October 2017 MCC 49th Anniversary Worship Guide
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MCC Governing Board

Introduction-

October 2017 we celebrate our 49th anniversary as a denomination. We have prepared this guide with suggestions for leading your congregation through a celebration of our history and a promise of our future.

As we enter our 50th year as a worldwide family of faith, we encourage you to communicate our core values to your congregation. These are: inclusion, community, spiritual transformation, and justice.

For each of our four core values we have developed themes in the form of questions:

1. Who are we? Core value: Inclusion
2. Where do we come from? Core value: Community
3. What are we learning? Core value: Spiritual Transformation
4. Where are we going? Core value: Justice

In what follows you will find suggested calls to worship, contemporary readings, and scripture selections for each week.

Please consider this guide to be the bones on which you can flesh out an anniversary sermon series. This is meant to be a tool for your use, not a requirement for your congregation. We recommend that you include MCC history in your sermon, either denominational stories, or stories from your local church. By looking at these four questions and four core values, we have a wonderful opportunity to share

Please note that the first 3 weeks of October coincide with Hispanic/Latin@ Heritage Month (September 15 - October 15), we encourage you to include celebrations of Hispanic and Latino/a in your music selections and the themes in your worship space. Also of note, October 1 is World Communion Sunday. In this guide we have included a communion reading from the seminary in Matanzas, Cuba.
October 1, 2017
WEEK 1: “WHO ARE WE?” (CORE VALUE- INCLUSION)
World Communion Sunday

Core value: Inclusion
Love is our greatest moral value and resisting exclusion is a primary focus of our ministry. We want to continue to be conduits of faith where everyone is included in the family of God and where all parts of our being are welcomed at God’s table.

World Communion Sunday Call to Worship:
One: Throughout God’s world this day, Christian churches are celebrating Communion as one family.

Many: Our sisters and brothers in Africa, Europe, South America, Asia and in all lands and countries join us in lifting the bread of life and the cup of salvation.

One: In Christ’s love there is no East, no West, no North, no South, but only one Spirit of hope, love, and peace for all.

Many: Praise be to Christ our Savior! Amen.

Galatians 3:23-29
23 Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. 24 Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, 26 for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. 27 As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.

From Outing the Bible by Rev. Elder. Dr. Nancy Wilson

We gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people need to see ourselves and be seen as fully human, neither angels nor demons. I remember when we asked the World Council of Churches on behalf of MCC to consider including gay and lesbian people (who are executed and tortured in many countries just for being suspected of being gay) in their human rights agenda. We weren’t asking them to support civil rights for gays and lesbians, or to offer some kind of religious validation. We just sought human rights: meaning the right not to be imprisoned, tortured, exiled, or murdered simply for being homosexual. When they hesitated,
hemming and hawing, whining that this was “bad timing” for the World Council of Churches (never mind the “bad timing” for those being abused and murdered!), I realized the depth of the problem once again: they’re not sure we’re human! Human rights seemed to them to be an unreasonable request at this time. It made me remember that many people still see us as a “behavior: or an “issue” to debate, not as beings in need of safety or inclusion; Talking about human rights and gay and lesbian people in the same sentence was difficult for them to tolerate.

The humanity of “others” is foundational for understanding the essential obligation of hospitality in ancient nomadic desert cultures. In biblical times, if you traveled anywhere in the Near East, you had to depend on the kindness of strangers and acquaintances alike. You had to treat the sojourner well because you might need to depend on someone yourself in the future. There was a common appreciation of the true vulnerability, the fragility of life in a desert climate. It was not a moral choice to be inhospitable. To do so was to violate the deepest commitment to being human and in community.

Communion Liturgy for International Association of Women Ministers, Matanzas Seminary, Cuba By Loren McGrail On May 04, 2017

God of our grandmothers and mothers---
Of Eve and Sarah and Hagar,
Miriam and Hanna, Shiphah and Puah,
Judith and the Syrophoenician woman,
Mary and Martha, Mary of Magdala
And Mother Mary.
We come to your open and expanding table
in this season of ripe papayas
and leave taking to celebrate the life
You have given us---
to remember your sacrifice.
You call us to cry out and lament
but also to sing and dance
to put on our aprons and serve You,
to sit down and be served.
Jesus, we come to this table
broken and beautiful
just as we are----
young and older.
We come to drink from the cup of blessing
to eat from the bread of life.
Spirit of the living God
bless this bread
so that it may nourish us
to be your hands and feet.
Bless this wine
so that it may fill us
with your compassion.

