SDGs related to the five goals we considered in the last session?

 **Responding** (10 minutes)


5. Consider Faithful Actions.

Remind the group that in encountering the Scripture today, they considered the looming climate crisis as a sort of impending apocalyptic event. Note that in the past few months, scientists have been sounding the alarm that the crises seems to be escalating, exhibiting such warning signs as the increased melting of the permafrost, the destruction of the Amazon rainforest, the threat of rising sea levels in Madagascar, and devastating fires in Australia and the western U.S. Ask participants to review the suggested targets and responses for these six SDGs. Invite them to consider writing in their journals on the following:

In what ways am I taking personal, concrete steps to be a better steward of this earth and its resources?

Where in our community is there evidence of a need for sustained action? What communities within our community are particularly vulnerable to environmental degradation? What community activism is in need of our support?

Where is there a need for advocacy to change systems, and how might I best support that advocacy?

 **Closing** (5 minutes)

6. Wrap Up.

In the coming week, encourage participants to again choose a different vignette from those included under each SDG for each day's devotional time. Pray the prayers included with each vignette.

Remind them to read over the information for SDGs 8, 9, 10, and 11 in preparation for the next session.

7. Reflect on a Psalm. (Optional)

Invite the group to participate in "Reflecting on Psalm 8" (p. 00).

8. Close with Prayer.

Pray the following prayer by Nora Leccese, associate for domestic poverty and environmental issues, The Office of Public Witness, or a prayer of your own choosing:

Bring your spirit to those gathered here today to help us bring climate justice to the world. Guide us with your strength and wisdom to make the world better, safer, more just and more merciful in response to greed and destruction. Help us change our ways to care for your creation. When we fail to care for your creation and instead allow chaos and pain, empower us through your love to act toward justice. Help us remember those who need your care most as we all face the fallout of our greed. May we hold our governments accountable and lead our churches to follow your way. Continue to bless and keep us on this journey toward justice for your creation and continue to hold the world in your own hands. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

More Activities (Optional)

Explore More Websites. Have participants download the study guide on their smartphones, or make laptops or tablets available for them to do so. Encourage them to access the websites listed for their assigned SDG to find out more information about programs and initiatives of the church.

View a YouTube Video. Show a short video of visual images depicting Psalm 8. Several can be found by searching on YouTube.

Reflecting on Psalm 8

1. O LORD our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.

2. Out of the mouths of babes and infants

you have founded a bulwark against your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.

3. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars you have established,

4. what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you should care for them?

(Pause to reflect in silence on the following:

What do you consider to be humankind's place in the created world?)

5. Yet you have made them little less than divine;
with glory and honor you crown them.

6. You have made them rule over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet:

7. all flocks and cattle,
even the wild beasts of the field,

8. the birds of the air, the fish of the sea,
and whatever passes along the paths of the sea.

(Pause to reflect in silence on the following:

What do you think it means that God puts all creation under our feet? Are we meant to exploit the created world for our own gain? How are we to function as stewards of creation? What grade would you give humankind of the first world for our stewardship?)

9. O LORD our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

God of majesty, amid the grandeur of your creation you sought us out, and by the coming of your Son you adorned us with glory and honor, giving us dominion over your works. Enable us so to care for the earth that all creation may radiate the splendor of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.⁵

SESSION 4

The Dimension of Prosperity



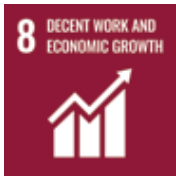
Main Idea/Goal

Participants will explore the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to the dimension of prosperity, examine programs and initiatives of the church, and reflect on how to respond as people of faith.

Scriptural Foundation

Matthew 25:31–46

Other relevant passages: Genesis 4:13–19; Leviticus 19:13; Ruth 2: 8–9; Jeremiah 22:13, 29:7; Matthew 5:3; 7:24; 10:1–16; 23:23; Luke 10:7; Romans 4:4; James 5:4; Revelation 21:1–2.



