

TENDING THE SOUL OF THE CONGREGATION

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES FOR CHURCH LEADERS





DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES

The United Methodist Church

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TENDING THE SOUL OF THE CONGREGATION

Spiritual Exercises for Church Leaders

Are you longing for spiritual vitality in your church? If so, The Upper Room invites you to use this resource to engage your church leaders (or your entire congregation) in a series of spiritual readings and reflection exercises. The exercises are designed to be conversation starters that will help us shift from being anxious about the church's future to being open and available to God's love and longing for the people we are sent to serve. As spiritual leaders, it is mission-critical that we ground ourselves in spiritual thoughts and practices that will strengthen our congregations during challenging times. We must tend to the *soul* of the congregation, to the heart of our call of being disciple-making congregations. May we be open to the Spirit who is the source and guide for all ministry that matters.

Session I: Transforming Presence

Spiritual leaders invite openness to God's presence

Session II: Transforming Practice

Spiritual leaders build spiritual practice

Session III: Transforming Pathways

Spiritual leaders guide people toward maturing in the Christian life

Session IV: Transforming Power

Spiritual leaders foster availability to the God who sends us forth in the power of the Spirit

Tending the Soul of the Congregation is written by Rev. Stephen D. Bryant, publisher of Upper Room Ministries and Associate General Secretary, Discipleship Ministries.



SESSION I: Transforming Presence

Spiritual leaders invite openness to God's presence.

"New every morning is your love, great God of light, and all day long you are working for good in the world. Stir up in us desire to serve you, to live peacefully with our neighbors, and to devote each day to your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord."

– A Liturgy for Morning Prayer, *Upper Room Worshipbook*

Spiritual vitality in our churches stems from our openness to God's transforming presence, not from anxious striving over members, money, and maintenance. Indeed, there is much work to be done; and it requires our attention. But we must balance the outer work with the inner work. Inner work begins with carving out the space and time required to center ourselves in God. When we do this, and when we've yielded afresh to the persuasions of the "Love at the heart of things" (Douglas Steere), we return to the work of the day reordered, more aware and more attune to the gracious presence of the One who calls us forward.

Tending the soul of the congregation starts with attending to God's presence in our lives as leaders, then bringing the same prayerful openness into the meetings and ministries of the church. The opening to the spring must be maintained or else the streams will run dry.

Parker Palmer once wrote, "Many of us and our congregations are guilty of 'functional atheism.' Though our language pays lip service to God, our actions assume that God does not exist or is in a coma. Functional atheism is the belief that nothing is happening unless we are making it happen." (*Weavings, no. 1, vol. 1, 1986*)

I can identify. Can you? One way we can overcome the functional atheism that routinely sets in among us is by routinely engaging in prayerful reflection on scripture and spiritual conversation, or what John Wesley called “Christian conferencing.” Such conversations are a form of spiritual exercise for the body of Christ. On the way to Emmaus, Jesus joined two disciples in conversation about the things that were happening around them. The conversation continues today and remains a source of new life for us as it was for them. Returning to it whenever we meet is one of the ways we maintain our connection with the living Christ among us and remain spiritually alert.

Spiritual conversation is especially important for leadership teams and ministry groups when we are seeking to be a disciple-making church. We can get so lost in what we are doing and how we will make people into disciples, so intent are we to do well and to make a difference for Christ! And yet it is the risen Christ who calls the people to discipleship, joins them on their journeys, and changes the direction of their lives. Our work is to help the people to pay attention, to listen, learn, and live in the Spirit. Spiritual conversation helps us to help one another pay attention.

So where do we begin? One way is to make spiritual conversation a regular practice. Whenever you gather in a meeting or a ministry, begin by asking: Where have you noticed God’s presence or heard God’s call during the week? Do this each time you meet and give the group a few minutes for conversation. People will eventually catch on. Let the question become an expectation that will cause people to wonder and be watching for signs of God’s presence between meetings.

A second way is to draw from one of the spiritual readings or exercises below. A few moments to ponder a reading followed by a spiritual exercise can leaven an otherwise lifeless meeting

with new meaning. This practice of reading and reflecting can enliven our common life and deepen our deliberations.

