

FIRE UP THE SPIRIT
STUDIES IN STEWARDSHIP
AND CHURCH VITALITY

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FIRE UP THE SPIRIT

STUDIES IN STEWARDSHIP AND CHURCH VITALITY

WHAT IS STEWARDSHIP?

Stewardship is not a program. It is not a time of year. It is not asking for money. ***Stewardship is a lens through which people of the Spirit look at life.*** When looking at our experiences through the lens of Stewardship, we discover that things we thought were “ours” really belong to God, and that our role is to use those things as God directs.

Stewardship is not about tithing per se. A focus on tithing tends to encourage the fiction that 10% of ***our*** money should be given to God and that the other 90% can be used at our discretion. This is bad theology. The Biblical witness tells us that “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” (Psalm 24:1). One hundred percent of our material possessions are not ours at all. They belong to God and are given to us for God’s work. God has instructed us to give 10% of our income to the work of the Church, but God cares just as much about how we use the other 90%.

Stewardship is not just about money and possessions, either. ***Stewardship is about recognizing who is really in charge of the world and all that dwell therein.*** Your money is not yours; your house and your car are not yours; but neither do your spouse, your children, or even your own body belong to you. They are all God’s, placed within our sphere of influence for a time so that we may help each other along God’s path.

Although we don’t generally speak this way, as an exercise try eliminating the possessive pronoun from your vocabulary for a day and substitute “God’s.” Instead of saying, “I’d like you to meet my daughter,” say, “I’d like you to meet God’s daughter.” Instead of saying, “I had to get new tires for my car,” say, “I had to get new tires for God’s car.” See if it doesn’t alter the way you look at things. If you really want to bring it home try this: The next time you want to justify an unhealthy habit, instead of saying “I can do what I want with my own body,” say, “I can do what I want with God’s body” and see if you really believe that. The exercise will get you thinking. True Stewardship will change your life.

WHY ARE WE SO FOCUSED ON MONEY?

If Stewardship is not just about money and possessions, then why are we always talking about money and possessions? ***We spend so much time in American churches talking about money, because that is the place where our disease and our sin reaches the deepest.*** Greed has a stranglehold on our nation and those both inside and outside the Church bow to the power of money. Just the fact that money is one of the touchiest subjects to address from the pulpit, shows that we have issues in this area. Why should we get defensive when someone suggests we should

give more of our money, when there is no such response to a call for more time in prayer? We are beginning to awaken to the stewardship of the earth; we are learning that our bodily habits are a spiritual issue; but we are still as resistant to letting God examine our checkbooks as we ever have been, even as we careen toward financial ruin. ***To fail to talk about money in the context of stewardship is spiritual malpractice.***

Churches wrangle and wrestle with stewardship campaigns. We look for the best programs, the new gimmick, the sure-fire way to get people to put more money in the plate so that we can adequately fund the ministries to which God has called us. It is not wrong to want that or to recognize that most of the people sitting in United Methodist pews give only what is leftover from their other pursuits, and not even a high percentage of that. The Stewardship Task Force recognizes that ***some stewardship programs are more effective than others and that there are things we can do programmatically in this regard.***

THEN HOW COME THERE'S ONLY ONE STUDY ON MONEY?

When we increase the overall spiritual vitality of the church and focus on the spiritual formation of its members, programmatic and financial issues will take relatively little effort to resolve. The best givers (of time, talent, money, or other resources) do not give in response to a well-thought out program. The best givers give as a joyous response to the outpouring of God's love in their lives. Mature disciples of Jesus Christ don't give out of guilt or duty; they give out of love.

It is our hope that by using these studies in your church, you can help create an atmosphere where the fire of the Holy Spirit can be rekindled in your congregation, making disciples of Jesus Christ who recognize their role as stewards in God's world.

*The Stewardship Task Force
(Studies written by Rev. Anne Robertson, 2004)*

FUEL FOR THE FIRE

The following series of seven Bible Studies may seem like odd choices for a group focused on Stewardship. They reflect our belief, however, that churches which produce good stewards have a number of things in common.

Churches that produce good stewards:

- 1. Are Spirit-led and Spirit-filled.*
- 2. Are committed to the spiritual disciplines.*
- 3. Give generously, joyfully, and abundantly.*
- 4. Preach the Gospel, through word and deed, to those who have not heard it, no matter the risks.*
- 5. Delegate and divide the labor according to people's gifts.*
- 6. Address issues and conflicts with love, respect, prayer, and the guidance of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.*
- 7. Participate intentionally in acts of justice and mercy as a direct expression of faith.*

Using the book of Acts as a foundation, each Bible study focuses on one of these areas. They are designed to be used with those in your church who are in a position to make the way for spiritual growth and renewal in your congregation. This might be the formal leaders of your Church Council or it might be others with both the vision and the authority to bring about change. The questions require that at least some of those present for the study have the institutional memory of your congregation, both so that traditions can be respected and mistakes either not repeated or worked through.

Once the group has begun, they should go through all seven studies without adding new members to the class. By the time you reach the studies on spiritual gifts and conflicts, the success of the study becomes dependent on the trust level in the group. This is hard to maintain when new people are added.

NEW ENGLAND CONFERENCE FOCUS

Each of the studies is also tied to one or more areas identified by the Bishop and Cabinet as marks of a viable and authentic local church, listed below, and to the five critical issues of our annual conference: Spiritual Life, Evangelism and Church Growth, Area Diversity, Equipping Leadership, and Stewardship.