Sustainable Development Goals — Prosperity

Goal 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth

Goal 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

Goal 10 Reduced Inequalities

Goal 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities



Preparing

- In this session, participants will explore four goals — fewer in number than in other sessions thus far. Though it may seem counterintuitive for these goals to both seem remote and to be all too personal, this may be the case for your group. Some persons may have experienced downsizing from the work they found fulfilling. They may have found it difficult to find other work at the same level of pay, or they may be making ends meet with freelance or part-time work. Some may have had the factory in which they worked closed and relocated overseas. Be sensitive to what may have been difficult or frustrating experiences for some.
- While you may have utilized a laptop to record and a video projector or white or chalkboards to display information about the goals in previous sessions, you will need to use newsprint sheets for this session. Head four separate sheets with one of the four goals and position them around your space, either on the wall or on tabletops. Provide markers of three different colors with each sheet.
- Though not essential, having the actual herbs can make the Reflecting on Scripture activity more concrete and vivid for participants. If you like, obtain some dried mint and dill, and some ground cumin.
- In the United States., reducing inequalities is specifically connected to the power of structural racism. As you plan, allow enough time for the group to confront this reality.

Materials Needed

- Newsprint sheets and markers of three colors.
- Bibles
- Copies of “Study and Devotional Guide: on the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals” for each participant.
- Dried mint, dill and ground cumin. (optional)

- Copies of a hymnal such as *Glory to God* with the hymn “Come Now, You Blessed, Eat at My Table” (*Glory to God*, 186) (optional)
- Writing materials for those who do not bring a journal.

🕒 **Opening** (5 minutes)

As participants arrive, welcome them. Invite them to read over the information from previous sessions as a way to review work done on previous SDGs.

1. Gather Together.

When most participants have arrived, gather together. Ask participants to respond to the following:

- In rereading and reflecting on the vignettes for last session’s SDGs, with which stories did you resonate? What programs or initiatives, if any, seemed particularly striking?

Say that in this session the group will explore four SDGs that have to do with engendering prosperity for all, not just for a very tiny percentage of the world’s population.

2. Pray Together.

Pray the following prayer, or a prayer of your choosing:

*God, who labored creation into being,
we give thanks for this day
and the opportunity to work in your world.
Grant us the strength to labor
for what is right, just and fair.
Grant us the wisdom to speak out
for those who are enslaved, oppressed and exploited.
Grant us the ability to break the chains of injustice
and hear the voices of people long silenced.
As we seek to work in your world this day,
help us to make it a better place for all.
In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.⁶*

🕒 **Exploring** (25 minutes)

3. Engage in a Reflection on Scripture.

Invite the group to review the vignette, “Tithes for Equality,” by Richard Williams, coordinator, Young Adult Volunteers, included under SDG 8. Have someone read aloud Matthew 23:23. Explain that this verse is part of a teaching segment in Matthew on the theme of divine judgment — a segment that culminates with the passage that is the foundation for this study, Matthew 25:31–46. This verse presents one of seven woes in the chapter. The use of woes to announce divine judgment is common in prophetic literature.

In this verse, the Pharisees are accused by Jesus of focusing on trivial things. They insist on tithing even the herbs used in cooking, and to do so, they must weigh them.

Distribute to the group some mint, dill and a pinch of cumin to hold (or simply have them imagine holding these herbs in one hand). In the other hand, ask them to imagine holding the weightier issues named in the vignette. Ask them to reflect on the following:

- What are the trivialities of my life that get in the way of considering the weightier issues of justice?

After a few moments, read aloud this closing paragraph of the vignette and invite participants to reflect.

I wonder what our offering plate would look like if, instead of carefully measured tithes of our smallest platitudes, it would be heaped with our congregation's best, most creative, most generous efforts to join in God's work in our neighborhood. I wonder what overflowing justice, mercy and faith would do in our city, instead of our strained, stretched and scarce charity.

4. Explore Four SDGs.

Invite a volunteer to read aloud SDGs 8, 9, 10 and 11. Form four small groups or pairs and assign one of the SDGs to each small group or pair. Ask participants to read over their assigned SDG and then to discuss the information. Invite them to use a black felt-tipped marker to record on the relevant newsprint sheet the observations they surfaced about the SDG, its targets and the programs or initiatives of the church that seek to address the SDG, leaving space for others to respond.

