

Lent 2012

A Congregational Resource

In you, O Lord, I take refuge;... Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength is spent.

Psalms 71:1; 9



Older Adult Ministries Task Force

Introduction

Our lives and spiritual journeys take us to a journey outward and a journey inward. As we engage in this rhythm, we realize that these journeys are of the same cloth and both lead to the other. Lent is a time of consideration of our interior journeys where we are open to hear the voices that come to us and ponder once again who we are, whose we are, and who is the “we” that we yearn to be. As we journey down this path, we are also drawn to the outward journey as the answers to these questions are found in part in our relationships with others, and the created world. Such is the walk into our baptismal covenant, our consideration of conversations and work that matters, and an understanding that ours is an incarnational faith. What we do matters. All people who are in our memories and who share the planet with us matter in the sight of God.

Lent is an important time to go into the interior crevices of our lives and communities, and ponder yet again who is there, and what voices we are hearing. Elder abuse is often a silent voice as it occurs within the noise of our living. It often occurs outside the earshot of our daily living, and happens within institutions, families, and on the street corners of life, all of which may present some barriers for our response. Yet the abuse of people of any age grieves God, and all of us, when we are made aware of its existence. Abuse takes many forms and not all of it is calculated or intentional but its pervasive effects on young and old alike is often destructive beyond imagining.

In this journey, this Lent, we offer to you the Lenten series as a way in which you might consider hearing and seeing what is often not perceivable (elder abuse) so that the reach of love, healing, and reconciliation might be available to them. Case studies are presented in such a way to demonstrate the harsh reality of this abuse, but also to suggest that we all can do something about it. Sometimes elder abuse might be likened to voices crying in the wilderness. Now can be a time during this re-entering the wilderness in Lent to become especially aware of older adults living amongst us and in our communities. It can be a time to connect with them in ways that bespeak of the high value we place on their lives and to exclaim what treasures they are in our midst. As we seek to reach out, we will be surely aware that older adults, who are at risk of abuse, have gifts and treasures to share with us.

So let us re-engage this inward and outward journey with hope and promise, with integrity and honesty, and with the undying belief that nothing can separate us from the love of God. In this way we will seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves and respect the dignity and freedom of every human being. That just may be a Lenten discipline worth doing and may be life-changing along the way.

The Rev. Dr. Bud Holland
Priest and fellow sojourner along the way
Member, Older Adults Ministries Task Force

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Sessions for use with Small Groups

About these Sessions

Our hope is that the lesson plan outlines on the following pages will help raise awareness and foster a better understanding of the importance to offer intentional and ongoing ministry to, for and with a wide variety of aging adults in your church and community.

Each session provides scripture passages (NSRV) and related framework to help your group have conversations around topics that can sometimes be difficult. In each session, you will find a variety of discussion questions and conversation starters. Feel free to adapt or ignore questions to best meet your group's needs... the provided questions are simply a way to help you get started.

Gathering Timeframes

These sessions were originally designed for five sessions of approximately 45 minutes each, but the timeframe can be shortened or expanded as needed for your group.

Sessions can easily be used as Sunday-morning Adult Education opportunities or mid-week small groups. One of the reasons we offer this resource in an electronic format is to make it easy for you to adapt to whatever best suits your group.

Participants

There are many groups who might benefit from these sessions. Below are some different groups we imagined might find this resource to be useful. However, use it in any way that is helpful for your group:

- Adult Sunday School class
- Committee for Older Adult Ministries
- Clergy group
- Families who care for older adults
- Diocesan groups

Ash Wednesday

Opening Prayer:

Righteous God,
in humility and repentance
we bring our failures in caring, helping, and loving,
we bring the pain we have caused other,
we bring the injustice in society of which we are a part,
to the transforming power of your grace.
Grant us the courage to accept the healing you offer
and to turn again toward the sunrise of your reign,
that we may walk with you in the promise of peace
you have willed for all the children of the earth,
and have made known to us in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Scripture for the Day:

Psalm 51:1-17

1:1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

1:2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

1:3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

1:4 Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.

1:5 Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.

1:6 You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.

1:7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

1:8 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.

1:9 Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

1:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

1:11 Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.

1:12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

1:13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

1:14 Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

1:15 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

1:16 For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.

1:17 The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Theme:

"Center on what is really important".