The marks of a viable and authentic local church:

- A. Is clear about its mission and primary task in a way that extends itself beyond itself; that is, the local church recognizes that it is called to minister to the community, that it's purpose is to be "in and for the world."

- B. Provides vital and engaging worship, including regular opportunities to share in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper.
- C. Engages people in spiritual formation beyond worship, and provides for the education and nurture of believers. (This formation and education includes training in stewardship of life.)
- D. Affirms and participates in connectional ministry, cooperating with other local churches--both United Methodist and ecumenical.
- E. Recognizes the importance of the global connections of the church, and encourages and provides for learning about and supporting/engaging with the global context.
- F. Trains lay people to take appropriate responsibility and leadership both within the congregation and within the community.
- G. Provides means for moving lay people into faith-sharing, disciple-making evangelism.
- H. Is financially solvent.

TEACHING THE BIBLE STUDIES

Each of the studies is designed to be an hour and a half in length. In that time frame, you are asked to select from the discussion questions listed, rather than trying to cover them all. If there is enough interest, you may want to expand the time-frame to allow for fuller discussion. It is not recommended that you use less than the 90 minutes suggested. If the desire is to use the studies for an hour-long Sunday School class, it would be preferable to take two weeks with each study. The real value of the studies comes from fully engaging the Scripture and then bringing it home to the local church context. *(Note: studies should only be used with a Sunday School class that has consistent attendance of the same people. Those classes open to new people coming and going are not good candidates for this study.)*

Each study closes with a time of silent reflection about some very important questions. Encourage participants to write down anything that might come to them in this time. These will be shared, according to the willingness of each to do so, at the closing worship which closes all seven studies.

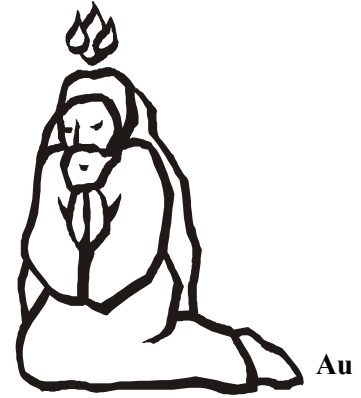
Formed By The Fire

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Acts 1:1-5 Acts 2:1-13 Exodus 19:10-25

NEW ENGLAND CONFERENCE CONCERNS

Areas Identified By The Bishop and Cabinet as Marks of a Viable and Authentic Local Church:



Provides vital and engaging worship, including regular opportunities to share in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Affirms and participates in connectional ministry, cooperating with other local churches--both United Methodist and ecumenical.

Recognizes the importance of the global connections of the church, and encourages and provides for learning about and supporting/engaging with the global context.

Critical Issues: *Spiritual Life, Stewardship*

MARKS OF A STEWARD

Stewards are Spirit-led and Spirit-filled.


OPENING WORSHIP (5 min.)

Hymn: #539 "O Spirit of the Living God"

Prayer: #542 "Day of Pentecost"

As a group, read the "Marks of a Steward" section aloud

EXPLORING THE PASSAGE (30 min.)

When Jesus ascended into heaven, he instructed  his disciples to stay in Jerusalem until the gift of the Holy Spirit was given to them. As they are waiting, the Jewish festival of Pentecost arrives. Pentecost was the celebration of the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai, which occurred about 50 days after Passover. Jesus' disciples were Jews, and just as they had gathered to celebrate the Passover just before Jesus' death, so now they have gathered together to celebrate Pentecost.

Have someone read Acts 1:1-5 and Acts 2:1-13 aloud to the group.

Pair up with another person. One of you take the role of a news reporter, the other take the role of someone present at the Pentecost festival. The reporter should conduct the interview to find out what happened. Be sure to ask the basic questions of news reporting: Who? What? When? Where? Why?

In the large group, have someone read Exodus 19:10-25 aloud.

Return to your partner and take the opposite roles. Conduct an interview about the events at Mt. Sinai.

Still in pairs, compare the events in Acts and Exodus. Make a list of some ways they are similar and some ways they are different. What were the problems each group faced as a result of these events? Report these back to the larger group.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION (20 min.)

Depending on the size of your group, you may discuss all together or divide into smaller groups of 4-5 each. Select questions from the ones below according to the needs and interests of your congregation.



1. The events at Mt. Sinai made the twelve tribes of Israel into a nation. The events in Jerusalem at Pentecost made the twelve disciples into the Church. What are some things that help turn a bunch of individuals into a cohesive group?
2. What is the difference between a group of individuals sitting in a church and a congregation?
3. What are the benefits of belonging to a group? What are the drawbacks?
4. Why do you think the events were so dramatic?
5. What do you think of, when you think of the Holy Spirit?

BRINGING IT HOME (30 min.)

Depending on the size of your group, you may discuss all together or divide into smaller groups of 4-5 each. Select questions from the ones below according to the needs and interests of your congregation.

1. Do people in our local church expect the Holy Spirit to act on Sunday mornings? In what ways? How could we help more people to come with such an expectation?
2. How would people in our church respond if the Holy Spirit showed up with wind and fire, like on Sinai or at Pentecost? Would a powerful experience of God cause problems for us? In what way? Does anyone expect THAT sort of experience of God on a Sunday morning? Why or why not?
3. Does our church act like a bunch of individuals or like a group? What do they gain from this?

What do they lose?

4. Do the people in our church feel like they are a part of any larger group? What do they gain from this? What do they lose?
5. How might an understanding of these passages help to increase our spiritual vitality as a local congregation?

PLAN OF ACTION (5 min.)