Readings for Reflection

Which readings stir something in you? What insight and challenge do you hear?

“Openness to God happens whenever we experience wonder, curiosity, compassion, love, or beauty. It happens when we suffer. Any life experience that causes us to long for meaning, for transcendence, for whatever is of God’s character opens us to God. This is true whether we are religious or nonreligious, individuals or communities. God chooses to work collaboratively and co-creatively with us wherever we are open. And as Jesus teaches in the parable of the mustard seed (Matthew 13:31-32), even a tiny degree of faith is enough for God to initiate a process that will in time become an astounding work of loving transformation. In this way, God makes all things new.”

– Elaine Heath, *God Unbound*

“Many of us and our congregations are guilty of ‘functional atheism.’ Though our language pays lip service to God, our actions assume that God does not exist or is in a coma. Functional atheism is the belief that nothing is happening unless we are making it happen.”

– Parker Palmer, *Weavings*

“To live the life of prayer means to emerge from [our] drowse, to awaken to the communing, guiding, healing, clarifying, and transforming current of God’s Holy Spirit in which [we are] immersed.”

– Douglas Steere, *Dimensions of Prayer*

“To contemplate is to see; and to minister is to make visible [the presence of God in the world].”

– Henri Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*

“There is that near you which will guide you; O wait for it, and be sure to keep to it.”

–Isaac Pennington

Spiritual Exercises

Make time as a group to take up one of these spiritual exercises. Attend to where you, as spiritual leaders of your church, are noticing God’s presence and hearing Christ’s call.

Read Genesis 28:10-18 (NRSV)

“Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!”

God comes to Jacob in a God-forsaken place in his life. Where, looking back, do you now recognize God’s hand in your life in a way you didn’t at the time? Or where lately have you, like Jacob, been surprised by grace? Share with one another.

Reflect on the parts of your church or your church life you most strongly associate with a sense of God’s presence; or with a sense of God’s absence. Share your stories.

Who among you is living stuck in a God-forsaken place and needs to hear your story of how “the Lord is in this place,” even though you didn’t recognize or know it?

Read Isaiah 43:19 (NIV)

“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?”

This word of hope comes to Israel in a time of desolation. Where do you sense a spirit of desolation in your church or community? Where do you feel hopeless, that all is lost—that we’re at the end of our rope?

Re-read the words of Isaiah again and listen prayerfully. Look within yourself and outside of yourself with the eyes of your heart. Where do you perceive the new thing God is doing? Where do you notice seeds of promise? Share your perceptions with one another.

Read John 21:1 (NRSV)

“After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way.”

In John 20, after the resurrection, Jesus the risen Lord shows up multiple times in multiple ways—in the midst of his followers’ grief and despair, fear, doubt, and futility. Where and when has the risen Christ showed up in your experience and in what ways? Where and to whom among the people of your congregation is the Lord showing up? Go, ask, and listen to one another.



SESSION II: Transforming Practice

Spiritual leaders build spiritual practice.

“The wind of God is always blowing, but we must hoist our sails.”

– Douglas Steere

Yes, opening to the Spirit is the key to church vitality, as stated in the previous section. But *remaining* open requires spiritual discipline, especially in those parts of our lives where we tend to be closed to God and need change. Spiritual practices (or spiritual discipline, means of grace) are like sails. We hoist our sails with intent to live under the sway of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, not under the sway of other forces competing for influence.

A discipline of regular prayer, for example, is for me a way to reserve an available space for God at the center of my being which will otherwise fill up with the voices of any number of all-consuming concerns. Regular prayer provides discipline for even the possibility of a listening heart attuned to the voice of the risen Christ.

“Seeing the people” is a practice that helps me curb my tendency to be in too big a hurry to really see and honor the people in my path. Walking to work or in the halls of our workplace with a verse of scripture helps me see people through the eyes of Christ rather than through my own first impressions. My favorite verse for this practice is: “You are my Son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11) from the story of Jesus’ baptism. Having that verse running through my mind helps me to really see all the people, to see them as God saw Jesus, and as Jesus would see and relate to the people he met along life’s way. The practice transforms my vision and my response; sometimes it opens me to an encounter. Without this discipline, I hardly see at all.