**Words of Institution**
The table is set.
All is prepared.
Come as you are.
All are welcome to the banquet of life.
God of today and tomorrow
we live between memory and hope
for your kin-dom come
on earth as it is in heaven.
We go forth now
full and ready
to do your work
in faith and love.
October 8, 2017
WEEK 2: “WHERE DO WE COME FROM?” (CORE VALUE- COMMUNITY)

Core Value: Community
Offering a safe and open community for people to worship, learn, and grow in their faith is our deep desire. We are committed to equipping ourselves and each other to do the work that God has called us to do in the world.

Call to Worship:
“They Have Threatened Us with Resurrection” a poem excerpt from Julia Esquivel de Velasquez
[Julia Esquivel de Valasquez, Threatened With Resurrection: Prayers and Poems from an Exiled Guatemalan (Brethren Pr; Span-Eng edition,1982)]

There is something here within us
Which doesn't let us sleep, which doesn't let us rest,
Which doesn't stop pounding deep inside,
It is the silent, warm weeping of Indian women without their husbands,
It is the sad gaze of the children
Fixed there beyond memory,
In the very pupil of our eyes
Which during sleep, though closed, keep watch
With each contraction of the heart
In every wakening...

What keeps us from sleeping
Is that they have threatened us with resurrection!
Because at each nightfall,
Though exhausted from the endless inventory
Of killings since 1954,
Yet we continue to love life,
And do not accept their death!

...Because in this marathon of Hope,
there are always others to relieve us
in bearing the courage necessary
to arrive at the goal which lies beyond death...

Accompany us then on this vigil
And you will know what it is to dream!
You will then know how marvelous it is
To live threatened with resurrection!
To dream awake,
To keep watch asleep
To live while dying
And to already know oneself resurrected!
Acts: 8:26-40

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to this chariot and join it.” So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” He replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

“Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth.

33 In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.”

The eunuch asked Philip, “About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

From “The Meaning of Liberation” in God of the Oppressed by James Cone


There is no liberation independent of Jesus’ past, present, and future coming. He is the ground of our present freedom to struggle and the source of our hope that the vision disclosed in our historical fight against oppression will be fully realized in God’s future. In this sense, liberation is not a human possession but a divine gift of freedom to those who struggle in faith against violence and oppression. Liberation is not an object but the project of freedom wherein the oppressed realize that their fight for freedom is a divine right of creation. This is what Anthony Burns, an ex-slave, meant by saying “God made me a man—not a slave, and gave me the same right to myself that he gave to the man stole me to himself.” A similar point was made by David Walker when he urged black slaves
to remember that freedom is not a gift from white slave masters but a natural right of divine creation. … Divine Freedom is not merely an affirmation of self-existence and complete transcendence of God over creaturely existence. It also expresses God’s will to be in relation to creatures in the social context of their striving for the fulfillment of humanity. That is, God is free to be for us. This is the meaning of the Exodus and the Incarnation. The biblical God is the God whose salvation is liberation. God is the God of Jesus Christ who calls the helpless and weak into a newly created existence.

Suggestions:
Consider connecting Cone reading and Ethiopian Eunuch, to question of where we came from

Additional exegetical resources:

https://petersontoscano.com/ethiopianeunuch/
http://jesusinlove.blogspot.com/2012/05/ethiopian-eunuch-early-church-welcomed.html
October 15, 2017
WEEK 3: “WHAT ARE WE LEARNING?” (CORE VALUE- SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION)

Core Value: Spiritual Transformation
Providing a message of liberation from the oppressive religious environment of our day or to those experiencing God for the first time is what guides our ministry. We believe that when people are invited to experience God through the life and ministry of Christ, lives will be transformed.

Call to Worship:
“Do Not Be Afraid” from Africana Worship Book
[Valerie Bridgeman Davis and Safiyah Fosua, eds. The Africana Worship Book Year A (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2006)]

Many: Do Not Be Afraid
One: You who are weary
Sleepless
Tired
Depressed
Discouraged
Many: Do not be afraid!
One: You who are fed up
Hopeless
Visionless
Fearful
Tearful
Many: Do not be afraid!
One: God is present in your suffering.
Many: God will calm the winds and waves of your soul!