Encourage participants to make some notes either during or after this exercise about what comes to them during the silent time. There will be a time to share those thoughts (as each is willing) in the worship service that concludes the seven studies.

Have someone read the passages from Acts aloud one more time. Take a few moments of silence after the reading to ask God the following questions:

- 1. What do You want our church to learn from this passage?**
- 2. What specific step could we take in the next year put that teaching into practice?**

At the end of the time of silence, the leader should close in prayer.



These are further resources that you may want to explore to help your church grow in this area.

1. *Growing Spiritual Redwoods* by William M. Easum and Thomas G. Bandy. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997.
2. *Acts: The Gospel of the Spirit* by Justo L. Gonzalez. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001.
3. Walk to Emmaus.
The Walk to Emmaus is a spiritual renewal program intended to strengthen the local church through the development of Christian disciples and leaders. The Walk to Emmaus is grounded theologically and institutionally in the Upper Room ministry unit of the General Board of Discipleship of the United Methodist Church. Find out more by visiting www.upperroom.org/emmaus or by calling toll free 1-877-899-2780. You can also write to The Upper Room Walk to Emmaus, 1908 Grand Avenue, P.O. Box 340004, Nashville, TN 37203-0004.

Holiness of Heart and Life

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Acts 2:37-42 Exodus 20:1-21



NEW ENGLAND CONFERENCE CONCERNS

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Provides vital and engaging worship, including regular opportunities to share in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Engages people in spiritual formation beyond worship, and provides for the education and nurture of believers. (This formation and education includes training in stewardship of life.)

Critical Issues: *Spiritual Life, Stewardship*

MARKS OF A STEWARD

Good stewards are committed to the spiritual disciplines.

OPENING WORSHIP (5 min.)

Hymn: #395 "Take Time To Be Holy"

Prayer: #401 "For Holiness of Heart"

As a group, read the "Marks of a Steward" section aloud.

EXPLORING THE PASSAGE (30 min.)



Have someone read Acts 2:37-42 aloud to the group.

With a partner, look at the passage more closely. Write down all the verbs in one column and all the nouns in another. Look first at the verbs. Discuss with your partner which verb is the most important or interesting to you and why. Then discuss the one that seems most difficult or uninteresting to you and why. Next do the same thing with the nouns.

Come together as a large group and see if there was any consensus of important or unimportant words for the whole group. Don't get into the why, just take a tally of which were the interesting/important and uninteresting/difficult words. Discuss whether your findings might be true for your local church as a whole.

Have someone read Exodus 20:1-21 aloud to the group. Go back to your partner. Look over the commandments and share your answers to the following questions:

1. *When did you first hear about the Ten Commandments? Have you ever memorized them?*
2. *Do you think some of them are less important than others? Which ones? Why?*
3. *Do you think any of them are based in culture or are they all true for everyone everywhere?*

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION (20 min.)



1. Has the Church throughout history broken any of the Ten Commandments? When? How? What should be done about it, if anything?
2. Does your church lean toward some spiritual practices and away from others? Which ones? Why do you think that is?

BRINGING IT HOME (25 min.)

Depending on the size of your group, you may discuss all together or divide into smaller groups of 4-5 each. Select questions from the ones below according to the needs and interests of your congregation.

1. Is anyone aware of a time in the history of your local church when a church leader or the church as a body broke any of the Ten Commandments? How has this affected your church? Was anything ever done in response?
2. Make a list of the opportunities your church provides for teaching, fellowship, ritual/sacraments, and prayer. How many of these happen on Sunday morning? How many at other times? Would any of the following groups be unable to participate:
 - Those who work on weekends.
 - Those who work during the day.
 - Those who do not drive at night.
 - Those who care for small children.

PLAN OF ACTION (10 min.)

Encourage participants to make some notes either during or after this exercise about what comes to them during the silent time. There will be a time to share those thoughts (as each is willing) in the worship service that concludes the seven studies.

Have someone read Exodus 20:1-21 again, aloud. Take a few moments of silence to consider the following question:

1. **Is there anything for which your church still needs to repent or a harmful issue to which you have turned a blind eye? How might you begin to address this issue and heal old wounds? Who is feeling called to help the church with this?**

Have someone read Acts 2:37-42 again. Take a few moments of silence to consider the question:

2. What one or two things could you offer in the next year that would increase opportunities for teaching, fellowship, ritual/sacraments, or prayer? How will we follow up to be sure they happen?

At the end of the time of silence, the leader should close in prayer.



These are further resources that you may want to explore to help your church grow in this area.

1. *The Truth About God: The Ten Commandments in Christian Life* by Stanley M. Hauerwas and William H. Willimon Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999.
2. *Sabbath: Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest* by Wayne Muller. New York: Bantam Books, 1999.
3. *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life In God* by Dallas Willard. San Francisco: Harper, 1998.
4. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* by Richard Foster. San Francisco: Harper, 1988. (Study Guide is also available.)
5. The Academy for Spiritual Formation
The Academy for Spiritual Formation is an experience of disciplined Christian community emphasizing holistic spirituality—nurturing body, mind, and spirit. The program is meant for all those who hunger for deep spiritual experiences, both lay and clergy. There are both two-year and five-day Academy experiences. For more information contact:
The Academy for Spiritual Formation
The Upper Room
P.O. Box 340004
Nashville, TN 37203-0004
1-615-340-7232
www.upperroom.org/academy
6. Disciple Bible Study
The Disciple Bible Study program is designed to develop strong Christian leaders in local churches through the in-depth study of Scripture. Find out more at www.cokesbury.com or by calling toll-free 1-800-672-1789.
7. New England Annual Conference Resourcing Team
For additional resource suggestions contact Wanda Stahl at 978-291-0055 x221 or Stahl@neumc.org.