Tending the soul of the congregation involves fostering spiritual practice among the people so that we as a body have eyes to see and ears to hear (Matthew 13:16). Prayer, searching the scripture, and service are means of entering and sharing in the heart, mind, and work of Christ. A balanced spiritual practice helps us get in step with the transforming rhythm of Jesus' life with God: work and worship, engagement and rest, service and Sabbath, contemplation and action. "Spiritual formation in the local church," according to well-known pastor and retreat leader Larry Peacock, "is the focused attention we give to this rhythm of withdrawal and return." (*Heart and Soul*)

Sometimes in the church we get religious programming and spiritual practice all mixed up. When that happens, our goal is to get more people more involved in more activities. In this case, are we helping people be more attentive and responsive to the presence of the Lord in their lives? How can we design church programs that will facilitate a fuller participation in the heart, mind, and work of Christ during the weekdays?

If we want to be a disciple-making church, our goal is to help people find a spiritual practice for staying awake and alive to God. People need opportunities to try on for size the practices John Wesley categorized as "works of piety" and "works of mercy," the means of grace for growing in the love of God and neighbor as God's beloved.

Readings for Reflection

Which readings stir something in you? What insight and challenge do you hear?

“Spiritual disciplines are not ways to prove our righteousness. They are a way of fostering trust in and receptivity to God. They make room for grace to operate in our lives.”

– Marjorie J. Thompson and Stephen D. Bryant, *Exploring the Way, Leader’s Guide*

“Spirituality is the experience of the presence of God. Spiritual practices are those attitudes or activities that open a person to the experience of the presence of God. The ones that first come to mind are prayers, meditation, reading the Bible, and attending church. In recent years many Christians have been adding to the list so that we now think of a walk in the woods, sitting in a sunny window with a cup of tea, or even knitting as spiritual practices. Anything that allows us to be still or to focus our attention on the Holy One can be a spiritual practice. Anything we come back to day after day, anything to which we give our attention, can be a spiritual practice. Washing dishes, walking the dog, even taking out the trash.”

– Jeanette Stokes, *The Upper Room Disciplines*

“A life with God is a life in which the rhythms of silence and listening alternate with the rhythms of sharing and service. By praying with every part of who we are, we allow the grace that pours from the well of living water to trickle through all the aspects of our being, nourishing and hydrating that which was parched and dis-eased. So begin the adventure, start the journey, follow Jesus. Allow God to transform your mind such that everything you are and everything you encounter speaks with the breath of the Spirit.”

– Daniel Wolpert, *Creating a Life with God*

“The means of grace are means by which persons experience and respond to the loving presence of God. All means of grace have as their end the life of love, the Christian life.”

– Hal Knight, *The Presence of God in Christian Life*

“There is a rhythm to Jesus’ life. He is immersed in ordinary life: speaking words of hope, healing painful wounds, telling stories...eating with sinners. He also withdraws from the clutter and ambiguity of life in order to reflect on the movements of the Spirit and touch again the Mysterious One.... Spiritual formation in the local church is the focused attention we give to this rhythm of withdrawal and return.”

– Larry Peacock, *Heart and Soul*

“Early Methodists asked the question, ‘How goes it with your soul?’ By creating small groups where this kind of sharing could happen, the Wesleys encouraged growth in discipleship... Such social holiness [spiritual communities]... shapes social conscience [engagement with the world].”

–Trevor Hudson and Jerry Haas, *Living in the Cycle of Grace*

“The church exists first and foremost to praise and glorify God...So for us prayers, meditations, Bible reading are not peripheral to our operations. These things are at the centre of our lives...Our pattern and example is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who could be the man for others only because he was first and foremost a man of God, a man of prayer.”

–Desmond Tutu, *Rabble Rouser for Peace*

Spiritual Exercises

Make time as a group to take up one of the spiritual exercises. What is a practice that helps you stay centered in God or strengthens you as a Christian disciple? What practices are most important to the vitality of your church?

Read Acts 2:41-47 (NRSV)

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

Note the practices that mark spiritual vitality in the early church. Which are your strengths as a church? Which, if given more attention, would nourish and deepen your life together and your ministry in Christ?

