WORLD COMMUNION OFFERING

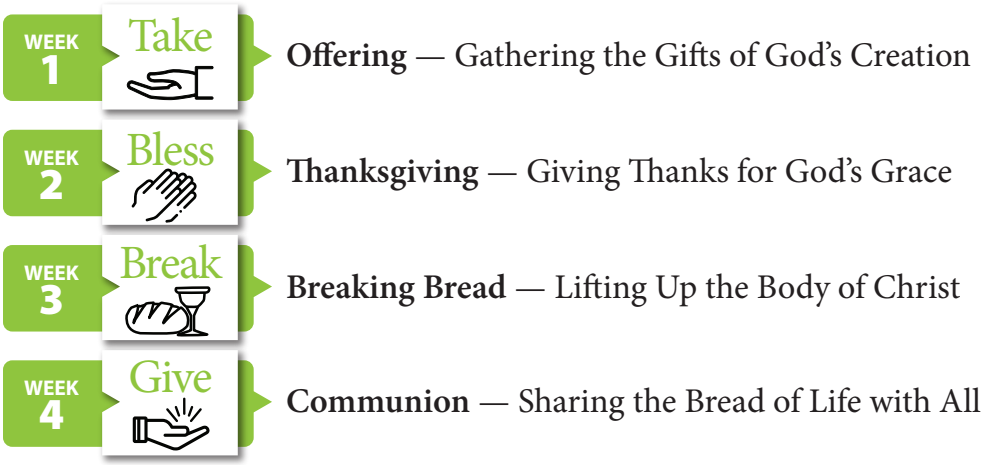
A Season of Preparation

WHAT IS A SEASON OF PREPARATION?

A season of preparation is a special period dedicated to getting ready for something significant, involving spiritual growth, skill-building and gathering the many ways to prepare. It is often characterized by challenges and anticipation that cause our faith to be tested, confirmed, and affirmed by God and the movement of the Holy Spirit. It's a time of active commitment to spiritual growth through prayer, study and discipline.

A Season of Preparation before congregations receive the World Communion Offering, created by the 226th General Assembly (2024), will invite members of the church community to learn more about the practice of communion and how it is a vital part of their congregation's worshiping life. It will also prepare the community for what happens after the sacrament is shared and the Offering is received by engaging in learning about and engaging in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s mission and ministry around the World Communion Offering cause areas identified by the General Assembly: racial justice, gender justice, peacemaking, global witness, and ecumenical and interfaith relations.

We have provided four weeks of resources.



A Season of Preparation –

WEEK 2

SEPT. 13

Bless - **Thanksgiving** — Giving Thanks for God's Grace

Introduction

The logistical plan for the World Communion Offering echoes the liturgical rhythm of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in our Presbyterian tradition. Communion or the Eucharist is comprised of a fourfold pattern of

- Gathering
- Blessing/Thanksgiving
- Breaking
- Giving

So, too, is the World Communion Offering organized around those same four faithful exercises of

- Gathering
- Blessing/Thanksgiving
- Breaking/Dividing
- Giving

Perhaps these are, in fact, the immutable rhythms of the life of faith in Christ. These are the fourfold approaches to reconciliation and to the unity for which Jesus prayed "*May they be one…*". World Communion Sunday, with its special offering is, therefore, a unique opportunity to express in word and in deed our commitment to reconciliation and unity. As we approach and share in this meal alongside Christians around the world, sacramentally the day set aside for Christians throughout the world to participate in the Lord's Supper and in gratitude take up an offering intended to address the world's brokenness, it is well to reflect upon these four themes.

Blessing

Gathered people, elements and offerings are blessed in the language and litany of faith. To bless is to invoke God's presence and favor — to make holy. The Hebrew word for bless is *barak*, meaning t*o bestow the power to thrive*.

The ancient threefold blessing with which Moses blessed Aaron and his sons asserts: "*May the Lord bless and keep you; may the Lord make his face to shine upon you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*" Often used as a benediction, this blessing invokes God's enduring presence and protection.

Jesus blessed many people, even those outside of the bounds of ancient Jewish perceptions of those qualified for God's favor. In his sermon on the mount Jesus pronounced a blessing upon the meek, the poor in spirit, the peacemakers and the merciful (Matthew 5:3–12). He also blesses a Samaritan woman at the well, crossing cultural

and social barriers and norms (John 4). Jesus blesses the children, opposing common convention (Mark 10:13-16) and blesses his disciples (Luke 24:50).

At the table, Jesus takes the bread and, having given thanks, blesses it. At the communion table for World Communion Sunday we, too, give thanks and bless the elements praying, "*Take, O God, these elements and bless them that they might serve not a common purpose but a sacred purpose. Then take, O God, our lives that they too might fill not a common but a sacred purpose.*"

The World Communion Offering is received, blessed and dedicated in the same spirit of gratitude and hope of reconciliation. It is received in the hope that all might be blessed by it, that is, given the power and resources to thrive. This offering is applied to those purposes that seek to make whole and well the creation that God loves. And so, we pray, "*As we joyfully return a portion of all of your bounty, O God, bless now the gift and the giver, that both might serve your purposes in a world of need.*"

Worship Resources

16th Sunday After Pentecost
Exodus 14:19–31 or Genesis 50:15–21
Psalm 114 or Psalm 103:8–13
Romans 14:1–12
Matthew 18:21–35

Call to Worship

Rejoice and give thanks, people of God!
Celebrate the life within you, and Christ's presence in your midst!
Our eyes shall be opened!
The presence will have new meaning, and the future will be bright with hope.
Rejoice and give thanks, people of God!
Bow your heads before the One who is our wisdom and our strength.
We place ourselves before our God;
That we may be touched and made whole by the power of God's Spirit.