The Problem of Money

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Acts 2:43-47

Exodus 35:20-29

Psalm 84

Acts 4:32-37

Exodus 36:2-7



NEW ENGLAND CONFERENCE CONCERNS

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Is clear about its mission and primary task in a way that extends itself beyond itself; that is, the local church recognizes that it is called to minister to the community, that it's purpose is to be "in and for the world."

Is financially solvent.

Critical Issues: *Stewardship, Equipping Leadership*

MARKS OF A STEWARD

Good stewards give generously, joyfully, and abundantly.

OPENING WORSHIP (5 min.)

Hymn: #581 "Lord, Whose Love Through Humble Service"

Prayer: #570 "Prayer of Ignatius of Loyola"

As a group, read the "Marks of a Steward" section aloud.

EXPLORING THE PASSAGE (20 min.)



1. Divide into small groups of 2-5 people. Each group take one passage from Acts and one passage from Exodus. For each passage answer the following questions:

- A. *What did the people give?*
- B. *Why did the people give?*
- C. *Was there enough?*
- D. *What was the result of their giving?*

2. Back in the large group, discuss your findings. Were there answers common to a number of passages?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION (25 min.)



1. Find a partner and share answers to the following questions:
 - A. *What is your earliest memory of giving to someone else? As a child, how did you learn about giving to others?*
 - B. *Remember a time when you felt good about giving money to someone or something else. What made that feel good?*
2. Back in the large group, list all the ways that people learned about giving. Discuss the following:
 - A. *How can the church play a greater role in teaching children about giving?*
 - B. *Why is money such a difficult issue for churches today? Across the country, statistics show that the higher a person's income, the lower the percentage of giving to charitable causes. Why do you suppose this is so?*
 - C. *Are gratitude and giving connected? How?*

BRINGING IT HOME (30 min.)

Depending on the size of your group, you may discuss all together or divide into smaller groups of 4-5 each. Select questions from the ones below according to the needs and interests of your congregation.

In the large group, discuss the following:

1. Remember a time when your congregation rose to the occasion to meet a special financial need. What was it for? How did you raise the money? How did people feel about raising the money? Why did they give? If a dollar was a vote, what were they voting for?
2. Remember a time when the congregation failed to meet a financial goal. What was it for? How did you raise the money? Could you identify a reason that the effort did not succeed as you hoped? If a dollar was a vote, what did they fail to vote for?
3. What can you learn from these examples about why people in your congregation give?
4. If someone with no church background visits your church on a Sunday morning, how do they know what to do when the offering time comes? If a visitor asked an usher on the way out why people put money in the plate, what answer would they receive?
5. If you took a poll during the offering next Sunday morning, would people be more likely to say that they were giving to the church or that they were giving to God? How many would say they looked forward to the offering time?
6. If your church were to have a surplus of funds at the end of the year, what would they do with the extra money? Is this the example the church wants to set for its members?

PLAN OF ACTION (10 min.)

Encourage participants to make some notes either during or after this exercise about what comes to them during the silent time. There will be a time to share those thoughts (as each is willing) in the worship service that concludes the seven studies.

Have someone read Psalm 84 aloud. Spend a few minutes in silence and consider the following:

What could happen at the offering time in Sunday worship to help people understand giving as a joyous response rather than a grudging duty?

Have someone read Psalm 24 aloud. Spend a few minutes in silence and consider the following:

What is God saying to your church about its financial stewardship? How will you answer?

At the end of the time of silence, the leader should close in prayer.



These are further resources that you may want to explore to help your church grow in this area.

1. *Rambam's Ladder: A Meditation on Generosity and Why It Is Necessary to Give* by Julie Salamon. New York: Workman Publishing, 2003.
2. *Revolutionizing Christian Stewardship For The 21st Century: Lessons from Copernicus* by Dan R. Dick. Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1999.
3. The United Methodist Foundation of New England
The Foundation can provide help, information, and educational events on planned giving, investing, financial management, insurance, and other financial matters important to both individuals and local churches. They also provide some grants and financial assistance for needy ministries and projects. The Foundation is a resource for speakers and events related to stewardship. Every other year they join with the New England Ecumenical Stewardship Council to provide a major stewardship conference. Contact them at www.umfne.org or toll-free at 1-800-595-4347. They are located at 10 Bricketts Mill Rd., Ste. 5, P.O. Box 370, Hampstead, NH 03841.
4. Stewardship Task Force of the New England Annual Conference
The task force can offer help with resources related to stewardship. Contact the chair: Rev. Stan Cushing at srcushing@hotmail.com or at 508-234-2275.

Spreading the Word

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Acts 2:16-36

Acts 10:34-43

Acts 17:22-32

Acts 3:11-26

Acts 13:16-41



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Provides means for moving lay people into faith-sharing, disciple-making evangelism.

Critical Issues: *Evangelism and Church Growth, Area Diversity, Stewardship*

MARKS OF A STEWARD

Good stewards preach the Gospel, through word and deed, to those who have not heart it, no matter the risks.

OPENING WORSHIP (5 min.)

Hymn: #156 “I Love To Tell The Story”

Prayer: #597 “For The Spirit Of Truth”

As a group, read the “Marks of a Steward” section aloud.

EXPLORING THE PASSAGE (40 min.)