After allowing several minutes for pairs or small groups to work, spend some time with participants moving around the room from SDG to SDG, reading the notes about the goal, jotting down any additional observations they may have using a green or blue marker, and using a red marker to record any questions that occur to them.

When everyone has had a chance to review all four SDGs, gather together. Ask members of each of the four groups, in turn, to review their comments. Then open the floor to allow all participants who added comments and questions to expand on what they wrote.

Discuss some of the following, if the questions have not already surfaced in your conversation:

- In what ways do you think these four goals are related?
- If you had to choose one of the four that represents the biggest challenge, which would it be? Why?
- What effect do you think structural racism has on the ability of people in the U.S. to tackle these goals? Do you think it is possible to make significant progress on prosperity without addressing racism? Why or why not?

Have participants choose one target from one of the goals. Invite them to describe how addressing this target might impact one or more of the other goals.


 **Responding** (10 minutes)

5. Consider Faithful Actions.

Note for the group that one unique feature of the SDGs is that they call for action by all countries — poor, rich and middle-income — to promote prosperity while at the same time protecting the planet. In past sessions, participants have considered actions they might take within their own communities and the nation, not just to benefit developing nations.

Revisit with the group the “Get Involved!” sections in each of the four goals, and invite participants to name suggested actions that could make a significant impact in their own communities. Invite them to respond by writing in their journals about the following:

- Which of the suggested actions represent concrete steps I might take?
- Are there other actions I might consider taking that could make a specific difference in my community?
- Are there actions — locally, nationally or internationally — that connect to a particular passion I have for acting with justice?

 **Closing** (5 minutes)

6. Wrap Up.

In the coming week, encourage participants to continue to choose a different vignette from those included under each of this session's SDGs for each day's devotional time. Ask them to pray the prayers included with each vignette.

Call the group's attention to fact 8 on the list of “Ten Things to Know About the Sustainable Development Goals” — that the 2030 Agenda builds on past work, which viewed sustainable development through the lens of three core elements: social inclusion (people), economic growth (prosperity) and environmental protection (planet). To these dimensions, the SDGs add two critical components: partnership and peace. In the next session, they will be considering these two important goals. Remind them to read over the information for those goals in preparation for the next session.

7. Sing a Hymn. *(optional)*

Sing “Come Now, You Blessed, Eat at My Table” (Glory to God, 186).

8. Close with Prayer.

Close with the following prayer by Richard Williams, or a prayer of your choosing:

God of mercy, justice and faith—help us look honestly at our hands and see how much we can do with them, with your help. Stir in us the scales of your justice, the compassion of your mercy and faithfulness in you to see it through. Amen.

More Activities *(Optional)*

Examine Resources for Addressing Structural Racism. Point participants to the suggestions for dismantling structural racism found on the Presbyterian Mission Agency’s Matthew 25 initiative page, <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/matthew-25/racism/>. Suggest they consider taking the 21 Day Racial Justice Challenge. Also point them to the suggested resources at **Useful tools and resources for study and engagement:**

- Facing Racism webpages.
- Racial Equity & Women’s Intercultural Ministries web page
- Presbyterian Women’s anti-racism work (and here).
- Environmental ministries.

Continue to Explore Other Websites. Have participants download the study guide on their smartphones, or make laptops or tablets available for them to do so. Encourage them to access the websites listed for their assigned goal to find out more information about programs and initiatives of the church.

Develop a Checklist on Your City. In “Sustainable Cities, Safe Cities” under SDG 12, Timothy Wotring wrote, “Jesus’ words lend themselves to how we should approach cities today and in the future. We should be asking ourselves:

- *Are cities spaces of welcome or of division?*
- *Is public transportation connecting people not only to areas of shopping, but also to hospitals and supermarkets?*
- *Are neighborhoods safe and do they have green space?”*

Invite the group to add to these questions and others that they might ask about their own city in order to evaluate its sustainability and safety.

