



Becoming Tomorrow's Church Today



**A Leader Training resource to help
congregations connect, enrich, empower,
and sustain their circles of faith**

Dear Leaders,

The Association of Presbyterian of Church Educators (APCE) presents to you this resource on the occasion of its 50th anniversary +1 year and beyond. Titled *Becoming Tomorrow's Church Today*, this is the vision of what lies beyond. APCE was born in 1971. In the year 2000, APCE adopted the mission statement that has in the ensuing years served to shape and transform our common ministry.

**The mission of APCE is to connect, enrich, empower,
and sustain persons serving in educational ministry
in the Reformed family of churches.**

Connect...Enrich...Empower...Sustain. While in its original formulation these dynamic verbs were intended to express what the organization sought to do for its members, these words can also articulate how APCE seeks to live out its common life. As we reflect on the fifty years gone by, these verbs can serve as a touchpoint for evaluating how far we have come and for celebrating what we have accomplished. They can serve as a lens through which we can look back over the totality of our past history. And they can be a framework for imagining where we might go and how we might serve in the fifty years to come.

Our gift to you is that this resource, in four sessions, each one centered around APCE's dynamic verbs serve as mission components for your leaders: *Connect, Enrich, Empower, and Sustain*. We hope this resource will serve as a leader development tool for a variety of contexts and people - staff training, church officer training, non-profit groups, denominational events, and more. As our world is constantly changing, APCE realizes that our churches, our groups, our contexts, and our ways of leading have to adapt and change as well. May this resource help you and the people you serve reflect on and choose to participate in *Becoming Tomorrow's Church Today*.

Each session is designed to last between 45 minutes to 1.5 hours, with flexibility to make it as long or short as needed. Each session will have a video that accompanies it, lasting between 15-17 minutes. Each video will have an introduction, display a quick bio for the speakers in that session's video, and then will begin with the session's content. When the content begins, there will be moments to pause, so that the group will be able to participate in discussion and various activities. After the group discussion, click "play" and the content will continue. Designated times to pause and play are in the video as well as listed in this leader guide. At the end of each video, the speakers conclude with a blessing and charge. Each session

provides more activities and questions than the time allotted, giving you the opportunity to choose what is most suitable for your group.

Before the group meets, we encourage you to communicate with the participants. In the appendix of this guide, you will find different sample emails to send to the participants, along with other resources referenced in the sessions. We hope these videos and leader guides for each session are helpful as your group experiences the dynamics of connecting, enriching, empowering, and sustaining you *Becoming Tomorrow's Church Today*.

Prayer as you prepare to lead with this resource:

God who was, is, and will forever be,

Thank you for the opportunity to lead your people as we continue to navigate this changing world. May your Spirit be with these leaders. O God, may these leaders feel your presence, be encouraged by your faithfulness, and recognize you at work, around and within them.

We thank you for the people who will participate in these sessions, the lives that will be changed because of these times together, and for the faithful responses of your Church.

May this resource inspire and encourage us all to be connected, enriched, empowered, and sustained as faithful disciples on the journey.

In your holy name we pray, Amen.

Blessings beyond!

The Association of Presbyterian Church Educators, February 2022

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Connect

Connect Goals

Through discussion, activities, and reflection the participants will:

- define the themes of connection, relationship, and partnership as disciples of Jesus Christ;
- discuss how connection plays a role in our lives as individuals and as communities;
- examine how connections are created and partnerships are developed.

Today we will be looking at what it means to be connected,

- through discussion about connection, relationship, and partnership
- by realizing how our lives are interconnected and how our faith connects us to one another and to the Divine
- by recognizing that we are created by God to connect



[Connect Video](https://youtu.be/APBeC4Fp3R4)

<https://youtu.be/APBeC4Fp3R4>

Opening Activity:

If your group is new to each other, you may want to do an activity to help people get to know each other. Consider using this activity to kick off the theme of Building Community:

- 10 things in common -
 - Split everyone into pairs (one group of three if you have odd numbers) and hand each pair a piece of paper.
 - List 10 things you have in common with one another. You get points for creativity so try not use things such as, "we both have two feet."
 - Once they find 10 things they have in common, invite them to share their discoveries with the group.
 - Was it difficult to find 10 things?
 - What was this experience like for you?

Opening Prayer:

Ask someone to lead the opening prayer. As part of the prayer, give God thanks for the connections we share with one another today.

Connecting as Individuals

Opening Questions:

Break into small groups and give them 2 minutes to answer the questions:

1. What does connect mean to you?
2. How are you most connected to others?

Have groups share their answers.

*Play Video: CONNECT Introduction 0:00--1:00 and
Connecting as Individuals 1:00--5:33*

When you are finished, have the group consider the following: We live in a world designed to connect - phones, computers, gaming stations with Wi-Fi remote partners, Zoom calling, working remotely around the world, and constant connection through social media. Yet, research suggests that people are more lonely now than ever. Three out of five Americans say they are lonely. People who report heavy uses of social media are among the loneliest.