Read Luke 4:15-19 (NRSV)

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to...”

Luke tells us that Jesus lived by the leading of the Spirit to incarnate God’s love. Reflect on his way of walking through the world with his followers. What inward practices sustained him and his life in the Spirit? What outward practices? What shared practices shaped and sustained his life in community with his disciples? Reflect on which of Jesus’ practices are also happening in the inner frame of your church’s life.

Read Mark 6:30-32 (NRSV)

“The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all they had done and taught.”

Mark shows us here how Jesus invited the disciples to participate in the rhythm of action, reflection, and prayer that shaped his life with God. Where is this rhythm evident in your meetings and ministries? What differences does it make?



SESSION III: Transforming Pathways

Spiritual leaders guide people toward maturing in the Christian life.

“We will surround these persons with a community of love and forgiveness... [and] pray...that they may be true disciples who walk in the walk that leads to life.”

– The United Methodist Hymnal, *Baptismal Covenant 1*

Forty years ago, a religious researcher named Jean Haldane concluded an analysis of laity in congregational life with a revolutionary insight that only today is more fully taking hold. She writes, with respect to a particular church judged strong by most measures of the day, “It is obvious that the major goal of St. Columbia’s [Church]...is to help people belong [and be active], and without exception everyone wants to keep this intact. But now the possibility of a second task is raised—that of assisting people on their spiritual journeying. The problem is that all of the present leadership resources are directed toward the first goal... But for me it is becoming increasingly important that the churches help people with their spiritual journeys—and perhaps this should be the primary task of our day.” (Jean Haldane, *Religious Pilgrimage*, Alban Institute, 1977.)

Becoming a disciple-making church means making our “primary task” that of “assisting people on their spiritual journeying.” It means redirecting resources and reordering church life around pathways for helping people become and mature as disciples of Jesus Christ. It means shifting from a functional to a formational vision of ministry that impacts how each and every group or committee goes about its work.

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul clearly names his primary task and driving passion: “...that we may present everyone

mature in Christ. For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires with me.” (Col. 1:28-29) If we’re going to be a disciple-making church, we need to ask ourselves: For what do we toil and struggle? What would it mean to focus our toil and struggle on how to best assist people with their spiritual journeying?

Making the main thing people’s spiritual walk and their progress on the Christian journey means rethinking church and reordering the common life. For example, people on a spiritual journey may not need a menu of activities to attend as much as they need a map of the journey to the promise land—the love of God and neighbor. What are the various pathways and way stations we offer for following Jesus to fuller life with God for people at each stage of the journey?

Becoming a disciple-making church challenges us to be *spiritual* leaders because we must do our own inner work if we want to help others with theirs. We cannot lead others where we have never been or give others the grace we never received for ourselves. We need to learn together from scripture and Wesleyan tradition about how the Spirit works in people’s lives (prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace) and how most people experience the stages of the spiritual journey. Above all, we must gain insight into where we are on our own journeys: Where is God challenging us to grow, to serve or to move on? Where are we stuck? What gift has God given us? Who can help us stop pretending and be honest with God and with ourselves?

Readings for Reflection

Which readings stir something in you? What insight and challenge do you hear?

“For too long, The United Methodist Church has looked for a quick fix to help guide our discipleship efforts, and it is not working. We have lost our focus on intentional discipleship, we have forgotten the reasons why we said “yes” to Jesus, and we ourselves have stopped growing as disciples. We have forgotten that being on a path of discipleship is a life-long journey of growth and maturing. I believe a renewed focus on making disciples will be a better investment of our time, money, and resources. Our focus must move away from “fixing” churches, toward making and growing disciples!”

– Junius Dotson, *An Invitation to Intentional Discipleship and Healthy Discipleship Systems*

“It is this vagueness about the ends of ministry that is killing us...I shall argue here that the fundamental aim of ordained ministry is to guide parishioners toward maturing in the Christian life.”

– Neill Hamilton, *Maturing in the Christian Life*

“We make disciples as we: proclaim the gospel...lead persons to commit their lives to God...nurture persons in Christian living...send persons into the world to live lovingly and justly as servants of Christ...”

