



TAMIL ANNUAL CONFERENCE METHODIST WOMEN
WEEK OF PRAYER AND SELF DENIAL
(19th – 25th August, 2018)



25th July, 2018.

Dear Sisters in Christ,

Greetings in the Name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ !

Enclosed herewith is the MATERIAL FOR THE WEEK OF PRAYER AND SELF DENIAL 2018.

Kindly observe this day prayerfully making use of the materials enclosed and an offering will be taken during this service. The offering taken is for : -

- 1. The Development of the Methodist Women's Centre in Ulu Klang**
- 2. The Ministries of GCMW**

All cheques for the offering should be made payable to 'AEC OF THE METHODIST CHURCH IN MALAYSIA' and the cheques must be sent to the following address : -

Mrs. Margaret Chelliah
The Treasurer , TAC MW
No. 3, Jalan Sri Siantan 43,
Kawasan 2, Taman Sri Andalas,
41200 Klang, Selangor.

Wishing you a meaningful and fruitful Week of Prayer and Self Denial 2018 !

Have a blessed service and God Bless You.

' TO KNOW CHRIST AND TO MAKE HIM KNOWN '

In his service,

Margaret Nelson
Spiritual Life Coordinator
TAC Methodist Women

DAY: 1

TOPIC: THE SACRED SPACE OF CALL

OBJECTIVE: TO EXPLORE GOD'S CALL DURING BIBLICAL TIMES AND IN OUR LIVES.

BIBLE READING: Exodus 3:1-8a Judges 6:11-16,22 – 24 Esther 4:9 Acts 9:36-42

MEDITATION:

These scriptures give us examples of God calling individuals to four different tasks:

- 1) Moses leading his people out of bondage; Gideon leading his army against a formidable foe
- 2) Esther risking her life to intervene for her people;
- 3) Dorcas/Tabitha serving her community.

For some, God is calling them to a **specific lifestyle**, and for others, God's call is for a **specific time or task**. Each has a sacred call to follow and each lives in a sacred place of trust. God puts great confidence in these individuals for their leadership, impact and availability to follow their call.

In Moses' call we see God coming to him in a remote place. At the age of 80, Moses encounters God's presence in a burning bush, and it changes his life. God is revealed to Moses in an amazing display and the place of that display becomes holy ground. Moses is asked to remove his shoes as he stood on holy ground. **To recognize the call of God whether through hearing God's voice, circumstance, or opportunity - is to cherish it as sacred space.**

Gideon was an unlikely candidate for a military leader or any type of leader at all. Nevertheless, he is visited by an angel of the Lord to call him to do just that. The angel comes to Gideon while he is beating wheat in an effort to hide it from the occupying forces. Gideon questions God's selection of him and is assured that God's power will be demonstrated in his weakness. Once the proof was provided, the angel disappeared and then Gideon knew God had called him. **He recognized that place as a sacred space of encounter with God and built an altar to mark the place as holy ground.**

Esther received her call through Mordecai. Learning of a plan to destroy all the Hebrews, Mordecai sent news to Esther that she should interfere. Esther responded with an affirmation that her attempt to do so could cost her life, but Mordecai reminds her that she may have come to power for "such a time as this." Esther embraces the challenge and makes her own plan. **She then creates a sacred space by calling a fast, garnering support from others and creating a strategy for accomplishing her goal.**

Dorcas/Tabitha's story is one of a person whose life calling was to serve her community. When she became ill and died, her community mourned her loss and treated her body with utmost respect. When word reached Peter, he came immediately and restored her life as well as her place in her community. All of these calls were to address the needs around the called: Moses to the Hebrew people who were slaves; Gideon to the Hebrew people who were occupied; Esther to the Hebrew people who were threatened with annihilation; Dorcas to the needy of her community. Similarly, Jesus' disciples were called to spread the good news, to carry on the message of the gospel after his death and resurrection. They were also called to heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons, and more.

Calling comes in a variety of forms for some it is lifelong, for others it happens later in life and for some it is just for a season. We all respond to the call of Christ to love God and to love others.

DISCUSS:

1. In what way do you feel that you have been called by God?
2. Share how you are living out the call of God in your life.

DAY 2

TOPIC: THE SACRED SPACE OF GATHERING

OBJECTIVE: To reflect on how the sacred spaces where we gather can become temples of love, hospitality and justice.

BIBLE READING: 1 Kings 8: 1 – 13, 22 – 53 Mathew 18: 20 Acts 2: 42

MEDITATION:

Today's scripture passages are from the gathering of the Jewish nation for the dedication of the Temple built by Solomon in Jerusalem (Old Testament) and from the early church gatherings as Christians (New Testament).