Focus on Rural Communities. If your congregation is located in a rural area, emphasize that SDG 12 does not focus solely on cities, but on sustainable communities. Discuss what unique challenges related to sustainability impact your community. For example, is your community impacted negatively by the dwindling number of small family farms? Do all the people in your community have access to jobs that pay a living wage? What other issues are unique to your context?

SESSION 5

The Dimensions of Peace and Prosperity



Main Idea/Goal

Participants will explore the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to the dimensions of peace and prosperity, examine programs and initiatives of the church, and reflect on how to respond as people of faith.

Scriptural Foundation

Matthew 25:31–46

Other relevant passages: Isaiah 58:6; Matthew 5:3–12; 43–46; 18:20.

Sustainable Development Goals — Peace and Partnership

Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals

Preparing

- Make copies of “A Dynamic Diagram of Dimensions” (p.27). Alternatively, arrange to project the diagram from a laptop using a video projector.

Materials Needed

- Newsprint sheets and markers.
- Bibles
- Copies of “Study and Devotional Guide: on the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals” for each participant.
- Copies of “A Dynamic Diagram of Dimensions”(p. 000), or a laptop and video projector.
- Writing materials for those who do not bring a journal.

Opening (5 minutes)

As participants arrive, welcome them. Distribute copies of the diagram, or call participants’ attention to the projected diagram and invite them to study the interrelationships among the dimensions of people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership.

1. Gather Together.

When most participants have arrived, gather together and ask the group to make observations about the diagram of the dimensions of sustainable development. Discuss:

- What does the diagram show about how the social, environmental and economic dimensions are related?
- Where does sustainable development appear in the diagram?

Ask the group to note where the dimensions of peace and partnership are located. Tell participants that in this session, they will examine the implications of how those dimensions interact with the other dimensions.

2. Pray together.

Pray the following prayer, or one of your choosing:

*Mighty and merciful God,
lover of justice and equity,*

*you call us to support the weak,
to help those who suffer,*

and to honor all people.

*By the power of your Holy Spirit,
make us advocates for your justice
and instruments of your peace,*

*so that all may be reconciled
in your beloved community;*

through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.⁷

Exploring (25 minutes)

3. Utilizing Scripture in Breath Prayers.

Invite a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 5:3–12. Following the reading, read aloud the following quotation:

“Blessed are the peacemakers. ... the translation “peacemakers” recognizes that peace is not passive; it is more than an absence of violence. One has to “make” peace; one has to set the conditions of the possibility for peace. Justice and reconciliation lay the groundwork for any lasting peace.

... for they shall be called children of God. There is no promise of reward for the work of peacemaking, rather this work is simply an expression of our identity as children of God; it is the result of being in an “intimate and imitative relationship with God.” Children of God are those who act as God acts.⁸

Ask the group to use this verse as a breath prayer. Invite them to settle into stillness, breathing out any distractions and breathing in a sense of the presence of God. Then ask them to listen as you read the first phrase (“Blessed are the peacemakers”) repeating it silently to themselves on the inhale. Repeat the second phrase (“for they shall be called children of God”) as they exhale. Repeat the breath prayer several times. End with a brief time of silence.

4. Explore Two Final SDGs.

Invite participants to self-select to work either in a small group considering gSDG 16 or g 17. As in previous sessions, ask small groups to examine the targets and the ways one might get involved in addressing them, as well as reading over the vignettes. Ask them to record relevant information either on newsprint or a board, or in a digital file.

After allowing time for the two groups to work, gather again in the full group and ask groups to report. Discuss some of the following:

- In our use of the beatitude as a breath prayer, we noted that one has to set the conditions under which peace is possible. In what ways do you see the initiatives of the church named here as helping to initiate and sustain those conditions?
- If the work of peacemaking is an expression of our identity as children of God, where do you see connections with urgent concerns about violence in your community?
- Where do you see the church expressing itself as a movement as well as an institution?
- Simon Doong observes that partnership is not simply one group giving and another receiving. It is a relationship where all parties both give and receive, listen and speak. What evidence do you see that PC (USA) is exemplifying partnership in how it walks alongside its global partners? How does your congregation give witness to this perspective in its mission and outreach?