1. Divide into small groups of 2-5 people. All of the above passages are sermons preached by either Peter or Paul. Each group should select one of the sermons (leader be sure that each passage gets selected by at least one group) and note the answers to the following questions:

- A. *Who is speaking? To whom?*
- B. *What are the circumstances under which this sermon is being preached?*
- C. *What are the key points of the message?*
- D. *Does the preacher quote from other parts of Scripture or other sources? What are they?*
- E. *What is the response to the sermon?*
- F. *If this sermon were preached in your congregation this next Sunday, what would be the response? Why?*

2. Back in the large group, discuss your findings. Were there answers common to a number of passages? Put together a list of the key elements in these early sermons. Are these elements still important today? Why or why not?

3. Go back to the small groups and select one of the following passages to examine:

Acts 4:1-21

Acts 5:17-42

Acts 7:54-60

Acts 12:1-19

Acts 14:1-20

Acts 16:16-40

Acts 17:1-9

Note the answers to the following questions:

A. *What happens?*

B. *Why? What led up to these events?*

C. *What was the end result?*

D. *Was the misfortune a sign of God's displeasure or punishment?*

Share your findings with the large group.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION (10 min.)

Depending on the size of your group, you may discuss all together or divide into smaller groups of 4-5 each. Select questions from the ones below according to the needs and interests of your congregation.



1. These sermons and others like them moved the church from a collection of a few fishermen to one of the major religions of the known world. What made them so effective?
2. Some popular Christian leaders teach that if you do the will of God, you will experience financial and personal blessings. How might these early Christians respond to that message?

BRINGING IT HOME (30 min.)

Depending on the size of your group, you may discuss all together or divide into smaller groups of 4-5 each. Select questions from the ones below according to the needs and interests of your congregation.

1. All of these sermons were preached to those who were not yet Christians. Most of our sermons today are preached within church walls to those who already profess some level of faith. How does your local church get the Gospel message out to those who do not have faith? What is the response?
2. What are 3-5 things that most of your members would agree must be included in a message to those in your community who have no faith?
3. What is important to the people in your community? How do you know this, or how might you find out? How might your church connect with them on issues they find important?

4. Is your church more inclined to spread the Gospel by word or deed or both?
5. What are the risks you might face as individuals or as a church if you were more intentional about spreading the Gospel outside the church walls? How might you prepare to meet those risks?

PLAN OF ACTION (5 min.)

Encourage participants to make some notes either during or after this exercise about what comes to them during the silent time. There will be a time to share those thoughts (as each is willing) in the worship service that concludes the seven studies.

Have someone read aloud Matthew 28:16-20. Spend a few minutes in silence and reflect on the following:

Is there one time in the next year when our church could find a way to send its message out into the community instead of expecting the community to come to us? When? How?

At the end of the time of silence, the leader should close in prayer.

Note: Before the next session, each participant should spend some time filling out the Interest and Ability Survey at the end of the next lesson.



These are further resources that you may want to explore to help your church grow in this area.

1. *Worship Evangelism: Inviting Unbelievers Into the Presence of God* by Sally Morgenthaler. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999.
2. *Let the Redeemed of the Lord Say So* by H. Eddie Fox and George E. Morris. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991.
3. *Journey to Jesus: The Worship, Evangelism, and Nurture Mission of the Church* by Robert E. Webber. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001
4. Lay Speaking
Contact your District Superintendent about Lay Speaking classes related to this and other areas.
5. General Board of Discipleship Programs
 - A. **Congress on Evangelism:** This yearly, national gathering helps to get individuals and churches fired up about reaching their communities for Christ. Contact President Gary W. Exman at gjexman@prodigy.net or 614-471-0252. You can also get information at www.gbod.org/evangelism.

B. Lay Witness Mission: Find out about hosting a team of committed laity to help guide your congregation into a deeper faith-sharing experience. Contact: Robbie Jones, General Board of Discipleship, P.O. Box 340003, Nashville, TN 37203-0003. 1-877-899-2780 x7054. rjones@gbod.org.

C. Faith Sharing: In addition to the theology and theory for faith-sharing, Faith-Sharing Initiative training includes practical tools and exercises in personal faith-sharing. Equally important, however, is the focus on helping a congregation see its role as evangelist and enabling the congregational system to create an atmosphere of hospitality and grace. Contact information is also Robbie Jones, as listed under the Lay Witness Mission.

6. Alpha

The Alpha course consists of a series of talks, designed for new Christians and given around the informal setting of supper, small groups and coffee, addressing key issues relating to the Christian faith. Contact Alpha USA, 74 Trinity Place, 10th Floor, New York, NY 10006. 212-406-5269. www.alphausa.org.

7. PERCEPT, Inc.

PERCEPT compiles demographic, ethnographic, and lifestyle information within a defined radius of your church site. Useful to those wishing to reach the unchurched, plan a parallel development or those planting a new church. Call 1-800-442-6277 or visit www.perceptnet.com for more information.

8. New England Annual Conference Consultants

For personalized help for you congregation contact Evelyn Johnson Moore at 860-739-8487 or ejohnsonmoore@juno.com.

Sharing the Work

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Acts 6:1-7

Exodus 18:13-27

1 Corinthians 12:1-31

Ephesians 4:4-13



NEW ENGLAND CONFERENCE CONCERNS

Areas Identified By The Bishop and Cabinet as Marks of a Viable and Authentic Local Church:

Engages people in spiritual formation beyond worship, and provides for the education and nurture of believers. (This formation and education includes training in stewardship of life.)

Trains lay people to take appropriate responsibility and leadership both within the congregation and within the community.

Critical Issues: *Equipping Leadership, Stewardship*

MARKS OF A STEWARD

Good stewards delegate and divide the labor according to people's gifts.

