

Acts 2:1–21 or
Ezekiel 37:1–14
Ps. 104:24–34, 35b
Rom. 8:22–27 or
Acts 2:1–21
John 15:26–27;
16:4b–15

Honoring Gifts of the Spirit

Goal for the Session *Adults will affirm the church's unity, born of the Spirit, and explore ways to honor its diverse, Spirit-generated gifts.*

■ P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E S E S S I O N

Focus on Acts 2:1–21

WHAT is important to know?

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WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Donald K. McKim

There is now a new community of women and men where the one Spirit bestows many gifts—on all people, regardless of who they are. The church is the place where this new fellowship begins to take shape as it recognizes the gifts of the Spirit in and for all people. To realize that “all flesh,” all people, receive the Spirit, enables us to watch and participate in God's work in this world with a wide-open vision. We live in eager anticipation of the Spirit's work in our midst as we join with all others to accomplish the Spirit's purposes.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Kristin Emery Saldine

Pentecost emphasizes the centrality of Christ to the church's identity, authority, and proclamation. This christological focus at Pentecost is essentially ecclesiological, and it affords an opportunity for us to see the church in its many dimensions. The first, and most important, dimension of the church is its universality. We confess this each time we recite the Apostles' Creed: “I believe in the holy catholic church.” The Holy Spirit gifts the church to proclaim the Good News to the ends of the earth. Pentecost reminds us that, even though all our faith practices are rooted in local contexts, the church's identity extends beyond every congregation, denomination, and cultural tradition. Pentecost celebrates the face of Christ throughout the world.

NOW WHAT is God's word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” G. Lee Ramsey Jr.

The text states clearly that Jews from all parts of the Middle East are each able to hear in their own native languages. Like a gathered conference of the United Nations, each delegate hears the proceedings in his or her own tongue. The Word of God not only transcends cultural barriers, but it arrives in the particular language of each listener. Pentecost verifies Christmas. All wrapped up in human form, God comes to us in our very own bodies; God speaks to us our very own language(s). Through ordinary human speech, the Holy Spirit establishes unity amid diversity, a fulfilled promise that even the most divided congregations and communities can take to heart.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Acts 2:1–21

YOU WILL NEED

- red cloth or crepe paper
- Christ candle
- Bibles
- YouTube clip with a reading of Acts 2:1–13 (<http://tinyurl.com/n2zdl2b>) and device to play it on
- copies of Resource Sheets 1, 2
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for May 31, 2015

For Responding

- option 1: church outline sheet from option 1 in Responding on May 10, 2015 (optional), newsprint, markers, paper, pens
- option 2: 3 poster board sheets or pieces of newsprint, glue, markers, magazines with pictures of people, pictorial directory of congregation (optional), hymnals with the hymn “They’ll Know We Are Christians by Our Love”
- option 3: printed information (optional)

Focus on Your Teaching

The idea of experiencing the unleashing of the power of the Holy Spirit may be appealing to most adults, but what about changes that power may bring? It’s human nature to want to remain in our comfortable niche, worshiping, studying, and learning with others who generally see things the same way we do. Speaking the same language, at least metaphorically, is less threatening than the idea that we might hear all kinds of perspectives—and by the Spirit’s power, actually understand them! This session offers the opportunity for adults to welcome the change Pentecost brings.

Come, Holy Spirit. Nudge me into new insights that can open adults to new learnings. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, place red cloth or crepe paper and a Christ candle on a table. Prepare to show the YouTube clip and recruit a strong reader. If you use the clip, ask the reader to read Peter’s sermon (verses 14b–21). For option 3 in Responding, invite a guest from a local ecumenical ministry, such as a food bank or clothes closet, or get printed or Web site materials describing it. Your pastor may be able to suggest such a ministry.

Welcome participants and newcomers. Point out the red cloth. Say that red is the color traditionally associated with Pentecost.

Invite the group to sit comfortably and close their eyes as you lead them in a guided meditation.

You are one of a small group of Jesus’ followers gathered in an upstairs room. You have all been through a great deal together. You have been praying constantly as you await the promised coming of the Holy Spirit. What emotions are you experiencing as you await this gift? What do you imagine will result from the gift of the Holy Spirit? For what do you pray? Explain that in this session the group will explore the church’s unity as well as its diversity, and experience how they interact through the Spirit’s power.