Ask the large group

1. Have you seen or experienced this loneliness as well?
2. What are other observations about connection in our society that impact individuals?

In your small groups, continue to explore these questions.

- "Loneliness can be healed through the faith community." (Vilmarie)
 - When have you experienced healing through connection?
 - What are the wider issues associated with loneliness?
 - How is your church part of the problem and/or the solution?
- Activity - Personal Reflection
 - Do you believe that God loves you as you are? Why or why not?
 - Do you believe that you can come as you are? Why or why not?
 - Do you believe that you are fully known? Why or why not?
- "We don't always live into our words." (Cindy)
 - How does the way we *do* Church speak to our connections?

Connecting within Community

Play video: Connecting within Community 5:34--9:25

In your small groups discuss the following.

- As a group, define “relationship” and “partnership”.
 - What is the group’s collective understanding of the differences between relationship and partnership?
 - How does connection, relationship, and partnership lead your community to action?
- Cindy mentions that “connection leads to relationship which can lead to partnership.” She says that, “It’s not enough just to be in relationship with one another. It’s the partnership that guides us to action. And that’s part of our gospel too.”
 - Share (in a large group or with another person) a time in which you experienced a connection develop into a meaningful relationship which finally led to a partnership.
 - What was this experience like for you?
- Activity
 - Invite your group to brainstorm ideas of how your community can better connect with individuals to create relationships and build partnerships.
 - Using newsprint or ZOOM chat to write down ideas. These sheets start in one group and can be circulated around the room. Invite participants to place a star next to the ideas that they would like to see happen in their contexts.
 - Discussion Questions:
 - What barriers to connection exist in your context?
 - How can you prepare for resistance, either from the group you lead or from the outside?

Say: In the next section of the video, the speakers will be referencing Acts 9:1-31. Before we watch the next section of the video, we will split into groups and think about the different perspectives involved in this narrative.

- Read Acts 9:1-31
 - Divide the participants into four groups. Each group will read the text from a different perspective.
 - Paul
 - Ananias
 - the disciples
 - God

- As a large group, share their thoughts and observations regarding their perspective readings of the text.

Connecting with Scripture

Play Video: Connecting with Scripture 9:26--16:00

- Discussion Questions:
 - How did your understanding from the Scripture reading prior to the video shift after hearing their discussion in the video?
 - In their discussion in the video, our attention is drawn to the two conversions that take place - Paul's and Ananias'.
 - What are the similarities between the conversions?
 - What are the differences between the two conversions?
 - How would such conversions affect your understanding of community and connection?
 - Based on what you heard them say in the video about the differences in their backgrounds and lived experiences, how can we become a welcoming and inclusive community?
 - What are the barriers to inclusivity in your context?
 - What are the strengths your community brings?
 - Cindy states, "The Church from the beginning chose to be different."
 - How is your ministry context choosing to be different? How do you wish your ministry context would choose to be different?
 - How are you choosing to be different as a disciple of Christ? In what ways do you wish you were choosing to be different?

Blessing and Charge

Play Video: Blessing and Charge 16:01--17:12

- What are three ideas related to connecting that you will take with you from this session?
- Prayer
 - Holy One, Holy Three - You are the Alpha and the Omega, the in-between and the beyond. You, O God, are the One who creates, claims, calls, and connects. We pray that this time together has been full of moments of connection.

Enrich

Enrich Goals:

Through discussion, activities, and reflection the participants will:

- grow in their understanding of enriching faith;
- examine how their own lives have been enriched by and enrich the faith of others;
- explore why enriching faith is an essential spiritual practice for disciples.

Today we will be looking at what it means to be enriched,

- by growing in faith
- through the power of the Holy Spirit as the people of God
- by believing “God loves you just the way you are, and then loves you so much to not let you stay that way.”



[Enrich Video Link](https://youtu.be/6Fwb8ZhtAWY)

<https://youtu.be/6Fwb8ZhtAWY>

Opening Activity:

Guided Imagery--Ask the group to think of a tree, with roots sunk into the earth and branches filled with leaves reaching into the sky.

- (You may want to sketch this on chart paper or a dry erase board if your group is gathered in person.)
- (If your group is gathered virtually, you might want to ask each person to draw on a piece of paper a simple version of the tree or plant that comes to mind for them.)

Thinking about this tree that takes in water and nutrients through its roots, consider what you draw into yourself through your own roots.

- Ask the group...
 - “What is like water and nutrients for you in your relationships?”
 - How are you enriched?
 - *(List answers growing down like roots on the board/chart paper or the individual drawings.)*

Think through the needs and life of this tree. It draws energy from the sun and harnesses that power to grow both deeper and wider.