In 1 Kings we see the Hebrews reaching a place of prominence as a nation after years of struggle. David began as a shepherd, then was a warrior and then became beloved royalty. Now his successor son, Solomon, convenes to invite God's presence into the Temple the place where they will gather to worship. His lengthy prayer of dedication found in 1 Kings 8:22 – 53 recounts the history of his people and requests God's favor. God accepted Solomon's prayer and answered him.

For Christians, Jesus promises to be in the midst of us whenever we gather together. Our gathering can be for worship, prayer, study, and also for help, safety, support, witness and for a cause. This was the disciples' experience during Jesus' ministry. Remember when people gathered to hear him teach and he ended up feeding 5,000? Or when people were listening to Jesus teach so they cut a hole in the roof of a house to get his attention and then he healed their friend?

After the Holy Spirit's appearance in the "Upper Room," they devoted themselves to being together for teaching, prayer and the breaking of bread . And powerful things happened. It was outside and women had gathered there. Paul and Silas joined them and spoke to them. Among the women was Lydia, who is described as "a worshiper of God." She was a businesswoman and was listening to them. God touched her through Paul's words at that gathering and she, along with her household, was baptized. In Acts 16:40, we read that Paul and Silas came back to Lydia's house after they were arrested and released. This informal gathering changed her life and theirs as well.

Acts 16 goes on to tell us that Paul and Silas got into trouble for casting of demon from a young girl who used her to make money telling fortunes. They were thrown into jail for this. At midnight, the two men were praying and singing hymns. Both of these activities are typical of faith gatherings, including our Methodist Women meetings. The prisoners were listening to them when an earthquake occurred. Suddenly, the doors were opened and chains released so that everyone was free. The jailer was so distraught he was going to kill himself, but Paul and Silas stopped him. He and his household became believers. All of this occurred because two men created a sacred space for worship gathering in prison.

DISCUSS:

1. What happens when you gather? Are you creating a sacred place for love and hospitality? For prayer and singing hymns? For learning together, supporting each other and gaining courage for whatever happens?

DAY 3

TOPIC: THE SACRED SPACE OF LEGACY

OBJECTIVE: To gain better understanding about the sacred spaces created by inheritance and the legacy of Methodist Women, children and youth.

BIBLE READING: Numbers 27:18 - 23 John 14:12 2 Kings 2:1 - 18 2 Timothy 1:5 - 6

MEDITATION:

Much of what we think about when we think of legacy is what we inherit. In most cases, it boils down to assets, a contemporary word for money, property, possessions, land and the things we own.

In Numbers 27:1 - 11 and 36:1 -12 there is a fascinating story of inheritance. Up to this time, daughters could not inherit land. Zelophehad's four daughters did not want to be denied the right to the land that their father would have been given as part of his tribe. They brought this request to Moses who took it to the Lord. It was accepted and actually seemed to change the legal practice of that time. His place in the family and in the community of faith was a sacred space to be preserved and God honored that.

From Old Testament times to the present, land remains a significant sign of wealth. However, tangible things like land are not the only inheritance we have. In some cases, we take note of awards and accomplishments that are passed down. Personality, opportunity and leadership skills heavily influence these things. There is a sacred space created when the mantle of leadership is passed from one person or generation to another. It is a respectful, honorable task for one who has leadership to hand it over. It is a humbling, thrilling opportunity to receive such responsibility.

Moses handed his leadership of the Hebrews over to Joshua as they entered the Promised Land. Reread Numbers 27:18- 23. Moses and Joshua were tribal leaders, not elected by the people but appointed by God. Moses wanted Joshua to be assured of the trust of the people, so this ritual was held before all the people. Similarly, there is a transfer of leadership between Elijah and Elisha. The two men are Hebrew prophets. They are spiritual leaders who worked in the context of kings and queens, royal lines and military takeovers. Elisha asks for a "double portion" of his predecessor's spirit. In those sacred moments together, the mantle of leadership is literally, figuratively and miraculously passed down.

Jesus passed his leadership and work on to his disciples in the sacred trust that they would share it with others "even to the ends of the earth." While he was with them, he gave them his teachings and the experiences that they had together, and after his death and resurrection he gave them the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Paul recognized this when he gave special attention to the family heritage Timothy had through his mother and grandmother. These individuals were recognized as part of the legacy of faith and work in those who came before them. Many contributions remain unnamed, however, we are literally standing on the foundation built by them and we are adding to it by building the future for those who will come after us. This is true for our Christian faith, our church, Methodist Women and our families. In Luke 8: 1 - 3, we read of women who journeyed with and provided for Jesus and his disciples "out of their resources." This is the legacy of Methodist Women; it is the legacy of women over the centuries. Women accompany, support, nurture, provide for, pray and serve, they also teach, lead and act. Women live out their faith in innumerable ways, often without any notice. That is the legacy of women of faith, Methodist Women and you and me. We live in the **sacred space of inheritance and legacy, carrying our faith, noticed or not, through history to the present and into the future.**

Discuss:

1. How do we see God's presence and action in our heritage?
2. How can it change us? How do you want to be remembered?

DAY 4

TOPIC: THE SACRED SPACE OF GRIEF AND HOPE

OBJECTIVE: To find a sacred space of hope in our personal lives and with others, even in the midst of pain and despair.