Scenario:

Mrs. L has recently lost her husband. She has been having increasingly more serious medical issues and hired a home health care worker, Ms. Nancy. Ms. Nancy has moved in with Mrs. L, and visitors have commented that some of the furniture has been removed from the house by Nancy's friends. According to the concerned people, Mrs. L's car is being used by Ms. Nancy to visit the local casino. These visitors have some serious concerns that Mrs. L's assets are gradually being taken by Ms. Nancy.

A Time for Reflection:

It appears that Ms. Nancy is stealing from Mrs. L.

- How can there be an intervention in this situation to ensure that Mrs. L's resources are not being stolen, there is accountability for Ms. Nancy in her actions, and treasures of healthy relationships might be available for Mrs. L that cannot be stolen?
- How can the church make sure that this does not happen to others?
- Are there any people in your congregation, community, neighborhood who live alone and depend on outside care givers? If so what might you do to advocate for them and check on their well being?
- In psalm verse 1:6 the psalmist point outs God's desire for us to search for the truth of our inward being and ask for the teaching of wisdom in one's secret heart. Having heard Mrs. L's story, what have you discovered about your own understanding of elder abuse?

Closing Prayer:

Look with mercy on our contrite hearts,
wash from us the stain of iniquity,
and create a new and right spirit in us,
that we may declare your praise
and offer an acceptable sacrifice in these Lenten days;
through Christ Jesus, who bore our sins on the cross. Amen.

First Sunday in Lent

Opening Prayer:

Beloved friends, in this season of repentance and healing,
we accept God's invitation to be ever-mindful of the needs of others,
offering our prayers on behalf of God's community in the church and the world.

Scripture for the Day:

Mark 1:9-15

1:9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

1:10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.

1:11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

1:12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.

1:13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

1:14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God,

1:15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Theme:

“God is doing a new thing, and so can we”

Scenario:

Mrs. Smith and her husband, longtime members of the church, were approached by several people at the most recent Sunday service. After talking to the Smiths a bit, some of the group walked away to have a private conversation because they were worried about Mrs. Smith. They had observed some bruises on Mrs. Smith's arms, and when one of the members of the group asked her about them, she said that she "bumped into things a lot." At that point, her husband very abruptly ended the conversation and told those gathered that it was none of their business how she got hurt.

A Time for Reflection:

- Mrs. Smith is in the wilderness, how should or might the concerned members of the congregation react to what they are witnessing?
- Whom should they tell?
- How can they keep Mrs. Smith safe?
- What will you do to learn more about the warning signals of elder abuse?

Closing Prayer:

God of the covenant,
in the glory of the cross
your Son embraced the power of death
and broke its hold over your people.
In this time of repentance,
draw all people to yourself,
that we who confess Jesus as Lord
may put aside the deeds of death
and accept the life of your kingdom. Amen.

Second Sunday in Lent

Opening Prayer:

God of wilderness and water,
your Son was baptized and tempted as we are.
Guide us through this season,
that we may not avoid struggle,
but open ourselves to blessing,
through the cleansing depths of repentance
and the heaven-rending words of the Spirit. Amen.

Scripture for the Day:

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

17:1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless.

17:2 And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous."

17:3 Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him,

17:4 "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations.

17:5 No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations.

17:6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.

17:7 I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

17:15 God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name.

17:16 I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."

Theme:

"A new direction is being established in the midst of great odds." It is often difficult to discover abuse within a family situation, especially when the children are so highly respected in the community. Mrs. G's voice can be like one crying out in the wilderness.

Scenario:

Mrs. G lived with her son, daughter and daughter-in-law. The son was the principal of the local high school and very involved in the community. The daughter was the primary caregiver. Mrs. G had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's and had been confined to her bed for the last 10 years. On the day she died at home, the local EMS crew observed what appeared to be a very bad pressure sore. They contacted local law enforcement officers who were able to determine that Mrs. G died from an infection from the pressure sore and malnutrition. No one in the community believed that this family could have possibly neglected their mother to the point where she died. Ultimately, the son and daughter were convicted of neglect but received only probation.

A Time of Reflection:

- The unimaginable has happened to Mrs. G; the offspring God blessed her with have betrayed her; this sacred bond between mother and child was broken. What must it have been like for Mrs. G in the wilderness? Perhaps her faith sustained her, or not? What can we do for those who are in isolation? How might we, through the gifts God has given us, touch their lives?
- What are the opportunities within the church to identify, and reach out to persons in distress?
- What is the role of the church in this work?
- How do can we reconcile the children, who received only probation for their violation of their mother, with our understanding of justice for the oppressed?