- What do you draw into your life that provides energy like the sunlight gathered by leaves?
- What gives you energy and motivation?
 - *(List answers like leaves filling the canopy of the tree on the board/chart paper or the individual drawings.)*

For groups who have brainstormed their ideas onto a single tree drawing,

- invite the participants to share observations they have about the roots and leaves that have been shared.

For groups who have had individual drawings,

- invite a volunteer to go first and then let them call on others until all who wish have had a chance to share one “root” and one “leaf”.

Considering what has been shared, engage the group in 2 or 3 of the following questions:

- Who has enriched your faith?
- What are some characteristics that describe either the people or the experiences that enrich your faith?
- How is our faith enriched?
- Why might enriching our faith be a vital part of our ability to be disciples?

Close this section with a reminder that many different factors contribute or enrich us, to make growth possible, and that we will be reflecting on this enrichment that we both receive and provide for one another.

Opening Prayer:

Ask someone to lead the opening prayer. As part of the prayer, include a thank you to God for all the ways we are enriched and can grow into becoming the people God calls us to be.

Enriching as a Whole

Play video: ENRICH Introduction 0:00--0:54

Enriching as a Whole 0:55--5:16.

Continuing to build on our tree metaphor, let's consider the practice of adding things to the soil. The soil nourishes what has been planted and helps us to define what it means to enrich and be enriched.

- How might this metaphor be applied to your ministry?
- What might the soil of your ministry need to have mixed in with it to allow your ministry to go deeper or spread its roots further out?
 - *(Add bright green post-it notes around your tree's roots with these ideas if you are in-person.)*
 - *(If you are meeting virtually, write in bright green ink to add things that will fertilize your ministry on your individual drawings.)*
 - *(You could also use the whiteboard feature of Zoom to illustrate this as people share.)*

In the video, Lynn references her father's statement, "We move to look for something a little bit better."

- How can your community live out this quote?
- Using our nutrient metaphor, illustrate your observations by reflecting on these questions:
 - *(You can use sticky notes in person, ink for in-person or virtual, and the Zoom drawing board for virtual only.)*
 - What needs to be "pruned" so that growth can be promoted? *(pruning=red)*
 - What is root-bound and in need of "repotting" to allow the roots more room to spread? *(repotting=blue)*
 - How does exposure to the sun enrich the tree, providing new energy? *(energizing=yellow)*
- Where are you seeing new energy in an aspect of your ministry?
 - What allows that to happen?
 - What does your ministry need exposure to for new energy to be discovered?
 - When we think of our whole body - individually or communally - how do the practices mentioned cultivate re-creation as those who are being transformed anew in Christ?

Enriching by Going Deeper

Play video: Enriching by Going Deeper 5:17--8:56

When have you been in a conversation that “goes deeper”?

- Think of a conversation or relationship in which you felt enriched.
 - What was the experience like?
 - Who were you with?
 - Where were you?
 - What happened?
 - What qualities does this person or group have?
 - How were you moved by an experience of going deeper?

Share with one other person in the group.

Lynn describes going deeper as wanting to ask one more question, and then one more question after that, and so on. By asking questions, exploration occurs and enrichment happens. “Going deeper” involves storytelling, speaking, listening, vulnerability, risk-taking, time, and relationship.

- Thinking back to the tree, and relating it to the church with its various parts representing disciples, what does your tree tell you about going deeper in faith?
- Remember the sources of energy you named on your tree.
 - How do these practices help disciples go deeper in faith?
 - What other practices can you now add?

(Optional Exercise)

If you want to go deeper with your group now or later, continue by using this section.

Explore language that your context uses to go beyond head knowledge to enrich, and therefore, embody faith. Lynn says words are not adequate to describe God.

“Omnipotence is not describable.”

- What words do you and other disciples in your context use to try to describe God? *(example: Father, Mother, Parent, Creator, Trinity, Divine, Holy One, Sustainer, Redeemer, Human One, Son of God, Son of Man, Good Shepherd, Judge, Abba, Perfect, Sovereign, Love, Wisdom, Prophet, Holy Spirit ...)*
- How did you decide to use those words to describe God?

(Optional Activity)

Using the words for God from the first bullet above, select three very different words.

- Invite participants to use sticky notes to define the words.
- Begin with one word and list the variety of definitions.

- Take time to discuss the differences of the definitions shared.
- How could those words be perceived positively or negatively in the life of your church or context?

How has this activity enriched or deepened your faith in God?

Being Enriched by Scripture and Sacraments

Play Video: Being Enriched by Scripture and Sacraments 8:57--14:30

Scripture

- Read: Luke 2:41-52

Create space for participants to reflect individually, and then in pairs.

Reflection Questions:

- What does this Scripture tell you about the nature of God? (*humanity, divinity, the mind of God can change with new experience*)
- What does this passage tell you about Jesus' growth and development?
- Appendix Resource: Faith and Other Developmental Theories

Discussion Questions:

- In this story, how was Jesus enriched?
- How was Jesus enriched by both God and other people throughout his life?
- What do you imagine Jesus was teaching to his elders in the temple?
- What can we learn from Jesus as a 12 year old teaching his elders?
- Why do you think this is the only story in the Bible about Jesus as a young child or preteen?