– *United Methodist Book of Discipline, 2012*

“I am more convinced than ever that the preaching like an apostle without the joining together those who are awakened, and training them up in the ways of God, is only begetting children for the murderer.”

– John Wesley

“By its very nature, the church is an ecology of spiritual care and guidance. It is the decisive context for spiritual formation. Spiritual guidance and care in the congregation must be ongoing and consistent, woven into the very fabric of all that happens rather than presented on sporadic occasions as a new program.”

– Suzanne Johnson, *Spiritual Formation in Congregation and Classroom*

Spiritual Exercises

Make time as a group to take up one of the spiritual exercises. Each exercise will, in its own way, challenge you to consider your image of the spiritual journey and the “pathways” for companionship, learning, or engagement that you as a faith community currently offer that are relevant to people in each stage along the way.

Read Hebrews 12:15 (NRSV)

“See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God...”

How do you “see to it” that everyone experiences and grows in God’s grace, that no one fails to obtain the gift of God’s grace? Sketch out a map of the ways your church seeks to do this, for example, in relation to each age group.

Read 2 Cor. 3:17-18 (NRSV)

“We are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.”

Paul views Christian life as progressive, beginning with the glory of our origin in God, then our awakening to the glory of God’s love for us all in Christ crucified. How would you then describe the next “degrees of glory” in the journey toward becoming Christ-like? Think of ways your church supports people’s maturing in each phase.

Read Mark 3:13-15 (NRSV)

“He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him...to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message...”

The story of Jesus’ calling the twelve apostles also illustrates three phases of the discipleship journey and of the church’s work. Jesus calls us to come to him, to be with him, and to be sent out. How do you in your church actively support people’s responsiveness to Christ’s call to lifelong discipleship through ministries of inviting (“they came to him”), forming (“to be with him”), and sending (“to be sent out”)?

Read Col. 1:28-29 (NRSV)

“...that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires with me.”

For what do you and your church toil and struggle? What would it look like if you were to invest your creativity and resources to each and every person’s maturing in Christ?



SESSION IV: Transforming Power

Spiritual leaders foster availability to the God who sends us forth in the power of the Spirit.

Roman emperor Hadrian in the second century sent an envoy named Aristides to scope out the Christians and write a report on what sort of people they were, having heard rumors they ate flesh and drank blood. Upon returning, Aristides reported, “These Christians are certainly a different kind of people. When someone comes to them hungry, they share what they have; if they don’t have enough, they fast so as to have enough for all. When someone is without home, they take them in and treat them like family, including orphans and widows. In fact, they treat our own people better than we do ourselves, caring for our sick and burying our dead.” Aristides concluded, “The Christians are a new kind of people. There is something divine about them.”

How do we become such a people, “a new kind of people”? Not by accident, not overnight, nor in isolation. The journey of becoming “a new kind of people” is a joint venture with the Holy Spirit. With our cooperation, the Spirit lowers the threshold of our resistance to the new life God offers. Step by step, we become increasingly available to the gift of “power from on high” for carrying on the mission. (Luke 24:49) Douglas Steere would remind us, “Spiritual growth is increasing abandon to the great gulf stream of God’s love.” As Aristides saw, that kind of joyful abandon marked early Christian life. That’s what maturing in the Christian life looks like.

The journey of discipleship is not only about individual transformation; the congregation undergoes transformation as well. We become *a new kind of people*, not only new persons. As we labor together to become a school of Christian discipleship for the sake of others, Christ transforms us in our life together. As newcomers come our way, Christ challenge

our perceptions of the people he brings us; we must learn to welcome the stranger as he welcomes us, to love as he loves us. As we unite in common mission, “body of Christ” becomes more than a metaphor. Christ calls us to become a team, to seek God’s will together, to live in peace despite our differences, and to discover the abundance of the gifts God has already given us for being in mission.

But our transformation into a new kind of people does not happen unless we allow it. We can say no and remain unchanged. Or we can say yes and become more like the people Christ needs us to be for the community in which we live. The work of spiritual leadership is to help the church listen to the call of Christ, open its sails to the wind of the Spirit, and come to terms with the doubts and fears that come with holy adventure. This is the inner work of becoming a disciple-making church and becoming more available to God.