OPENING WORSHIP (5 min.)

Hymn: #114 "Many Gifts, One Spirit"

Prayer: #607 "Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition"

As a group, read the "Marks of a Steward" section aloud.

EXPLORING THE PASSAGE (25 min.)



Have someone read Acts 6:1-7 aloud. Then have another person read Exodus 18:13-27. Find a partner and discuss the following for each of the passages:

1. *What is the presenting problem?*
2. *How do you suppose the problem was created?*
3. *How is it solved?*
4. *How are the new people selected?*
5. *What are the results?*

With your partner, take turns describing a time when you felt like Moses or the apostles in these passages. What did you do? Did it work?

Back in the large group, have two different people read the passages from Ephesians and Corinthians. Take newsprint and make a list of all the gifts that are listed. Are there others you think should be on the list?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION (15 min.)

Depending on the size of your group, you may discuss all together or divide into smaller groups of 4-5 each. Select questions from the ones below according to the needs and interests of your congregation.



1. Moses was doing something he was good at, he was just doing too much of it. How do we get into situations like that? What stands in the way of delegating some of that work? What makes delegating easier?
2. The apostles ended up having their work compromised by doing jobs for which they were not called or gifted. How do we get into situations like that? What stands in the way of letting go of work that we don't like or don't do well? What makes it easier to give up a job to someone who is more suited for it?

BRINGING IT HOME (40 min.)

1. Each person should have spent some time on their own, filling out the Interest and Ability Survey. If the above discussion has made anyone aware of something new, take a minute to add it now.
2. Take turns affirming the gifts of others in your group. Be sure that every person has heard at least one other person describe their gifts. Only focus on the question of what a person does well. It will be up to them to decide whether what they do well is also an interest of theirs. Do not get into telling others what they don't do well.
3. Each person should find a partner who knows them fairly well. Partners should discuss what they learned in number two as well as the things they identified at home. Help each other put at least one thing in every box. Everyone is good at something and has an interest in something. Likewise, everyone has areas where they are not as strong and areas of little interest. *[Try not to think in extremes. You can say you are a good musician without implying that you are Beethoven and you can say that you don't have good people skills without saying that you're Ted Bundy. On the flip side, you don't have to either apologize for your strengths or justify your weaknesses. The whole point of gifts is that we have some and not others and it takes all of us together to make a whole. We are healthiest and happiest (as are those around us) when we recognize what we do well and what we don't.]*
4. Once you and your partner are content with your grids, come together as a large group. On the newsprint, list all the things that at least one person in the group has in the top left box of the grid--that is, the things that people both do well and enjoy. Next to each of those items, list a job in your local church that makes primary use of that gift. There may be more than one job next to some items.
5. As individuals, compare that list to your own grid. Is there a job that is particularly suited to

the things you do well and enjoy? Are you doing it? Are you doing something where the associated gifts are things you don't do well or don't enjoy? Why are you doing them?

6. As a group, talk about what you have learned. Ask whether there is any way to either share the load with others who have similar gifts or to shift the burden of work to someone more suited for it.

6. How could you help members of your congregation discover their gifts?

7. How might your Lay Leadership Committee consider a person's gifts in making nominations?

PLAN OF ACTION (5 min.)

Encourage participants to make some notes either during or after this exercise about what comes to them during the silent time. There will be a time to share those thoughts (as each is willing) in the worship service that concludes the seven studies.

Have someone read aloud Ephesians 4:1-7. Spend a few minutes in silence to consider this question:

How could I better use the gifts God has given me in my church, my job, and my community?

At the end of the time of silence, the leader should close in prayer.



These are further resources that you may want to explore to help your church grow in this area.

1. *Spirit Gifts: One Spirit, Many Gifts. Discovering God's Direction for Your Life* by Patricia D. Brown. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996.
2. *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling The Central Purpose Of Your Life* by Os Guinness. Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 1998.
3. *Equipped For Every Good Work* by Dan R. and Barbara Dick. The four tools—Spiritual Gifts Inventory, Leadership/Interaction Styles, Spirituality Web, and Task Type Preferences—help individuals and groups discover and understand the gifts, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors that influence their ability to live as Christian disciples and to lead within a community of faith. Contact Dan R. Dick, Director of Congregational Planning and Leader Development, General Board of Discipleship, P.O. Box 340003, Nashville, TN 37203-0003. 1-877-899-2780 x7079. dick@gbod.org. www.gbod.org/equipped.
4. New England Annual Conference Resourcing Team
For additional resource suggestions contact Wanda Stahl at 978-291-0055 x221 or Stahl@neumc.org.

INTEREST AND ABILITY SURVEY

Things I Do Well	Things I Don't Do Well
Things I Enjoy	
Things I Dislike	

A Church In Conflict

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Acts 15:1-35 Genesis 17:1-14

NEW ENGLAND CONFERENCE CONCERNS

Areas Identified By The Bishop and Cabinet as Marks of a Viable and Authentic Local Church:

Affirms and participates in connectional ministry, cooperating with other local churches--both United Methodist and ecumenical.

Recognizes the importance of the global connections of the church, and encourages and provides for learning about and supporting/engaging with the global context.

Critical Issues: *Spiritual Life, Equipping Leadership, Stewardship*

MARKS OF A STEWARD

Good stewards address issues and conflicts with love, respect, prayer, and the guidance of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.


OPENING WORSHIP (5 min.)

Hymn: #560 "Help Us Accept Each Other"

Prayer: #556 "Litany for Christian Unity"

As a group, read the "Marks of a Steward" section aloud.