Transition: Lynn shares a story of her friend Jackson and how he enriched her faith.

Jackson recognized the real presence of Jesus in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Lynn recognized the real presence of the Spirit in Jackson's response of awe and wonder.

- What stands out to you in Lynn's story about Jackson?

Take a moment to think about a time when you have had an enriching experience like the one Lynn describes with Jackson.

- In pairs or with the full group, invite participants to describe their enriching experience.
- Invite the group to share their thoughts to this guiding question.
 - How can your community intentionally create opportunities for enrichment to occur so faith grows deeper?

- As a community?
- As an individual?

(Optional Activity)

If you have a photo deck tool, like Visual Faith, you may want to have the group think of an experience and then go choose a photo that evokes that experience for you before sharing.

- After the images have been chosen by participants, they would then share how the photo they've chosen resonates with that experience.
- What was an enriching experience for you?

Enriched and Enriching

Play video: Blessing and Charge 14:31--15:25

Closing Blessing:

Invite your group to close in an embodiment prayer. This can be done seated or standing up. Invite the participants to embody the movements described in the prayer as they listen. These are marked in bold.

Let us pray.

Creator God,

we **close our eyes** and remember the enriching experiences we have had with your creation - moments at the beach, in the mountains, at the table and the font, with one another in this time together. You, O God, continue to create around and within us. We are in awe of your creation and we thank you for giving us the gifts to be creative too.

Loving God,

we **place our hands over our hearts** to remember with gratitude the gift of grace.

We **close our hands into fists**, recognizing that we do not always serve, help, and encourage one another.

We **open our hands** and ask that you help us to be open to the ways we may enrich one another.

Amen.

Empower

Empower Goals:

Through discussion, activities, and reflection the participants will:

- recognize the church as an agent of God's Spirit to empower all people;
- consider how God is still at work in the world acting through the Church as a remnant of God's people to carry out God's plan;
- identify the gifts they have received and be empowered to carry out God's mission.

Today we will be looking at what it means to be empowered,

- By claiming our unique gifts, abilities and call in Christ
- To be the Church
- To serve others



[Empower Video Link](https://youtu.be/kmDFYki3coU)

<https://youtu.be/kmDFYki3coU>

Opening Activity:

Ask the group to take 90 seconds to draw a picture of something you thought you could do really well as a child. (If your gathering is virtual, people could be invited to go and find something in their room/ home that symbolizes the thing in which they excelled.)

After 90 seconds or once everyone is back on screen, have participants hold up the drawing/object and have others guess what talent might be represented by the drawing/object. After a few guesses, have the person share their talent and why they picked it. Once everyone has shared, ask them to consider what and who empowered them to feel like they were gifted with this skill. Share with the group.

Close this section by reminding the group that they are going to have a conversation on empowerment.

Opening Prayer:

- Ask someone to lead the opening prayer. As part of the prayer, include a thank you to God for all those who empower us to be the people God has created us to be.

Empowering Gifts and Abilities

Ask the group to think about what it means to be empowered. Using a whiteboard or easel pad, write down a shared definition of empowerment.

Play video: EMPOWER Introduction 0:00-0:52 (optional) and Empowering Gifts and Abilities 0:53--3:27

Invite the whole group to share anything that stood out to them from either Jimmie or Rodger.

Discussion:

Think about the stumbling blocks that you have experienced. Jimmie alludes to the idea that self-doubt is often a stumbling block people experience.

- When did you first doubt yourself?
 - How old were you?
 - What happened?
- Did you ever find the confidence to overcome the doubt or does it still linger?

Jimmie talks about the juxtaposition between identity, gifts, and abilities. He suggests that our own self-doubt has the ability to stop us from feeling empowered.

- How do moments of self-doubt, ridicule, failure, suffering and pain affect our identity, gifts and abilities?

The Church can empower people. The church has an opportunity to remind each of us we are uniquely created in the image of God. In the covenant of baptism you have been empowered in countless ways.

- How does being named a child of God in your baptism impact your identity?
- How does identifying yourself as a child of God empower you?
- How does your identity as a child of God help you name and claim your gifts and abilities?

The Spirit-Empowered Community

Play video: The Spirit-Empowered Community 3:28--10:18

Jimmie recalls a Sunday morning or two when he tried to deliver a sermon which he was sure fell short of his goal. Yet, after worship, people came up to him and thanked him. They insisted that the Holy Spirit was speaking through his words.

- How does this story speak to the way in which the Holy Spirit empowered both Jimmie and the congregation?

Sometimes the Spirit calls us to be a remnant to go to the least likely places and empowers us to do justice in the world without us realizing that God was at work in that moment.