Mark 7:24-30
24 From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, 26 but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. 26 Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophoenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27 He said to her, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” 28 But she answered him, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” 29 Then he said to her, “For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.” 30 So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

From “Eating the Crumbs That Fall from the Table” by Justin Tanis in Take Back the Word
Imagine if we as people of faith declared: “This is better than we thought! People come in even more varieties than we thought, many more than we were ever told there were—many colors, gay, straight, lesbian, bisexual, men, women, those who see themselves as no gender, those who cross genders, transsexuals, monogamous, polyamorous, nonmonogamous, people with many ways of loving, people who are celibate, old, young, ageless. God must be even greater than we ever dreamed!” What if we welcomed them all? How would it affect our churches and our world if our faith celebrated all this? Or if we exploded the barriers between us? We do this, I firmly believe it, but have we taken the next step of rejoicing in our queerness, our differences, our abilities to transform our bodies, minds, and souls? Do we rejoice about what that says about the one who created us this way? We must be faithful, not to our ideas of God’s creation, but to the reality of it.

A vision that sees the world only in terms of two genders and one way of living in it misses the totality and beauty of creation. Christ is an alchemist. If we affirm that Jesus lived as he died, then his life must also be a story of alchemy, transformation, and resurrection.

Suggestions: Jesus as the one who learns and is transformed
October 22, 2017
WEEK 4: “WHERE ARE WE GOING?” (CORE VALUE- JUSTICE)

Core Value: Justice
Working to talk less and do more, we are committed to resisting the structures that oppress people and standing with those who suffer under the weight of oppressive systems, being guided always by our commitment to Global Human Rights.

Call to Worship by Mary Jo Bowman
One: Children of God,
It's time to take off your shoes,
Step out of your comfort zone, and
Wade with trust into the stream of God's mercy.
Stand still for a moment, barefoot, on holy ground.
Let the healing waters wash your feet.
Take a deep breath as Love soaks into your soul.
Be silent and listen for God's word to us today.
How shall we worship our God?
Many: We have heard what the Lord requires of us.
One: Leave empty talk and pride behind.
Many: We must walk the walk.
One: Prepare to step out in faith, even into troubled waters.
Many: Only God knows where we might need to go.
One: Don't be afraid.
Many: Jesus will guide our steps along the way,
One: Teaching us to walk humbly,
Many: To love boldly,
One: To serve God with body, soul, mind, and strength.
Many: Let us pray for the humility and courage
One: To follow where the Spirit leads.
Many: Amen.

Micah 6:6-8
6 “With what shall I come before the L ORD, and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?
7 Will the L ORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”
8 He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the L ORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

From Violence of Love by Archbishop Oscar Romero

If there were love of neighbor there would be no terrorism
   no repression,
   no selfishness,
   none of such cruel inequalities in society,
   no abductions,
   no crimes.

Love sums up the law.
Not only that, it gives Christian meaning to all human relations.
Even those who call themselves atheists, when they are humane,
fulfill the essence of the relationship that God wants among human beings:
Love

Love gives plenitude to all human duties, and without love justice is only the sword.
With love, justice becomes a brother’s embrace.
Without love, laws are arduous, repressive, cruel, mere policemen.
But when there is love—
   security forces would be superfluous;
   there would be no jails or tortures,
   no will to beat anyone.

Alternative contemporary reading:

From “The Altar and the Tent” in Where the Edge Gathers Bishop Yvette Flunder
[Yvette A. Flunder, Where the Edge Gathers: Building a Community of Radical Inclusion (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), 86-87.]

Abraham and later his son Isaac worshipped or built altars to God in the same place where they set up house. The altar and the tent were always together. The altar calls for the tent and the tent calls for the altar.
The Altar is where we worship, submit, and respond to the will of God for our lives. The altar is where we spend our personal time with God, where we acknowledge our need for the abiding tangible presence of God in our camp. It is vitally important that we stay close to God in times of great transition and
transformation, as our emotions are raw and vulnerable in this season of our lives.

The tent is where we live our lives, interact with our family, church, and other people, do our tasks, serve and minister God’s love. The tent connects us to this world, this cosmos. Abraham’s altar consumed a burnt offering as a representation of himself offered up to God. He did this before setting up his tent. He prayed there and sought God’s will before setting up housekeeping. How can we live a life that builds an altar before a tent? What things do we need to lay on the altar before we set up our tents? How would our lives be different if we put everything on the altar of sacrifice and allowed God to consume that God did not want us to take into our tents?...

The call to great change often comes in parts. You get the where but not the when. You get the who but not the how… the what but not the why. Put your great vision and great passion on the altar and wait for a revelation of where to place your feet before taking off with a partial understanding. Don’t bypass the altar and have a tent full of sorrow. The altar calls for the tent and the tent calls for the altar. In all thy ways acknowledge God and God will direct your paths. Amen.