Light the candle, identifying it as a reminder of the living Christ. Read Joel 2:28. Sit in silence. Then pray the following:

*As you have promised, we await the pouring out of your spirit on us,
O God. Open our eyes to the evidence of that Spirit in your holy Word.
Amen.*

In the Jewish calendar, Pentecost is the anniversary of receiving the law. In rabbinic tradition, the voice went forth from Sinai in seven voices and then seventy tongues so that everyone received the law in their own language.

Shavu'ot, the Festival of Weeks, is the one of three major festivals with both historical and agricultural significance. Agriculturally, it commemorates the time when the first fruits were harvested and brought to the temple.
—www.jewfaq.org

EXPLORING

Show the video clip of Acts 2:1–13. Afterwards, have the volunteer read aloud Peter's sermon (vv. 14b–21). If you are not using the video, have the volunteer read aloud Acts 2:1–21. Invite adults to comment on the images in the video, if appropriate. Ask:

- ✎ Which images were the most powerful for you?
- ✎ What did the images communicate about the Holy Spirit?

If adults heard the entire Scripture read, invite them to tell how the Spirit's coming is described.

Distribute Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Acts 2:1–21). Ask participants to silently read the "What?" excerpt. Note that as a result of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, the disciples have all become prophetic. Say that in common parlance, to be prophetic means to predict the future. Talk about what it means to be a prophet in biblical terms—a prophet is one who is given a message by God to deliver to the people.

Invite participants to quickly scan the headings in the book of Acts for evidence that the disciples functioned as messengers for God in the early church. For example, Peter's sermon on the focus scripture is a message from God.

Distribute Resource Sheet 2 (You Won't Believe What Just Happened!) Invite participants to pretend to be a member of this close, prayerful community. Ask them to write a letter home about what happened on Pentecost. Encourage them to include answers to the questions on the sheet. Ask volunteers to read their letters.

To transition to Responding, ask a volunteer to read aloud the "Now What?" excerpt. The writer observes that Pentecost verifies Christmas. Ask participants to reflect on the following statement:

"All wrapped up in human form, God comes to us in our very own bodies; God speaks to us our very own language(s)."

Name some implications for a diverse church.

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities depending on the length of your session.

1. **Honor Diverse Gifts in the Congregation** By identifying and exploring the differing perspectives and gifts of members of their congregation, adults can both honor that diversity and take steps to enhance diverse gifts. Post the newsprint with the church outline from May 10, 2015, if available. Look together at the church outline list of those inside your church. If the newsprint is not available, have the group quickly list diverse categories of persons in your congregation, such as racial or cultural groups, economic levels, and the like. Form small groups and assign one category of members to each one. Ask them to think about specific gifts that persons in this category may bring to the life of the church. For example, older members may bring a rich sense of the

**EASY
PREP**

church's history and calling over the years. Have participants report their discussion to the total group. Discuss:

- ✧ How is our congregation working to both use these diverse gifts and provide opportunities for people to enhance them?

Designate a volunteer to write an account of this activity and ask permission to post it on the church Web site or print it in the church newsletter, with an invitation to the congregation to add further thoughts about how the Spirit is actualized in the church's common life.

- 2. Create an Image of Unity** By creating an image of a hymn line about unity in the Spirit, adults can honor the many gifts that can enrich their particular church and the church universal. Distribute hymnals with the hymn "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love." Read together or sing verse 1 and the refrain.

Set out the art materials and form three pairs or small groups. Ask each group to create an image of one of the lines. Encourage them to use magazine pictures and pictures of members of your congregation, if available, but also words or phrases that express both unity and the particular diverse gifts these people bring to the church. Check with worship leaders to see if the creations can be displayed where arriving worshipers can see them today. Encourage participants to reflect in the coming week on both the lyrics and the images they used to illustrate them.

- 3. Partner in Ecumenical Ministries** By learning more about local ecumenical ministries with which your congregation is involved, adults can identify ways to honor the diverse gifts of others and partner in a visible expression of the church's unity. Have the guest describe the work of the ministries and which congregations participate in its work, or have adults peruse the printed materials or Web site information. Discuss how participants might be involved in these ministries, and encourage adults to choose a way to get involved.

CLOSING

Invite adults to complete this sentence: We pray, not for uniformity, but for unity. By that we mean . . .

Pray:

Come, Holy Spirit. Give us insight into our many gifts. Make us restless until we bring those gifts to fruition. Guide us as we seek to discern how unity in the Spirit can be restored. Amen.

Sing together the final verse of "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love."

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for May 31, 2015, or e-mail it to the participants during the week. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and Resource Sheet 1 before the next session.

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