- When have you found yourself or known of others questioning what you were doing only to realize that God was at work at that moment?
 - Share your experiences.
- How does it feel to be a remnant people?

Jimmie says: “Even in our moments of defeat, moments when we question ourselves, whether we are really doing what God is calling us to do, the Spirit is making something wonderful happen. We can’t always see or describe what the Spirit is doing, but we can experience it. And that’s really what it is about - believing God’s Spirit is alive and active in our lives. And there is nothing inconsequential. God can use all of us, each one of us.”

- What does it mean to believe that God’s Spirit is alive and active in your life – even in your “defeat”?
- When have you seen this in your life or the life of another?

The Empowered Prophetic Voice

Before starting the video, read the story of Joseph using one of the options below:

- 1) Divide into two groups and read from a children’s Bible (See Appendix for suggestions.). Ask half the group to keep track of the places where God is faithful to Joseph and have the other half create a list of how Joseph has been faithful to God.

After hearing the story, have participants share one statement of “Faithfulness” from their lists. Make sure to have someone record all the statements on a board or paper so people can see them (use the chat room in Zoom if online). Once everyone has had a chance to share, invite people to name additional things not already on each list.

- 2) If you have more time or a more experienced group, ask each member to read one chapter of the story and then share with the group what happened. (Genesis chapters 37, 39-46).

As they share, have people identify times or places when Joseph and God are faithful to each other. Again, make sure you create a list so everyone can see the answers.

Play video: The Empowered Prophetic Voice 10:19--15.50

We hear of Joseph going from beloved Son, to hated brother, slave, honored servant, accused of adultery, imprisoned and finally to a place of honor and power in pharaoh's court. Through it all, Joseph is certain that God is with him.

God is with us even if all the evidence points to something different. Joseph was given gifts and empowered by God to use them for others, not just for himself.

- How did God empower Joseph to benefit others?

Rodger said, "God's presence with Joseph is constant." God's presence and blessings are made known throughout Joseph's story.

- Create 2 columns in a chart with these headings. Invite the group to list their responses under each column.
 - What are the particular gifts that God gives Joseph?
 - How does God make use of each of those gifts in Joseph's story?
- Identify a moment when you felt empowered by God with a particular gift? Share your experience with the group.

As a group, consider what it means to believe that the Spirit is working to empower you to be God's prophetic voice to a world in need.

- What would it mean for your church to be a "prophetic stronghold" for God?
 - What are the stumbling blocks that get in our way?
 - What are the benefits?

Empowered to Respond

Ask for volunteers to read the following passage: Matthew 25:31-40

- What would it mean to believe that God has already empowered you to live out this story?
- If you are the Church, then how could you empower others to also live out God's mission?

Mobilizing Activity:

Friends, God has made you unique, there is only one of you. God is counting on us to live into the words of Christ. This is not always easy. Self doubt, ridicule from others, and our own fear will try to hold us back, but the Church is our stronghold. With the Holy Spirit guiding us, we can become the empowered disciples called to walk as Christ walked. The Church is uniquely positioned to help followers identify their gifts and abilities and

empower the people of God to do the work of God here and now.

Select one or two of the ideas from the Matthew 25 discussion and plan how to implement them.

- Consider what resources are already within your context.
 - What are the needs?
 - Who is being served?
 - What are the relationships we can use and draw on?
 - What are the gifts that are needed?
 - Name people with these gifts to contribute.
 - What are the community or learning resources available for partnership?
 - What activities might be effective?
 - What sort of timeline is needed? (long-term, short-term, urgent, etc.)

Play video: Empowered to Respond 15:51--16:26

Closing Blessing:

As people of faith, empowered by love, may you have passion, energy and excitement to go out and change this world. May God's love and faith in you empower you to share that love and faith with others. And may you rise up and become the empowered disciples you are called and created by God to be!

Sustain

Sustain Goals

Through discussion, activities, and reflection, the participants will:

- Define the term *sustain* to understand how individuals are fed and can use their gifts to nourish their community and themselves;
- Discern how the Church feeds its flock of disciples with the Spirit's guidance;
- Provoke transformation toward sustainable ministry where God is leading us to form and engage in sacred partnerships.

Today we will be looking at what it means to be sustained:

- by recognizing how the church and faith community can strengthen or support one another
- through the Holy Spirit
- by serving others



Sustain
Video Link

<https://youtu.be/NwdWNC2dWHs>

Opening Activity:

- Before people arrive, place a stack of 10 pennies in front of each chair. As people arrive, invite them to stack as many pennies on their index finger as possible without letting them fall.
 - The goal is to sustain and balance the most stacked pennies on your finger without letting them fall. (Hint: After everyone has tried a few times - remind participants they can use as many or as few pennies as they would like.)
 - How many you can sustain for at least 60 seconds?
- After a few minutes of playing, invite the group to think about the activity:
 - How many pennies did you have?
 - Ask participants if the game was easy or hard and why?
 - Did you focus more on getting the most pennies or sustaining the pennies? Why?
- Say something like: *Today, we are going to talk about what it means to be sustained. What images or ideas come to mind when you hear the word sustain?* Have the group share.
- **Opening Prayer:** Ask someone to lead the opening prayer. As part of the prayer, include the idea of God's sustaining power.