Responding (10 minutes)

5. Consider Faithful Actions.

Revisit “A Dynamic Diagram of Dimensions” and ask participants to examine specifically where the dimensions of peace and partnership are located on the diagram. Ask participants to respond in writing to the following:

- What does the positioning of these dimensions tell you about the relationship between peace, partnership and the other dimensions?
- Do you think we can effectively address the dimensions of people, planet and prosperity without proactive approaches to peace, justice and strong institutions? Is it possible to work toward any of these other goals without a concerted effort at partnership?
- What does partnership mean to those who have power and influence? How do we provide a forum for the voices and agency of the less powerful to be heard and heeded?

Invite volunteers to share some of how they responded to these questions.

 **Closing** (5 minutes)

6. Wrap Up.

As in previous sessions, encourage participants to continue to choose a different vignette from those included under each of this session’s goal for each day’s devotional time. Ask them to pray the prayers included with each vignette.

Tell the group that in the final session, they will be exploring the connections and synergies among the goals, as well as formulating action plans for getting involved. Suggest that participants give some thought to their own passions and interests, and to how they and their congregation are already partners in working to achieve the 2030 Agenda through its goals.

7. Hear a Psalm. (Optional)

Invite the group to reflect on the relationships between justice, peace and righteousness as you read aloud Psalm 85:8–13.

8. Close with Prayer.

Pray the following prayer by Simon Doong, a young adult volunteer at the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations, or a prayer of your choosing:

Dear God, we are all blessed by your grace and love. May we be examples of your love through the relationships we form with one another, built on mutual understanding and working towards a world that is open and loving. Amen.

More Activities (Optional)

Consider National and Local Initiatives for Peace.

Ask group members to list issues in their community and the nation where peace and justice are needed to combat violence—issues such as gun violence, violence springing from anti-Semitism or racism, and the like. Encourage them to do research on the listed websites to find initiatives the church is involved in to address these issues.

Explore PC(USA) Advocacy.

Read about opportunities for advocacy on the websites of the PC(USA) Office of Public Witness (<https://capwiz.com.pcusa/home>) and the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations

(<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/un/>).



SESSION 6

Commit to Action Plans



Main Idea/Goal

Participants will identify one or more passion or interest, discover how it intersects with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and explore making a commitment to action.

Scriptural Foundation

Matthew 25:31–46 and Isaiah 65:17–25

Preparing

- The activity of encountering Scripture is focused on the reading of a passage from Isaiah. If you choose to have a strong reader to read the passage aloud for the group, contact that person in advance of the session so that they will have time to practice their assigned reading. Or practice reading the passage aloud yourself.
- Have available all newsprint sheets or copies of all digital files from the previous sessions. Plan to make them available around your learning space.
- Choose from among the suggested closing hymns and obtain hymnals.

Materials Needed

- Newsprint sheets or large drawing paper and markers for each participant.
- Newsprint sheets or digital files generated in previous sessions.
- Bibles
- Copies of the “Study and Devotional Guide: on the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals” for each participant.
- Journals, writing paper and pens for those who do not bring them.

Opening (5 minutes)

As participants arrive, welcome them to this final session. Encourage them to move around your space reading over the information, questions and observations the group has generated during the study, and reflecting on what they have learned and what they may want to study further. Also suggest that they review what they themselves have recorded over the study in their journals. Allow enough time for participants to reflect on the breadth and depth of information.

1. Gather Together.

When most participants have arrived, invite them to gather together. Invite participants to respond, popcorn fashion, to the following questions:

- Of all the information we generated about the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs, what facts seem the most significant to you?
- What is the most troubling, and what is the most challenging?
- What unanswered questions do you have?

Tell the group that in this final session, they will seek to discern the interrelated nature of the 17 SDGs and identify significant, specific ways that they as individuals and as a church can respond.