Closing Prayer:

God of Sarah and Abraham,
long ago you embraced your people in covenant
and promised them your blessing.
Strengthen us in faith,
that, with your disciples of every age,
we may proclaim your deliverance in Jesus Christ
to generations yet unborn. Amen.

Third Sunday in Lent

Opening Prayer:

Faithful God of love,
you blessed us with your servant Son
so that we might know how to serve your people
with justice and with mercy.

We gather the needs of ourselves and others,
and offer them to you in faith and love,
seeking to be strengthened to meet them.

Shape us and transform us by your grace,
that we may grow in wisdom and in confidence,
never faltering until we have done all that you desire
to bring your realm of shalom to fulfillment. Amen.

Scripture for the Day:

Exodus 20:1-17

20:1 Then God spoke all these words:

20:2 I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery;

20:3 you shall have no other gods before me.

20:4 You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

20:5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me,

20:6 but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

20:7 You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

20:8 Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy.

20:9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work.

20:10 But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work--you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns.

20:11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

20:12 Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

20:13 You shall not murder.

20:14 You shall not commit adultery.

20:15 You shall not steal.

20:16 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

20:17 You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Theme:

The importance of the priorities/commands/demands of God.

Scenario:

Mr. T has reached a point in his life where he really shouldn't drive. He has made a decision to allow his son to move in with him, and he will pay him to help with such tasks as going to the grocery store, taking him to medical appointments, and helping with those things around the house that have become difficult to do, given Mr. T's declining health. His church attendance has declined because his son really doesn't want to go to church and doesn't see why it is important. Some folks from the parish have stopped by the home, but the son always seems to have a reason why Mr. T isn't available for visitors. When they finally are allowed in, they notice that he has some bruises on his arm, smells of urine, and generally looks unkempt. He won't talk about any of these problems, and the church visitors leave.

A Time for Reflection:

- The priorities/commands/demands including honoring your father and mother. How can the situation be turned around when it is apparent that Mr. T is not being honored and respected?
- What do you, and your community of faith do when a regular member of the congregation is not seen in church or when they need a way to get to Church?
- How courageous are you in asking the difficult questions of why are the deteriorating conditions of the Mr. T's of the world allowed to continue?

Closing Prayer:

Holy One, creator of the stars and seas,
your steadfast love is shown to every living thing;
your word calls forth countless worlds and souls;
your law revives and refreshes.
Forgive our misuse of your gifts,
that we may be transformed by your wisdom
to manifest for others
the mercy of our crucified and risen Lord. Amen.

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Opening Prayer:

God of the living,
through baptism we pass from the shadow of death
to the light of the resurrection.
Remain with us and give us hope
that, rejoicing in the gift of the Spirit
who gives life to our mortal flesh,
we may be clothed with the garment of immortality,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture for the Day:

John 3:14-21

3:14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,

3:15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

3:17 "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

3:18 Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

3:19 And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

3:20 For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed.

3:21 But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

Theme:

"A new awakening--a new light is dawning." A new light needs to be shown on this situation with Mrs. Wilson--a light that can help straighten up the real mess in the house.

Scenario:

Mrs. Wilson has not been seen at church in almost a month. Some parishioners are concerned and stop by her home to see how she is doing. They are met at the door by a man in his forties, who identifies himself as the older woman's grand-nephew, James. He informs them that his aunt isn't feeling well and that is the reason she hasn't been going to church.

After asking the visitors to wait outside for a few minutes while he "straightens up the mess," the nephew allows them inside. He goes to a back room and returns with Ms. Wilson. The visitors observe the following:

- She is very thin.
- She is wearing a sleeveless dress despite the fact that it is 55 degrees outside.
- The house does not appear to be heated.
- Her walk is unsteady, and she does not have a walker or cane. The nephew does not offer assistance, and as he leads her into the room, she stumbles and almost falls.
- She has bruises on both her upper arms.
- There is only one bedroom.
- There is a lock on the outside of the door to the bedroom

A Time of Reflection:

- A new light needs to be shown on this situation with Mrs. Wilson--a light that can help straighten up the real mess in the house. What are the opportunities and challenges for the church in this work of bringing new light to situations which seem to be so difficult?
- How might the church enlist visitors for others that might help prevent similar situations from happening?
- We do not know if the neglect is intentional. Perhaps the caregiver needs care? How can the church reach out to those who might be overwhelmed?

Closing Prayer:

Steadfast God,
you reach out to us in mercy
even when we rebel against your holy call
and prefer to walk in disobedience
rather than in the way of your divine truth.
soften our hearts with the warmth of your love,
that we may know your Son alive within us,
redeeming us and raising us up into your eternal presence. Amen.