The Meaning of Sustain

Play video: SUSTAIN Introduction 0:00-0:50

The Meaning of Sustain 0:51--2:57

Discussion:

- Invite the group to share one or two key learnings from this section:
 - Was there anything special Shannon or Rodger said that stood out to you? Please share.

Shannon shared three different ways of looking at the word sustain: negative (sustaining an injury), neutral (let's sustain this program as is), and life-giving (let's feel the power to do something amazing).

- Which do you most often experience in your church setting?
- Why do you suspect that is the case?

Sustained through Scripture

Scripture is filled with life-giving examples of sustenance. Invite three different people to read today's biblical texts. As each is being read, notice the ways in which God as each person of the Trinity helps sustain people.

- Exodus 16:2-12 (Manna from Heaven)
- John 6:48-54 (Bread of Life)
- Romans 8:5-17 (Life in the Spirit)

Play video: Sustained through Scripture 2:58--5:35

Discussion:

- In your previous reading of the Exodus passage, did you notice God listened to the Israelites four different times?
 - What does this mean to you?
 - Why not respond the first time they cry out?

Shannon says, "the promised presence (of the Spirit) is far more sustaining than even the manna. God has not left them (the Israelites) to their own devices."

- Break into small groups.
- Share a time in your life when the Spirit's presence helped to sustain you. After about 5 minutes, bring the group back together and invite people to share their responses with the large group.

God Sustains God's People

Play video: God Sustains God's People 5:36--8:57

Shannon spoke about "hitting dry periods" in our lives when we struggle to feel the sustaining power we need.

- Take a few minutes to create a list of times in your life when you have felt you were in a spiritual desert (pandemic, job loss, overwhelming concerns/anxieties for social justice issues ...).
- After a few minutes, invite the groups to share one or two of the moments and write them on a Dry Erase board/paper.

Many "desert" moments happen when people are hurting, fearful, anxious, and when our focus is turned to the ways of this world.

- Why do you think people often struggle to see God's sustaining presence during a difficult time?
- What do you do to build your connection with God when you find yourself in a spiritual desert?

Shannon reminds us that God is always present even if we feel lost in the desert. She implied that one way we might rediscover the sustaining presence of the Spirit is by remembering our call; focusing on what God has already helped us do and "recast our vision" back onto our calling.

- What one sentence comes to mind when you think of your call story?
- How does this sentence sustain you?

Shannon talks about the importance of the Church being an authentic place because what the Church does matters.

The Church as a Sustaining Body

Play video: The Church as a Sustaining Body 8:58--15:59

Shannon talks about the importance of being authentic. She invites us to consider how we, the Body of Christ, are the Bread of Heaven for the world in which we live.

- Brainstorm three ways your congregation works to authentically listen to others and become the Bread of Heaven for the world in which we live.
- How is your community working to sustain, empower, connect, and enrich the world around you?

In order for the church to be a sustaining body, Shannon encourages us to ensure our congregations are being "real/honest" about the issues people are facing in a complex world. Some churches may choose to ignore the world's problems out of fear that it might cause sustaining injuries to the life of the congregation. Yet, Shannon encourages us to consider the life-giving sustenance we receive when we dare to listen authentically to voices long silenced and recognize the Holy Spirit at work.

- How is your congregation providing life giving sustenance for those in need?

The Church is called to do more than help people stay alive - we can be part of the Holy Spirit's sustaining power. The Church can be a life-giving, sustaining body when we listen to others so that we are able to help people reenergize and reimagine their callings with courage, passion, and strength.

The Sustaining Bread of Heaven

Play video: The Sustaining Bread of Heaven 16:00--16:59

*Closing prayer: Use an open hand prayer - invite people to consider what it means to trust that God will:

- Provide manna when we are lost in the desert
- Hear our every cry
- Respond in good and loving ways

*If this is your last session, spend time before the closing prayer to share your feedback on *Becoming Tomorrow's Church Today*. Consider listening to one another through the following ritual:

- Participating in this group ...
 - makes me glad because ...
 - makes me sad because ...
 - makes me mad because ...
 - makes me want to say, "I'm sorry" because ...
 - makes me want to tell _____ "Thank you" because ...

We would also like to hear how your church lives in new ways after engaging in these conversations.

Thank you for engaging on the journey together!