Prayer of Confession

God of love, we come to you now to confess our sins.
We confess that we have been selfish and wasteful in the use of the gifts and talents you have given us.
We tend to hoard things, lacking faith that enough will be provided.
We give in to temptations we encounter and take for granted the blessings you give.
We get carried away with our getting and spending,
and forget about giving and sharing.
Forgive us our selfishness.
Forgive us our squandering.
Forgive us our petty grudges, which we carry endlessly.
Restore us now in courage and faith and help us to love each other as Christ has taught.
In His name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of Thanks and Blessing

(This prayer is to recognize the symbols of the summer memories that were gathered and received last week. It is suggested that they be arranged on the communion table.)

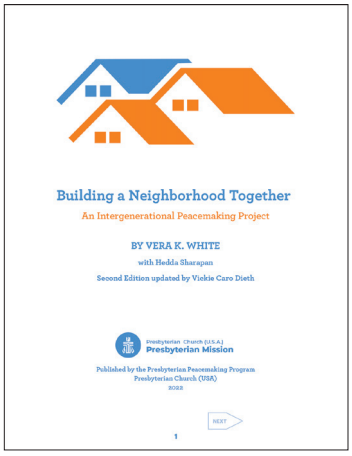
For the earth, and all that is part of it.
We praise and thank you, O God.
For rocks, signs of your strength and your steadfast love.
We praise and thank you, O God.
For shells, signs of your variety and your joy in creating this world, which you have given to our care.
We praise and thank you, O God.
For the birds, signs of the freedom that is ours when we recognize that we are your children.
We praise and thank you, O God.
For the fish of the sea and animals that walk on the land, a reminder to us that the new earth is to be a place where your people live, work and share in peace.
We praise and thank you, O God.
For mountains and seas, for forests and fields, for villages and cities where we experience your beauty and presence in this world that you have made.
We praise and thank you, O God.
For the people we have encountered and the people present at this celebration, who by their readiness to learn and listen, and openness of heart and mind, are signs of the body of Christ and your promises to us.
We praise and thank you, O God. Amen.

Suggested Hymns: Praise My Soul, the God of Heaven (Glory to God #619)
Help Us Accept Each Other (Glory to God #754)
There's a Wideness in God's Mercy (Glory to God #435)
I Will Call Upon the Lord (Glory to God #621)

Activities

— Use the prayer printed above to celebrate the memories of summer that people gathered last week and this week and placed on the communion table.

— For the children's sermon, ask the children if they realized that God has put a star in the middle of every apple. Take an apple and cut it in half, horizontally — the pattern of seeds at the apple's core reveals the shape of a star. Remind the children that when we have an attitude of gratitude and thanks, we are more likely to see the hidden blessings from God that lie right before our eyes.

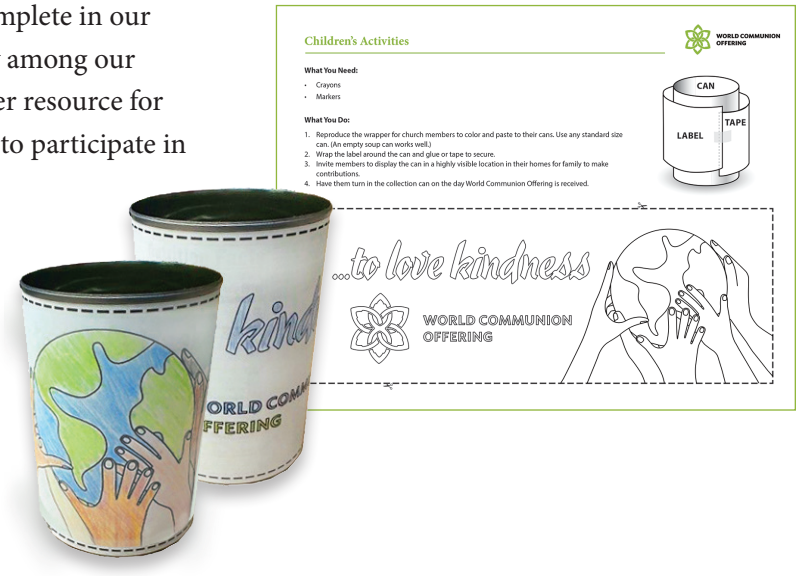


— Begin plans now to hold an Intergenerational Peacemaking Project for all ages. "Building a Neighborhood Together" is a program based on Fred Rogers' ideas about relationships, creative play, pride in making things, family communication and community. The curriculum is a free resource

available at pcusa.org/resource/building-neighborhood-together-intergenerational-peacemaking-project. You can find a story about how one congregation modified the program to hold a community Interfaith Peace Camp at pcusa.org/peace-global-witness-youth-building-interfaith-community.

— As you continue to make plans for World Communion Sunday, begin asking for and gathering various fabrics and decorative cloths from around the world to use in an opening processional. These will be used on World Communion Sunday to carry different kinds of bread representing our global community of faith.

— Our thanks and gratitude are made complete in our generosity. To help cultivate generosity among our youngest members, use the can wrapper resource for children to create coin banks for them to participate in the World Communion Offering. Visit pcusa.org/sites/default/files/2026-06/1022-SFD-World%20Communion%20Special%20Offering%202026-Can%20Wrapper%20PRINT.pdf.



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Questions?
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pcusa.org/oghs/resources