

## **Worship on the Lord's Day in a Time of Social Distancing**

For most Christians, the main time to gather for worship is on Sunday, the first day of the week. According to the first chapter of Genesis, as God's wind moved over the dark waters, God began the work of creation with light. This was the first day. According to the Gospels, Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week, and Christians soon considered Sunday to be "the Lord's Day" (Rev 1:10). This was a day to gather for a meal, to worship and pray together, to reflect on scripture, and to remember the Risen Lord, the light of the world. Thus every week, Christians celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus and the New Creation that the Holy Spirit continues to work in us.

How can we celebrate the Lord's Day when social distancing prevents us from gathering in our congregations? Obviously, we can't gather to celebrate the Lord's Supper, though nothing prevents us from worship and prayer in our homes. Different congregations will have distinct resources for connecting with the congregation through the internet. Some congregations will livestream an adapted service similar to what they would do on a typical Sunday. Other congregations who don't have the tools for real-time streaming can post a recorded video of sermons and music. Some smaller congregations may not be able to do anything through the internet, and not everyone will have the tools at home to stream video programs.

Therefore, let's consider how we can honor the Lord's Day and worship in our homes or places of shelter.

First, the size of the gathering doesn't matter. Jesus said, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I'm there with them" (Matt 18:20, CEB). In a profound sense, no Christian ever prays alone. The prayer that Jesus gave us to pray begins "Our Father." Every time we pray the Lord's Prayer, we join our voices with Christians all over the world and throughout all time. We are always a member of the body of Christ, even when we are not able to meet together physically.

Second, the day does matter. Honoring the Lord's Day connects us with other Christians throughout the world. This may be a time for congregations of every size to ask members to commit to worship and pray when they would ordinarily gather, regardless of whether they can do so on the internet. One option for churches to consider is to organize small groups of eight or fewer who will agree to worship on Sunday at the same time. These small groups could check in with each other by internet or by phone during that time to share prayer concerns and family news.

Third, we can start or renew a practice of daily family prayer, but with special attention to the Lord's Day. Here is a brief order of worship for a family of any size that can also be done by a single individual:

### **Opening praise**

Sing aloud one or more songs of praise. If you have a *United Methodist Hymnal (UMH)*, see pages 57-101 and 153-194. Or you may begin with a contemporary praise song. Or sing the Doxology. Or sing the words "Praise God" to the tune of "Amazing Grace." If you use a recording, please be sure to sing along, out loud, as much as possible. Speaking the words out loud is important as an act of worship.

### **Opening Prayer**

A leader may say this or another prayer:

Lord, as we honor this Lord's Day with our worship, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that we may receive your Word with joy.

### **Scripture reading.**

Have someone read the scripture out loud. Use one or more of the lectionary readings for the day (See <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/calendar/lectionary> ). Or use whatever is recommended by your congregation so that everyone hears the same scripture reading each Sunday.

### **Silent reflection**

Allow at least a full minute of silence after the scripture reading.

### **Sharing**

Share images or insights that may arise during the silence.

### **Confession**

Confess fears, doubts, or sins, silently or aloud.

After everyone is finished, a leader says: "May God forgive our sins and free us for joyful obedience."

### **Prayers and Thanksgiving**

Voice prayers and thanksgiving for the world, for the congregation, for leaders of the church and the world, for our neighbors, as well as for personal needs and concerns. Include prayers for those who are sick, for medical professionals, and for those who put their lives at risk to serve the common good. Also include a prayer for a time when it is safe once again to assemble with our sisters and brothers in the congregation. This would be a time for "call in" requests from others in a small group.

After each prayer or word of thanks, a leader may say: "Loving God," and all respond, "hear our prayer."

### **Lord's Prayer**

Conclude the prayers with the Lord's Prayer in unison, beginning: As Jesus taught us, we pray, "Our Father..."

**Ending Song or Hymn**

End with another song or hymn as the group may choose.

**Blessing**

A leader may conclude the service with a blessing from scripture such as:

Numbers 6:24-26

2 Corinthians 13:14

Or, "May God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless and strengthen us."

All respond: "Amen."