Additional Resources

Becoming Tomorrow's Church Today

Speaker Bios

Rodger Nishioka serves as the senior associate pastor and director of Adult Faith Formation at Village Presbyterian Church in Prairie Village, KS. Prior to coming to Village, Rodger taught Christian education at Columbia Theological Seminary in Atlanta for 15 years. Before that, he served as the national coordinator for Youth and Young Adult Ministries for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in Louisville, KY. He is a graduate of Seattle Pacific University, McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago and earned his Doctor of Philosophy degree at Georgia State University in Atlanta. He was honored to be named APCE educator of the year in 1996. He is the author of three books on youth ministry and numerous articles on faith formation.

Vilmarie Cintrón-Olivieri is an ESL teacher and a Presbyterian elder. A life-long Presbyterian, Vilmarie was ordained in San Juan, Puerto Rico, 25 years ago. At some point in her life, she has served at the session, as a member and chair of several presbytery committees, vice moderator of Synod Boriquén and council member, a commissioner to the 212th General Assembly, a member of the General Assembly Committee on Theological Education and as Moderator of the Presbytery of Tropical Florida. Vilmarie holds a B.A. in Education (English as a Second Language) from the University of Puerto Rico and a Master's in Education (Curriculum and Teaching) from Turabo University. Vilmarie lives in Miami, FL, with her husband, the Rev. José Manuel Capella-Pratts. An organizer at heart, she loves arts & crafts and decorating as well as relaxing over a good cup of Puerto Rican coffee. Along with the Rev. Cindy Kohlmann, Resource Presbyterian of the Presbyteries of Boston and Northern New England, Vilmarie serves as Co-Moderator of the 223rd General Assembly (2018).

Cindy Kohlmann serves as Resource Presbyterian, a full-time position shared between the Presbyteries of Boston and Northern New England. She provides leadership to both Presbyteries, facilitating conversations about vision and structure, designing opportunities for leadership training, planning programming during Presbytery meetings, and connecting congregations and pastors with both local and denominational resources. Cindy graduated from Whitworth College with a B.A. in Theatre and Religion and Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary with an M.Div. While in seminary, Cindy served in the U.S. Naval Reserves as a Chaplain Candidate. She has previously pastored New Jersey Presbyterian Church in Carlisle, OH, and Clinton Presbyterian Church in Massachusetts. She is married to the Rev. Eric Markman and has two amazing adult step-daughters and two extremely opinionated cats. Along with Elder Vilmarie Cintrón-Olivieri, an educator and ruling elder based in Miami, FL, Cindy was elected Co-Moderator of the 223rd General Assembly in June 2018. Vilmarie and Cindy joyfully served in this capacity until 2020.

Lynn Turnage is Director of Programs at Montreat Conference Center. An educator/pastor, she has an undergraduate degree in Recreation Administration from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, a M.A. in Christian Education from the Presbyterian School of Christian Education, Richmond, VA, and a Doctor of Educational Ministry in children, families and worship from Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, GA. Lynn has served congregations in a variety of positions from Youth Director to Director of Adult, Children and Family Ministries, from TX, SC, GA, and NC. She has also served on denominational staff as the Associate for Leader Development for Youth and Families, Louisville, KY. Lynn's passion is including children in every part of church life and empowering parents to bring out the best in their children. Lynn has two daughters and her mother lives with them.

Jimmie Hawkins serves as the Director of the Presbyterian Church (USA) Office of Public Witness in Washington DC. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in Social Studies from North Carolina Central University in Durham, NC; a Master of Arts in Christian Education from the Presbyterian School of Christian Education in Richmond, VA; and a Master of Divinity from the Interdenominational Theological Center/Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary in Atlanta, GA. Jimmie has served as pastor of Grace Covenant Presbyterian in Durham, NC, and at Grace Presbyterian, Holmes Memorial and Trinity Presbyterian churches in western Virginia. His community ministry includes being a leader for the Moral Monday Movement since its onset in 2013. He engaged in four actions of civil disobedience protesting the actions to curtail voting rights, healthcare and a living wage. He has been active in justice advocacy throughout his ministry. He is married to Sheinita Hampton Hawkins, and they have a daughter and a son.

Shannon Johnson Kershner is the senior pastor of Fourth Presbyterian Church (PCUSA). She grew up in Waco, Texas as the daughter of a Presbyterian minister and an elementary school teacher. Shannon stayed in Texas for college and graduated from Trinity University in San Antonio. She then began her theological training at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, GA, and received her Master of Divinity degree. Her sermons and articles have been published in several journals, including *The Journal for Preachers* and *Lectionary Homiletics*. She is involved in leadership for NEXT Church, serving on its Strategy Team, and as a Trustee on the Princeton Theological Seminary Board of Trustees. Shannon is married to Greg, whom she met in high school at a Presbyterian summer conference at Mo-Ranch. They have been married for 25 years and are the parents of a daughter and a son.