2. Open with Prayer.

Pray the following prayer by Christi Boyd, facilitator for Women and Children's Interests in Africa, Presbyterian Mission Agency, or a prayer of your choosing:

God, out of many parts you unite us into a greater calling together. Help us to listen for your spirit working in our relationships every day. Amen.

 **Exploring** (25 minutes)

3. Encounter Biblical Visions for the Future.

Recall for participants that the focus Scripture for this study has been an apocryphal vision of the Last Judgment—one that makes the claim that responding to the needs of the vulnerable is central to faith. In this concluding session of the study, the group will encounter a vision that points us to what the world might be like if all our actions are focused on realizing shalom for the whole creation.

Tell the group that they will hear a passage from a portion of the book of Isaiah known as Third Isaiah. Scholarly research points to this part of Isaiah having been written sometime after the rebuilding of the Temple in 520 B.C., when the people, having experienced Yahweh's judgment, had endured years of exile and were returning to their homeland.

Read aloud or have the volunteer you recruited read Isaiah 65:17–25.

Tell the group that scholar Walter Brueggemann observes that this passage describes the following facets of the new creation to come, and suggests that they are conditions that prevail in actual social relationships — not just theological ideas.⁹

- Stability and order that guarantees long life.
- Economic stability.
- An agenda of well-being for children.

Ask the group to consider and respond to the following questions:

- Where do you see connections between these facets of the new creation and the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda?
- Third Isaiah's message is addressed to a people who have been subjected to defeat and exile. Can you apply the metaphor of judgment and exile to our current context? What parallels do you see?
- In what ways do the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs represent a vision of the abundant life for all?

4. Discover Connections.

Read aloud the following paragraph from the vignette from gSDG 17, "Partnership for the Goals," by Christi Boyd:

Systemic causes of destitution are usually interconnected, as the harrowing experiences of women and children in Congo's war zones demonstrate. It necessitates the comprehensive response reflected in the breadth of efforts by our Congolese partners, PC (USA) congregations, and ministries of the Presbyterian Mission Agency. As some support the direct needs of conflict-related rape survivors and displaced children, others mobilize to break the cycle of violence. Healing the wounds of childhood trauma, pleading with warring factions to cease child recruitment, promoting measures for responsible mineral sourcing to counter resource-fueled conflict, eliminate child labor, and ensure good governance with investments in schools, hospitals and roads rather than in warfare—it is an impressive list of complementary initiatives. Whether they add up to a patchwork or pattern, however, depends on the level of coordination between those involved.

While Boyd is addressing partnership here, her example illustrates the interconnectivity of the 17 SDGs. This is not just a menu list of individual goals from which to pick and choose. Because this is true, addressing any one goal will have implications for the others as well.

Recall for participants that one homework assignment from the previous session was to identify one personal passion or an issue they are already addressing in some way. Distribute large sheets of paper and markers. Invite participants to print in the center of

their paper the passion or issue they identified. Underneath, ask them to print the SDG they identify as most closely related to their issue. Then ask them to create a goals web, printing around the paper other goals they see as most directly connected to their issue and drawing lines to connect them. In some cases they may want to add targets that specifically address their concern.

If space allows, display sheets side by side on a table or across a wall. If your group is large, you may want to connect three or four sheets in groups rather than the entire group's sheets. Invite volunteers to name connections they may see between one person's issue or passion and one or more others. Invite observations or comments from participants. Ask the group to revisit Christi Boyd's vignette. Point out that in the denomination's mission initiatives, we have been exemplifying partnership for many years.

Responding (10 minutes)

5. Consider Faithful Actions.

On newsprint or a board, print the following:

1. Sign up for action alerts from The Office of Public Witness in Washington and support the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations.
2. Contribute to the church's special offerings, specifically the One Great Hour of Sharing Offering and the Peace and Global Witness Offering.
3. Sign up to become a Matthew 25 Initiative church at <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/matthew-25/>.
4. Continue to educate myself and pray regularly about the issues of justice closest to my heart, seeking to encounter Christ in the lives of those who are vulnerable.

Remind the group that for those who feel overwhelmed by the enormous scope of need that the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs seek to address, these four steps can be a significant beginning in addressing those needs.