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Opening Prayer:

God of suffering and glory,
in Jesus Christ you reveal the way of life
through the path of obedience.
Inscribe your law in our hearts,
that in life we may not stray from you,
but may be your people. Amen.

Scripture for the Day:

Psalm 119:9-16

119:9 How can young people keep their way pure? By guarding it according to your word.

119:10 With my whole heart I seek you; do not let me stray from your commandments.

119:11 I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you.

119:12 Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your statutes.

119:13 With my lips I declare all the ordinances of your mouth.

119:14 I delight in the way of your decrees as much as in all riches.

119:15 I will meditate on your precepts, and fix my eyes on your ways.

119:16 I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.

Theme:

New life is possible in God. Hope springs from forgiveness.

Scenario:

Last year, Mr. Brown lost his wife of 55 years. This month, several members of the church stop by to see how he is doing. He introduces them to his new friend, Sally. Sally seems to be much younger than Mr. Brown, who appears to be somewhat confused. They notice that there is a new car in the driveway as well as some new and expensive furniture...all very interesting, because for most of his life, Mr. Brown was known to be very frugal and living on a very modest income.

A Time for Reflection:

- Is the new life Mr. Brown is exhibiting of his own choosing, or might he be coerced?
This is often a hard call. We don't want to interfere unduly in others' lives yet there appears to be circumstances that give us pause. How do we decide whether to act or not?
- What new contacts might the church make in this regard to invite persons like Mr. Brown to a broader fellowship of the church community so that he might experience more fully the compassion and healing potential of a community of faith?
- Grieving and bereavement are lived out differently by each of us but what holds us in common is that we have experienced a profound loss. When we love deeply we grieve deeply. How might the church community offer opportunities to persons to express their grieving and to discover new potential pathways for their future?

Closing Prayer:

Sisters and brothers,
as Jesus, in the days before his passion,
offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears,
let us pray for those who suffer, those who are in need,
and those who seek reconciliation.

God of compassion,
you know our faults and yet you promised to forgive.
Keep us in your presence and give us your wisdom.
Open our hearts to gladness,
call dry bones to dance,
and restore to us the joy of your salvation. Amen.

Palm Sunday

Opening Prayer:

God of the covenant,
in the glory of the cross
your Son embraced the power of death
and broke its hold over your people.
In this time of repentance,
draw all people to yourself,
that we who confess Jesus as Lord
may put aside the deeds of death
and accept the life of your kingdom. Amen.

Scripture for the Day:

Isaiah 50:4-9a

50:4 The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens-- wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught.

50:5 The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward.

50:6 I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting.

50:7 The Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame;

50:8 he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me.

50:9a It is the Lord GOD who helps me; who will declare me guilty?

Theme:

The journey is often not easy and initial expectations can be unfulfilled but the journey continues as God meets all that stands in the way with a steadfast love that not even death itself can separate us from. This is our hope and fuels our commitment to be about this reconciling love in the world

Scenario:

Several members of the parish, having visited Mrs. L, took their concerns to the Rector. He then scheduled a visit to the home of Mrs. L and came away with the same concerns. She felt that there was a reasonable belief that the home health care worker, Ms. Nancy, was financially exploiting and possibly neglecting Mrs. L. He then contacted the local adult protective services who, in turn, contacted local law enforcement. After a thorough investigation a family member was appointed her guardian and Ms. Nancy may be facing criminal prosecution. Mrs. L is now receiving regular visits from members of the parish.

A Time for Reflection:

- It is important not to get too discouraged. Our journey is, in part, to stay on the journey. We may not know the way forward but we can have hope which is often all we have. How might the church build on this good outcome and others like it?
- If we are a resurrected people, how can we voice that good news in all of our work with elders and with all age groups in our congregation and community?
- How might we bring all people, regardless of age, together into a new relationship that values the human spirit, giftedness, and wisdom of all—expressing a community that treasures inter-generational living and learning at its core?

Closing Prayer:

Caught between joy and despair,
we yearn for the fulfillment of God's desire
beyond the brokenness and neediness of this life.
We offer thanksgiving for God's presence with us
and petitions for the transformation
of the church and the world.

Life-giver, Pain-bearer, Love-maker,
day by day you sustain the weary with your word
and gently encourage us to place our trust in you.

Awaken us to the suffering of those around us;
save us from hiding in denials or taunts that deepen the hurt;
give us grace to share one another's burdens in humble service. Amen.