Readings for Reflection

Which readings stir something in you? What insight and challenge you do hear?

“When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we will be changed from one level of glory to another. The growing fruit of the Holy Spirit in our characters is both transformed and being transformed. It will give evidence of God at work. There will be a fragrance of Christ about our presence. Our deepest attitudes and responses to others will be those of Jesus, because we have learned to let his Spirit grow his life in us. The fruit of Christ’s living in us through the Holy Spirit will be visible signs of “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” (Gal. 5:22-23).

– Trevor Hudson, *Holy Spirit Here and Now*

“Every layer of the New Testament testifies that the ministry of the church is conducted by the Holy Spirit... Most of us are too busy inventing ministry and fretting over its outcome to realize that the Spirit has been concerned for our people and conducting a ministry among them long before we arrived and will continue to do so long after we are gone. The name of the game is not thinking up ministry where we are but listening for what the Spirit has in mind.”

– Neill Hamilton, *Maturing in the Christian Life*

“Very likely no one knew the cause of [my missionary father’s] collapse, referred to vaguely as a nervous breakdown. Looking back...I can see a cause they never saw; he was doing the work of the Holy Spirit without the full power of the Holy Spirit... The healing of souls and the forgiveness of sins that Our Lord accomplished through my father were real and true. But since the wellspring of God’s power had not been awakened in him, the toll on his own strength was great, and the nerves of his body could not stand it.”

– Agnes Sanford, *Sealed Order*

“Give us grace, O God, to dare to do the deed which we well know cries to be done. Let us not hesitate because of ease, or the words of men’s mouths, or our own lives. Mighty causes are calling us – but they call with voices that mean work and sacrifice and death. Mercifully grant us, O God, the spirit of Esther, that we say: I will go unto the King and if I perish, I perish.”

– W.E.B. Du Bois, early 20th century

Spiritual Exercises

Make time as a group to take up one of the spiritual exercises. Where in your community do you sense the Holy Spirit inviting your church to pay attention and respond?

Read John 20:19-23 (CEB)

“while the disciples were behind closed doors because they were afraid..., Jesus came and stood among them. He said, ‘Peace be with you’... ‘As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.’”

What fears keep you and your church closed off in any respect to people in your community? Receive the peace of Christ. When you let go of your fears and open the doors, what possibilities do you see? Who do you see?

Read Rev. 2:1-7 (NRSV)

“I know your works, your toil...But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.”

Listen for how the Spirit that addressed the angel of seven early churches addresses your church. What is the Spirit saying to the “angel” of your church concerning your spiritual health and fruitfulness? Listen, and write the diagnosis you hear; write the vision you see.

Read Luke 4:16-19 (NRSV)

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...to bring good news to the poor...release to the captives...recovery of sight to the blind... to let the oppressed go free.”

Contemplate your church becoming an open vessel to the Spirit, entirely available, anointed, and sent in the power of Christ’s love. What do you see happening in and through the people? What do you see happening in you?

Read Acts 1:12-14 (NRSV)

“All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer...”

Only after many days of constant prayer did the apostles yield entirely to the Spirit of the Lord in the Pentecost story of Acts 2. What barriers do you imagine they needed to work through? What barriers do you and your church need to work through?



ABOUT THE UPPER ROOM

The Upper Room is a global ministry dedicated to supporting the spiritual formation of Christians seeking to know and experience God more fully. From its beginnings as a daily devotional guide, Upper Room Ministries has grown to include publications, programs, prayer support, online initiatives, and more to help believers of all ages and denominations move to a deeper level of faith and service.

Since 1935, The Upper Room has been self-sustaining through resource sales, participants' fee, and donor gifts. The Upper Room is a part of Discipleship Ministries, a general agency of The United Methodist Church.

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1908 Grand Avenue • PO Box 340004 • Nashville TN 37212
www.UpperRoom.org • Find us on Facebook and Twitter too.

For more information about The Upper Room, contact Sherry Elliott, Executive Director of Interpretation and Development at selliott@upperroom.org or 615-340-7520.