Also underscore that no one can possibly focus their attention on every need that exists, but because the goals are built on the understanding that they are intimately connected, committing to taking steps to address one issue or passion has a positive effect on many issues.

Invite participants to respond in writing in their journals to the following:

- _____ is an issue or concern about which I am passionate. I am already taking the following steps: _____.
- In the coming months, I commit to taking the following additional step or steps: _____.

Plan to send a text message or an email to participants in the next few weeks as a reminder of the commitment they have made.

Closing (5 minutes)

6. Wrap Up.

Invite participants to respond, popcorn style, to the following open-ended prompts:

- As we conclude this study, I am grateful for ...
- I wish we had ...
- I plan to follow up what I have learned by ...

Point out that often a study such as this one plants seeds that continue to bear fruit, helping participants to look at injustice with fresh eyes and leading to new insights.

7. Close with a Hymn.

Close with a hymn about justice, such as "The Lord Now Sends Us Forth" (Glory to God, 747); "Come! Live in the Light!" (Glory to God, 749); "Today We All Are Called to Be Disciples" (Glory to God, 757); or another hymn familiar to your group.

More Activities (Optional)

Explore Another Passage from Isaiah. Invite the group to listen as someone reads aloud Isaiah 58. Note that at the time Third Isaiah was writing, there was an emerging dispute about what was essential in the shaping of Judaism following the long years of judgment and exile. This passage argues for an inclusive faith focused on meeting the needs of the vulnerable. Contrasted with this understanding of faith is the view of those in the community who were primarily concerned with a focus on worship. Discuss some of the following:

- Scholar Walter Brueggemann characterizes the worship described here as worship without public ethics — worship that distorts God and ultimately distorts social relations as well.¹⁰ How do you respond?
- How does this passage characterize a true fast?
- We experience a similar divide among believers today. What would you say to those who contend that social action is antithetical to Christian faith?
- What would you say to those who advocate for “feel good” worship as the primary focus of the faith?

Connect Programs to the SDGs.

Ask participants to name outreach or mission concerns that are addressed by programs your congregation supports in some way. Elicit from the group connections these programs or initiatives have to one or more of the SDGs. Also invite participants to identify how any goals suggest supporting an initiative of the Presbyterian Hunger Program, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, or Self-Development of People. How many times is advocacy suggested through the Office of Public Witness or the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations? Discuss how individuals and congregations can provide valuable support through programs already in place, ensuring that the way we address a need is indeed a pattern, as Christi Boyd suggests is necessary, and not just a patchwork approach.

Identify Local Needs.

Invite the group to identify a local issue needing attention that their congregation might address.

Encourage them to use the following steps:

- Canvass the community to find other partners already working on the issue, such as local agencies, other congregations, interfaith groups and the like.
- Identify an aspect of the issue that needs particular attention. For example, if your church is interested in addressing quality child care, you may discover there is adequate affordable quality care for preschoolers, but not for infants and toddlers. Or you may find there is a need for continuing education for family child care providers.
- Partner with other agencies and individuals to address the gap in services or in public policy advocacy.

Endnotes

- 1 Information adapted from the following commentaries:
Matthew, by Thomas G. Long. *Westminster Bible Companion*, Patrick D. Miller and David L. Bartlett, Series Editors (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995).
Matthew, by Anna Case-Winters. *Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*, Amy Plantinga Pauw and William C. Placher, General Editors (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015).
- 2 Case-Winters, p. 1.
- 3 Ibid. p. 281.
- 4 *Book of Common Worship. Office of Theology and Worship*, Presbyterian Church (USA). (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press), p. 562.
- 5 Ibid. pp. 932–933.
- 6 Ibid. p. 632.
- 7 Ibid. pp. 599–600.
- 8 Case-Winters, pp. 99–100.
- 9 *Isaiah 40–66*, by Walter Brueggemann. *Westminster Bible Companion*, Patrick D. Miller and David L. Bartlett, Series Editors (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press), p. 247.
- 10 Ibid. p. 188.



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