BIBLE READING: Matthew 27: 55-56 MARK 15: 40 – 41, 47 Luke: 23: 26-31; 46-49;55-56

MEDITATION:

Today's scripture reminds us of the pain of the women who journeyed with Jesus, stood watching as he was crucified, observed the preparations for his burial and witnessed him being placed in the tomb. Mark and Luke tell us that the women witnessed Jesus being laid in the tomb, but again, they were watching, observing from a distance.

1. Luke brings us closer and gives us a glimpse of the women's pain. Specifically, Luke tells us that women were beating their breasts and wailing. This is a strong reaction, uncomfortable to witness but appropriate for what they had witnessed. Because of the sabbath, there was a space of time between the burial and the resurrection.

- What must that time have been like for Mary? She had just watched her son die.

- What must that time have been like for the disciples? They had travelled with Jesus, lived with him, learned from him for three years. We know the grief of the betrayal was too heavy for Judas and he ended his own life.

- What must it have been like for the many followers, a multitude of whom had just gathered the week before to hail him with palm branches and shouts? He had healed many of them, taught and demonstrated God's love to them, met their many needs.

This is where we find the disciples and the women and the many others who had lost their friend and religious leader and even their hope. In the space between death and resurrection there is the agony of loss and it is experienced in a variety of ways. This is a sacred space where God's Spirit seeks to envelop us with love and comfort and presence not in a way that makes the pain disappear, but in the realm of hope and faith. We may not experience this since often people feel the furthest away from God when they have lost someone they love, but our faith in God who is infinite and our Savior who was raised from the dead gives us hope that life is not over, that there is an eternity with God that is yet to come.

During this sacred time of mourning, we may need to open ourselves to our own wordless prayers so that we can allow God's Spirit to pray on our behalf, as in Romans 8:25 – 27.

In prayer: Romans 12:12. In scripture: Romans 15:4 In the Holy Spirit's power: Romans 15:13 In God's plans for the future: Jeremiah 29:11.

These are promises for the grieving, promises of the presence of God, who often comes through others or through nature or sometimes in unexpected places. Wherever help comes from, as Christians, we can choose hope because we believe in the resurrection. We are Easter people! We come to this celebration each year as people who come to visit, an empty tomb. He is not here. He has risen as he said he would (Mark 16:6-7). Now, go and share the news there is HOPE!

DISCUSS:

1. Where do you find the sacred space of hope?
2. Are there places or people or quotes or passages of scripture that bring you peace and comfort?
3. Share our loud words or phrases that describe how you feel when a loved one died.

DAY 5

TOPIC: THE SACRED SPACE OF NURTURING

OBJECTIVE: To discover ways to create a sacred space for nurturing and learning more about our role to advocate for world peace and justice worldwide.

BIBLE READING: Luke 2:41 – 52 Ruth 1: 6 – 18

MEDITATION:

Jesus' mother had tremendous challenges from the very beginning: Giving birth to a baby while away from home under less-than-optimal circumstances, fleeing for the first years of the baby's life because of death threats, living as a refugee in another land. Many face similar challenges in our day as well: war & natural disasters. When we seek to meet the needs of these people today, we are creating a sacred space for mothering.

When Jesus was 12, his family made their annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem, but they lost track of him when it was time to return. In the company of so many friends and family members, they assumed he was with someone in their family group. At some point they realized Jesus was missing and headed back to Jerusalem to look for him. It is easy to imagine their concern, even fear, when they could not locate Jesus. It was three days before they found Jesus, sitting in the synagogue questioning the teachers. As most parents would, they expressed consternation about this behavior. His response was that he had to be "about his father's work." In those moments his mother went from frantically missing her child to feeling the pressure of his "special" status.

The next time there is a recorded exchange between Jesus and his mother is at the wedding in Cana. The wedding is running out of wine and Mary asks Jesus to help with this. She is so confident that he will address the issue that she tells the servants to do whatever Jesus says. It may sound stereotypical to say so but it really is just like a woman to attend to things like this; concern for everyone's comfort and support is always part of mothering.