EXPLORING THE PASSAGE (20 min.)

Divide the Acts 15 reading between two or three people  and read aloud to the group.

The Council of Jerusalem is a watershed moment in the life of the early church. The missionary efforts of the apostles was so effective that the early Christian movement had moved outside of the Jewish faith to include new Gentile believers. This created a new question: Is Christian faith a subset of Judaism, in which case converts need to become Jews, being circumcised and adhering to the Law, or is it something different enough that such requirements are not necessary? Predictably, there were strong feelings on both sides of the issue, especially when circumcision was questioned. Read Genesis 17:1-14 aloud as a reminder of the importance of circumcision for the Jews.



Look at the Jerusalem Model for Conflict Resolution at the end of this study. Identify the specifics according to Acts 15. Where do you see each step happening? What seemed to be the most convincing argument?

If you have a large class and extra time, you might want to stage the Council as a modern trial before a jury, accusing Paul of subverting the faith by failing to require circumcision. Select attorneys for the prosecution and defense as well as a judge and jury. You may want some witnesses as well. With a smaller group you could stage a debate with a panel to decide the outcome.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION (30 min.)



1. The Council of Jerusalem took radical action. To say that Gentile converts did not need to become circumcised would have felt to the Jews like it would feel to Christians if it were decided that Islamic converts to Christianity do not need to be baptized. Their decision essentially threw out large chunks of Scripture, saying that they did not apply under these new circumstances and citing experiential evidence that the Holy Spirit didn't seem to care whether Gentiles kept the Law or not. Did they make the right decision? Does this have implications for conflicts in the church today?
2. The Council did not make a decision on the basis of Scripture alone. Wesleyan tradition in the Quadrilateral provides for us to consider arguments from other sources as well (Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience). What are the benefits of this? What are the dangers?
3. Examine the process itself. Are there other elements you would add? What else might have happened that is not recorded here? How long do you think it probably took to reach a decision?

BRINGING IT HOME (30 min.)

Depending on the size of your group, you may discuss all together or divide into smaller groups of 4-5 each. Select questions from the ones below according to the needs and interests of your congregation.

1. How does your church respond to issues and conflicts? What was the last major decision your local church made? How was the issue decided? Did it settle the issue satisfactorily for both sides? List some things your church learned from that incident.
2. How are decisions in your local congregation usually made? Do you use Robert's Rules or Consensus? Why? How do you let others know what decisions have been made?
3. Look at the steps in the Jerusalem process. Which parts of the process does your church do well? Which parts are more difficult for you as a church?
4. Is there a current issue facing your church might be addressed using this model?

PLAN OF ACTION (5 min.)

Encourage participants to make some notes either during or after this exercise about what comes to them during the silent time. There will be a time to share those thoughts (as each is willing) in the worship service that concludes the seven studies.

Have someone read Philippians 2:1-11 aloud. During a few minutes of silence, consider the following:

What is God saying to you and to your church about dealing with conflict?

At the end of the time of silence, the leader should close in prayer.



These are further resources that you may want to explore to help your church grow in this area.

1. *Getting To Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* by Roger Fisher and William Ury. 2nd Edition. New York: Penguin Books, 1991.
2. *Boundaries: When to Say YES, When to Say NO to Take Control of Your Life* by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992.
3. Alban Institute
An ecumenical, interfaith organization founded in 1974, which supports congregations through consulting services, research, book publishing, and educational seminars. Conflict resolution in a faith context is a particular speciality of theirs. Contact: The Alban Institute, Suite 100, 2121 Cooperative Way, Herndon, VA 20171. 1-800-486-1318.
www.alban.org
4. New England Annual Conference Consultants
For personalized help for you congregation contact Evelyn Johnson Moore at 860-739-8487 or ejohnsonmoore@juno.com.

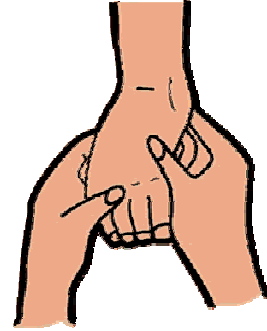
JERUSALEM MODEL FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

1. Define the issue.
2. Select representatives from those involved on both sides of the dispute.
3. Gather them together with spiritually mature church leaders.
4. Listen without comment or interruption to both sides.
5. Consider arguments which relate to: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience.
6. Listen to the wise who comment on what has been presented.
7. Decide on a course of action and support that decision with arguments from Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience.
8. Inform those affected by the decision:
 - A. In writing.
 - B. In person by someone who was part of the decision-making process and who has respect from all parties.

Engaged in Mission

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Acts 19:23-41 Acts 16:16-24
Leviticus 25: 1-55



NEW ENGLAND CONFERENCE CONCERNS

Areas Identified By The Bishop and Cabinet as Marks of a Viable and Authentic Local Church:

A

Is clear about its mission and primary task in a way that extends itself beyond itself; that is, the local church recognizes that it is called to minister to the community, that its purpose is to be “in and for the world.”

Engages people in spiritual formation beyond worship, and provides for the education and nurture of believers. (This formation and education includes training in stewardship of life.)

Critical Issues: *Area Diversity, Stewardship*

MARKS OF A STEWARD

Good stewards participate intentionally in acts of justice and mercy as a direct expression of faith.

OPENING WORSHIP (5 min.)

Hymn: #593 “Here I Am, Lord

Prayer: #574 “For Renewal of the Church”

As a group, read the “Marks of a Steward” section aloud.

