

Worship Resources
related to
Conditions of Childhood
Child Abuse Prevention and Child Protection



Originally created for the 2000 Health Promotion Sunday
Making Our Churches Safe Places

Invocation

Gracious God, we gather this morning in search of healing in our lives: healing of physical illness; healing of broken hearts; healing of separation from you. Help us enter into a time when we are fully aware of the abundance of your healing love. Wrap your grace-filled arms around us as we seek to share ourselves fully with you. O God, come and dwell among us. Amen.

by Kelly Burk

Invocation (unison)

Along with the Psalmist and Isaiah we affirm:

"O Lord, our God, we have cried to you, and you have heard us.
You forgive our sins, you help us fight our diseases.
You heal our broken hearts and bind up our wounds.
With your stripes we are healed."

Come, O Mighty Healer, touch our brokenness and pain.
Use this hour to cleanse and strengthen us. Amen.

by Chuck Boyer

Litany

Leader: We are persons who have experienced pain and rejection.
People: We are persons who have experienced love and acceptance.
Ledaer: We are persons who have shown racism, sexism and exclusion
to some who are different from us.
People: We are persons who have overcome prejudice and have included
some who are different from us.
Leader: We have sometimes been legalistic and put rules above relationships.
People: We have sometimes overcome legalism and put the concerns for other
people above old, unloving rules.
Leader: We have sometimes excluded the very sinners whom Jesus welcomed
into his kingdom.
People: Sometimes we welcome the outcasts of our society to God's table.
All: We seek to bring Jesus' love into our congregation and our communities.
We seek to be free of physical or verbal abuse.
We seek to live in peace.

by Chuck Boyer

Call to Worship

One: Jesus said, "Come."

All: We have come from many places with many needs.

One: Jesus said, "Come to me."

All: We have gathered in this house or worship to be with Jesus
to seek his presence to be with him.

One: Jesus said, "Come to me all you who are wearied and burdened."

All: We have brought our burdens and needs to confess them to lay them down
to find freedom.

One: Jesus said, "Come to me and I will give you rest."

All: We come seeking that rest both for ourselves and for our neighbors
that together we may rest in God's forgiveness.

One: Jesus said, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle
and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

by Galen Hackman

Invocation

We gather, O God, as your people in this place called "sanctuary." We gather aware that for some this is a place of safety and peace and comfort. We gather knowing that for others, this is a place that has been found to be dangerous. It is our heartfelt desire, as followers of your son Jesus, to have in this place, a true sanctuary. Begin to grow that seed of safety in our hearts so that it will blossom into every corner of our lives together. Amen.

by Marilyn Lerch

Prayer of Confession

With eyes downcast, we come to you, Lord Jesus, knowing that there are those who are not with us this morning because we have failed to make your church a loving and safe place. We ask your forgiveness for the hearts we have broken, for the trusts we have betrayed, for harsh and judgmental words that have turned others from you. We pray not only for a larger vision of grace but also for tender hearts and gracious tongues that are quick to speak the words of love we all long to hear.

by Marilyn Lerch

The Words of Assurance

We live our lives with the example of Jesus Christ before us. At times we are truly a reflection of Christ to the world. At other times we fail miserably in our faith journey. Always the good news for us is that as we ask to be forgiven, forgiveness is given to us. Thanks be to God.

by Marilyn Lerch

Things We Can Do to Make Our Churches Safe Places

Originally created for the 2000 Health Promotion Sunday

On any given Sunday morning you might hear many church attendees sharing a prayer concern - "Please keep my Aunt Thelma in your prayers. She was just diagnosed with cancer." Or perhaps, "Remember our youth this week as they are away at work camp." It is perfectly safe to raise these concerns with our church family because they are "safe" subjects. What hurts or concerns are typically NOT shared in church? Why aren't they shared? What are the impediments? Finally, what can the church do to become a safe (safer) place to share? These are the questions we put to several Brethren, and their responses are summarized here in two parts. Part 1 provides responses to several hurts or concerns. Part 2 is one respondent's closer evaluation of the issue of disabilities.

Our hope is that you will use this resource as you seek to make the church a safe place.

Part 1 - Some Ways the Church Can Become a Safe Place

What hurts or concerns are typically NOT shared in church?

- * Mental health concerns
- * Abuse - physical, mental and sexual
- * Addiction
- * HIV/AIDS
- * Terminal or chronic illness
- * Divorce
- * Unemployment
- * Homelessness
- * Grief
- * Incarceration
- * Faith struggles
- * Sexual orientation
- * Congregation's internal conflicts

- * Intra family conflicts
- * Marital problems
- * Pastor's humanity
- * Church's inability to change (we have always done it this way)
- * Racial issues - prejudice
- * Age and control versus youth and energy
- * Financial issues
- * Being widowed
- * Domestic violence
- * Teenage pregnancy and promiscuity
- * Bankruptcy
- * Litigation
- * Depression

Why aren't these issues shared? What are the impediments?

- * Negative perceptions around seeking assistance from a mental health professional
- * Feelings of guilt (the victim is somehow at fault) and fear
- * Victim's doubt that they will be understood and believed
- * Often perpetrators of abuse are respected community members
- * Prejudice
- * Easier to remain silent
- * Confidentiality concerns
- * We cannot acknowledge our own humanity
- * Church leaders don't want to be vulnerable
- * Lack of strong sense of community
- * Lack of appropriate opportunity to share
- * Fear of judgement
- * Ignorance of the issues and how to respond.

- * Fear of becoming "tainted" with the very issue being discussed
- * Fear of damaging the church - its structure and/or image
- * Pride
- * Lack of resources

What can the church do to become a safe (safer) place to share?

- * Be honest about our feelings
- * Share our stories of healing
- * Be willing to risk being open and honest - with ourselves and each other
- * Teach/model Christ-like actions
- * Place a higher value on being in relationship over being right
- * Focus on how we are alike
- * Agree to disagree
- * Create confidential and secure space for persons to express themselves
- * Stop the gossip before it gets passed on
- * Create a culture of respect
- * Talk honestly about the benefits of mental health therapy
- * Hold persons accountable in a supportive, nonjudgmental manner
- * Practice the "Imago Dei" - Seeing the image of God in each person
- * Establish Lafiya in the congregation
- * Preach and teach about care, compassion, openness to sharing, being nonjudgmental
- * Practice anointing and other rituals of sustenance and care
- * Employ church-wide reviews that ask questions like: "What issues currently impact the life of our church?" "What experience/skills do we possess that we can share with those who are hurting or need our help?"
- * Familiarize ourselves with helpful resources
- * Assess needs in neighborhood
- * Initiate support groups