

format that creates a time of worship.

When attending Sunday morning worship, still your soul and all the busyness that comes with life in the world and enter God's presence and listen. Consider arriving in the sanctuary early. As you enter, remind yourself that you are in a holy



space and be respectful of that holiness. Offer prayers; for those who will lead the service, for the gathered community, for this day and all that it invites us to, for the greater community and a world in need, for the earth and the wonder of God's creation. As you see others enter, lift them to God, invite the living Christ into their lives. And then, truly experience authentic community. When we are truly gathered into worship as a

community, we invite a deep inward fellowship in the power of the Holy Spirit. Our separateness and divisions melt away and we are invited to experience a sense of unity and oneness in God's presence.

Consider journaling about your worship experiences; what truly touched you and opened holy space for you, how did viewing Sunday morning worship differently change your experience?

In Brief

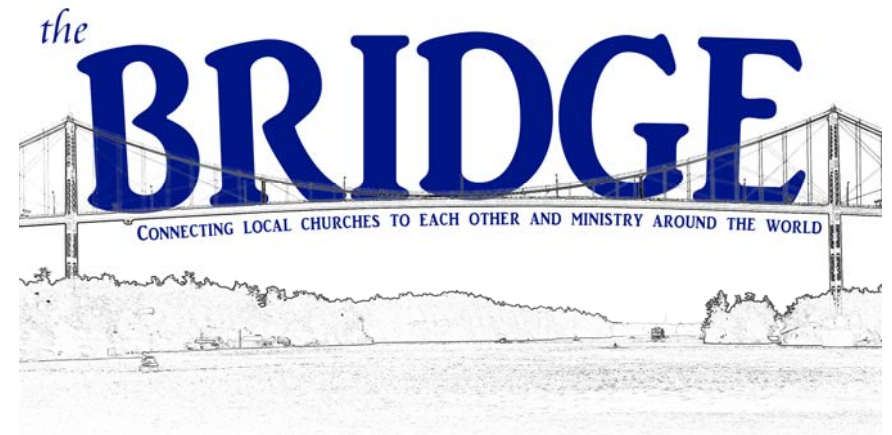
Native American Sunday is May 5

Did you know that more than 20,000 Native American people are part of The United Methodist Church? On May 5, help celebrate Native American Ministries Sunday by giving a special offering that directly supports Native American congregations and enables them to authentically minister with their communities while honoring creative expressions of culture and heritage. The offering also provides scholarships for Native American seminary students.

The Bridge is a Conference Communications Ministry tool that delivers to local churches news and stories of ministry from around the Upper New York Conference and the world. For more news and stories visit:

www.unyumc.org

Visit the Conference blog, Perspectives at <http://bit.ly/UNYEaster> to hear about the favorite Easter traditions of people from around the Upper New York Conference and to share your favorite Easter traditions.



The Upper New York Conference's vision is to live the gospel of Jesus Christ and to be God's love with our neighbors in all places.

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Delving into worship as a spiritual discipline

By Nancy Dibelius, Assistant Director of Vital Congregations for Spiritual Life

Spiritual disciplines are a means by which we “get away” with Jesus, “walk” with Jesus, and ‘learn’ from Jesus. From Richard Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline*, “God has given us the disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving his grace. The disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us...Spiritual growth is the purpose of the disciplines...We must always remember that the path does not produce the change; it only places us where the change can occur.”

I often tell people that I practice spiritual disciplines as a means of putting myself in the presence of God, to “keep company with Jesus.” It enables me to recognize and be aware of God’s presence, to listen for God’s deep desire for me, and to find myself in that place where God is able to affect change in my

life. I am not always able to experience that connectedness, but the more I practice, the more opportunity I have. I appreciate that the word ‘discipline’ often has a negative connotation in our present culture, but its basic meaning is “to train by instruction and exercise.” Athletes accept that discipline is essential to successful participation in a sport; it may not always be easy, but it is necessary. Practicing spiritual disciplines is not always easy either, but it is indeed necessary if we seek to ‘keep company’ with Jesus and to ‘recover the life’ God desires for each of us.

The traditional Christian disciplines include: Meditation, Prayer (and Listening), Fasting, Study, Simplicity, Solitude (and Silence), Submission, Service, Confession, Worship, Guidance (group and individual spiritual direction), and Celebration.

Let’s explore how we might practice worship as a spiritual discipline. Alt-



hough we generally think of worship as a corporate act, it is also a very personal act and it can occur in private, in small groups, and yes, in a large body on Sunday morning. Worship is our response to God’s initiative in our lives; our praise and thanks for all

that God is and all that God has done. Forms, rituals, and liturgy are not the central piece of worship; our authentic experience of the holy is what creates meaningful worship. In the Bible we see people gathered for worship with the expectation that they would hear the voice of God in their midst, the same was true of the early Christian church. They gathered knowing that Christ was present among them and that he would teach them and touch them.

We enter worship whenever we enter God’s presence, our worship may include singing, dancing, praying, or simply entering silently into God’s presence. But worship invites us to enter fully into the experience, offering our whole being to God. Our body, mind, spirit, and emotions are all offered on the altar in worship.

A vital aspect of our Christian community is the gathering together to worship. The invitation is there for us to gather into a unity of spirit that transcends our



individualism. Gathered together in faith we become the ‘body of Christ.’

Consider the ways in which you can participate in this experience, in your home with your family, in meetings and other small groups, and as the gathered community. On a personal level, consider ways in which you can make your devotional time truly seem like worship; create space that is worshipful; light a candle, have a cross or another object that opens you to God’s presence. Create a ritual that opens and closes your devotional time, sing a hymn/play a CD. During the Advent season, consider ways in which you can create moments of worship with your family; lighting an Advent candle and reading a brief scripture. Open meetings and other small group gatherings with a brief time of worship, not just a short prayer; if you’re not sure how to design such a time of worship, use a devotional that is designed with a

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