EXPLORING THE PASSAGE (30 min.)



Divide into two groups. One group should explore the passage from Acts 19, the other the passage from Acts 16. In each of your groups, prepare a five-minute news broadcast about the events in your passage. Reporters, of course, should be unbiased, but you might also want to

interview witnesses, who may have reactions to the people or the situation. You might want to consider including the following questions in preparing your report:

1. *How did Paul and company end up in trouble? Who was upset? Why?*
2. *What public charge was made?*
3. *How did the events play out? Were they punished?*

4. *Did the public charge square with what really happened?*
5. *Was the charge justified? Was the outcome fair?*

Present your news broadcast to the other group.

Back in the combined group, divide the Leviticus passage in paragraphs or other small chunks and give one segment to each member of the group or a pair of members if the group is large. Take a minute or so to go through your individual passage and write down what issue of justice or compassion is being addressed, how it is being handled, and who or what is benefitting from it. Share the findings in the larger group.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION (20 min.)

Depending on the size of your group, you may discuss all together or divide into smaller groups of 4-5 each. Select questions from the ones below according to the needs and interests of your congregation.



1. How many of the findings in all of the above passages involved economics?
2. What would it mean for American society to live according to the laws in Leviticus 25?
3. If we are not prepared to live by the laws laid out in Leviticus 25, how do we/could we address the concerns that these laws were meant to serve?
4. Should the Church be involved in economic affairs? Why or why not?

BRINGING IT HOME (30 min.)

Depending on the size of your group, you may discuss all together or divide into smaller groups of 4-5 each. Select questions from the ones below according to the needs and interests of your congregation.

1. Does anyone remember a time in the history of your local church when the church as a body stood up to an injustice? How was that done? What were the results?
2. The act of serving others is often divided into two categories: acts of justice and acts of mercy or charity. Acts of mercy are those compassionate acts designed to aid individuals in need. Food pantries, helping a burned out family, and putting a homeless man in a motel for the night are all examples of acts of mercy. Acts of justice are those actions that seek to expose the root of systemic problems and effect change. Lobbying Congress for support of civil rights, creating organizations for responsible parenthood, and raising awareness of issues through education or activism are all examples of works of justice. In a very simple example, acts of mercy feed the poor, acts of justice seek to eradicate poverty.

Given that definition, look at the ways your church has reached out in mission over the past year. Have you done more acts of mercy? More acts of justice? Are they equally balanced? Remember that through its mission shares, your church supports both acts of justice and acts of mercy here and around the world. Be sure your group knows what these are.

3. What acts of mercy are going unmet in your community? Is there a way your church could be involved?
4. What justice issues are facing your area? How could your church help with these?
5. Are there issues of justice or mercy right within the membership of your congregation? How might you respond?

PLAN OF ACTION (5 min.)

Encourage participants to make some notes either during or after this exercise about what comes to them during the silent time. There will be a time to share those thoughts (as each is willing) in the worship service that concludes the seven studies.

Have someone read aloud Matthew 25:31-40 and someone else read Matthew 25:41-46. Take a few moments of silence to ask God the following question:

What is the next step our church should take to be more actively involved in acts of justice and mercy?

At the end of the time of silence, the leader should close in prayer.



These are further resources that you may want to explore to help your church grow in this area.

1. *Engaging The Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* by Walter Wink. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992.
2. *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* by Ronald Takaki. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1993.
3. General Board of Global Ministry
The mission arm of the United Methodist Church. Check here for mission trip opportunities and for ways your church can help with needs both local and global. Contact them at 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10015. 1-800-862-4246.
www.gbgm-umc.org.
4. General Board of Church and Society
Offers resources, educational events, and partnerships to help local churches and annual conferences interpret domestic and international social justice issues. Contact them at 100 Maryland Ave., NE, Washington, DC 20002. www.umc-gbcs.org. Neal Christie is the Assistant General Secretary, Resourcing Congregational Life, and he can be reached at 202-488-5611 or nchristie@umc-gbcs.org.

CLOSING WORSHIP

CALL TO WORSHIP:

“Move Me” (sing through 3x) #471

PRAYER: God of purifying fire and powerful wind, we are ready. We are ready to receive the gifts and challenges you have prepared for us as well as the power of your Holy Spirit to use and meet them. We confess that we have not always been as open to change in our hearts as we have been with our lips. Forgive us for years when we have failed to be your Body in this place.

Forgive us for wanting to preserve our comfort at the expense of the Gospel and for our blindness to the needs and hungers of the world.



We stand now ready to go another way, as long as you will lead us. Help us to stand strong, to remember your commitment to us as well as our commitment to you. Left to ourselves, nothing will change; but with you all things are possible. We open ourselves to your fire. We know it won't be easy, but we welcome you to forge our spirits anew. Make us your Church. We are ready. Amen.

HYMN: “God of Grace and God of Glory” #577

REMEMBERING WHERE WE BEGAN

Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows: UMH p. 50.

HYMN: “Come, Let Us Use the Grace Divine” #606

OFFERING OUR GIFTS

(During this segment, participants should share any thoughts and commitments that came to them during the silence which concluded each session. Each person should offer at least one gift...that is one way that they will help bring about some of the changes discussed. This might be something new they will do, but it also might be energies that are re-directed, or even the relinquishing of a position for the sake of new blood coming in. It can be anything felt to be a prompting from God during the silent times experienced across the length of the study.)

REMEMBERING WHO WE ARE

Service of Holy Communion: UMH p. 12

PRAYER: “A Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition” #607

HYMN: “You Are the Seed” #583