Sample email / letter before the first gathering

Dear Participant,

We are looking forward to connecting with you all as we gather for four sessions about *Becoming Tomorrow's Church Today*. The resource for our time together is a gift from The Association of Presbyterian Church Educators (APCE) upon its 50th anniversary + 1 year and beyond. Each session centers around one of the dynamic verbs from APCE's mission statement.

Connect...Enrich...Empower...Sustain. These dynamic verbs were intended to express what the organization sought to do for its members... And they can be a framework for imagining where we might go and how we might serve in the fifty years to come.

This week we will be examining what it means to be connected. Please take time to ponder about connection, connecting, and being connected by, with, and for others, and to God.

If you have time, please read INSERT SCRIPTURE TEXT HERE.

I look forward to seeing you on ADD DATE and TIME for our next gathering (include link if online)

Sample emails / letters for other gatherings

Dear Participant,

I hope last week's topic "Connect" has helped you to consider how you might better connect with the church and the larger community we live in. I hope Words ring true for you as you work to build connections...

This week we will be looking at what it means to be enriched. Take time this week to think of a metaphor for what it means to be enriched. How does that apply to your faith journey? Think about the people who have enriched your faith life. Consider calling one of them and thanking them for their part in your growth as a Christian.

If you have time, please read INSERT SCRIPTURE TEXT HERE.

I look forward to seeing you on ADD DATE and TIME for our next gathering (include link if online)

Dear Participant,

I hope last week's topic on "Enrich" has helped you to consider how you might go deeper in your curiosity when it comes to living faithfully, exploring Scripture, building community, and experiencing the sacramental life. I hope ...

For me, our time exploring what it means to be enriched has ...

This week we will be looking at what it means to be empowered. Please spend a few minutes considering how you have been empowered and by whom. This week, as you read the paper or watch the news, look for stories of when and how people have been empowered. What do you notice about those stories?

If you have time, please read INSERT SCRIPTURE TEXT HERE.

I look forward to seeing you on ADD DATE and TIME for our next gathering (include link if online)

Dear Participant,

I hope last week's topic on "Empower" has challenged you to be open to others who need your voice on their behalf. Where do you hear the prophetic voices that call for justice, kindness, and walking humbly with God? I hope ...

I see the Spirit empowering our community by ...

This week we will be looking at what it means to be sustained. Please spend a few minutes considering what it means to be sustained. This week, as you read or listen to others' stories, take note of who sustains and how. Where do you see opportunities just waiting for someone to help?

If you have time, please read INSERT SCRIPTURE TEXT HERE.

I look forward to seeing you on ADD DATE and TIME for our next gathering (include link if online)

Optional follow-up email / letter

Dear Participant,

I hope last week's topic on "Sustain" brought the discussions of *Becoming Tomorrow's Church Today* full circle for you. Now that we have completed these sessions, how will we live into the future differently?

The following were ideas shared last week in the discussion that we will continue to flesh out in our community.

1.

2.

3.

I hope ...

I know the Spirit is sustaining our community when ...

(If you did not invite feedback on the whole four sessions, do so now using the following ways to reflect on the experience:)

- Participating in this group ...
 - makes me glad because ...
 - makes me sad because ...
 - makes me mad because ...
 - makes me want to say, "I'm sorry" because ...
 - makes me want to tell _____ "Thank you" because ...

Here is my blessing and charge for you as we look ahead to the future:

...

(Share any details about DATE and TIME of follow up gatherings, including link if online.)

Faith and Human Developmental Theories

(Use as a reference when leading the ENRICH session.)

Faith Development in Young People

A 26-page online flipbook describing Piaget's Cognitive Development stages, Erikson's Psycho-social Development stages, Kohlberg's Moral Development stages along with Westerhoff's Faith Development rings, and Fowler's Faith Development stages.

[Faith Development - Good Word Page Pages 1 - 26 - Flip PDF Download | FlipHTML5](#)

“The Psychology of Faith Development”

A thorough examination of the faith developmental theories of James Fowler and John Westerhoff and their differences.

[The Psychology of Faith Development](#)

“An Evaluation of the Contribution of John H. Westerhoff III to Religious Education”

- M. S. Bickford, Ph.D.

[“An Evaluation of the Contribution of John H. Westerhoff III to Religious Education” - MS Bickford, Ph.D. This paper wil](#)

“Faith Development and Faith Formation: More than Ages and Stages”

- Robert Keeley (2010)

[Faith Development and Faith Formation: More Than Just Ages and Stages](#)

Children's Bibles

Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible

by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim

Westminster John Knox Press, 2018

- ISBN-10 : 9780664262914
- ISBN-13 : 978-0664262914

The Children's Bible in 365 Stories

by Mary Batchelor

David C. Cook, 1995

- ISBN-10 : 0745930689
- ISBN-13 : 978-0745930688

The Rhyme Bible Storybook

by L. J. Sattgast

Zonderkidz, 2012

- ISBN-10 : 0310726026
- ISBN-13 : 978-0310726029