The Book of Ruth and Ruth 1:6-18, in particular, gives us an example of women who mothered each other. In the first chapter, Naomi is widowed and her sons die. She sets out to return to her own homeland. One of her daughters-in-laws decides to stay, but Ruth refuses to leave Naomi. Their exchange is a beautiful example of love and support. Ruth creates a sacred space for "mothering" Naomi by accompanying her back to her home. After they get there, Ruth goes gleaning to help provide support for her mother-in-law. It gives her quite a reputation in that land and she attracts the attention of Naomi's relative, Boaz. This is when Naomi gives Ruth advice on where to get noticed so that she secures Boaz' protection. Later on, Ruth and Boaz get married and through their son they become part of Jesus' lineage. Both women, related by marriage but separated by faith and culture, find a sacred space for mothering together. In each other they experience faith and love even though they had no obligation to each other.

Mothering can be done by all kinds of people. It is not gender specific even though it tends to be attributed to women. Even among women, nurturing comes from women who are mothers, who have never been mothers, older ones and younger ones. Nurturing definitely comes from men too. All of us need nurturing at some point and all of us can be nurturers too whether for children or parents or all the ages in between. In caring for each other, we experience the sacred space of mothering, and in these expressions of nurture we understand God's love for us.

DISCUSS:

1. How have you experienced God's nurture? In what ways do you recognize God's nurture through others?
2. How do you nurture? Who needs your nurturing?
3. Name a woman who has nurtured your faith ?

DAY 6

TOPIC: THE SACRED SPACE OF PRAYER

OBJECTIVE:

To make a commitment to experience sacred encounters by connecting with God through prayer and Bible Study, and to reflect on how the transfiguration of Jesus calls us, as Methodist Women members, to respond to needs in our communities.

BIBLE READING: Luke 9: 28 – 36 Matthew 6: 5 – 15

MEDITATION:

Ask and encourage a few responses to: "How did you learn to pray?" or "Where did you learn to pray?"

Prayer is the sacred space where we connect with God. Prayer is talking with God, both speaking and listening. It is in these moments that transformation can occur. **God's guidance is given, requests are shared, commitments are solidified.** This is true in both personal and communal life. Our personal times with God, as well as our congregational life, should include time for being open to God speaking and a sacred space where we can express our deepest needs and hopes.

Scripture includes a variety of prayers and instructions about prayer. As Christians, we look at Jesus first. His disciples asked him how to pray and two of the Gospels record Jesus' response in the Lord's Prayer. Jesus provides a good model, and it is one that we repeat at church, at other gatherings and in our individual time with God.

Jesus spent much or all of some nights praying. Jesus prayed all night before choosing his disciples (Luke 6:12 - 13). He prayed much of the night before his arrest in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32 - 42).

Jesus' disciples accompanied him to the garden and he took Peter, James and John further than the others, asking them to provide prayer support for him. Matthew 26 says, "And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed..." This was a serious prayer of struggle. We are told Jesus was struggling with his eminent death and asking God for guidance. He came back to find the disciples asleep and urged them to stay awake, but we know they fell asleep again. In the sacred space of prayer Jesus sought guidance and he found it.

Three of the Gospels tell us about the transfiguration of Jesus. It is an extraordinary event by any standard. Luke records that as Jesus was praying his physical appearance was altered. As we look back on these sacred encounters with God through prayer, we see Jesus' example of lifelong communication with God. In the **sacred space of prayer**, Jesus provides a powerful encounter with God for the disciples.

Prayer provides us with a sacred space to encounter God for personal spiritual formation as well as for transforming our lives, together in the community of faith. When we gather to pray together, like in Acts 4:31, power comes. Boldness comes to us, too, as we are empowered to be witnesses in the world around us.

DISCUSS:

1. How do you really talk with God - praying to and listening?
2. How does the church do this ?
3. How could we all do it better?

DAY 7

TOPIC : THE SACRED SPACE OF COMMUNITY

OBJECTIVE:

To reflect on how Methodist Women members can create a sacred space of community and respond to the needs of the voiceless in society.

BIBLE READING: Deuteronomy 15:7 Acts 4:32 Acts 2:44 1 Corinthians 12:7

MEDITATION:

In the early days, possessions were shared in common and needs were met. It was an idyllic existence that gives us a glimpse of what the sacred space of community means to discipleship. There is attention to the common good and the basic needs of human life. Jesus created a sacred space for his disciples. They travelled together as a group, hearing Jesus' teaching and witnessing his miracles. His sacrificial death demonstrated his love for them. It illustrated the truth of his teaching that, "Greater love has no one than this, that he would lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:12 - 17).

The disciples learned to love each other as they travelled together, and it gave them strength later when Jesus was gone. In the early church, there was a more centralized collection of the disciples in Jerusalem who devoted themselves to teaching and proclaiming Jesus' word. There were disagreements in the community over various issues including circumcision for the Gentiles, equity in sharing and others. One of the first can be found in Acts 6:1-7. The needs of only some of the widows were being met, so the community responded by consecrating trusted leaders, including Stephen, to take care of this, so that those who had been closest to Jesus could devote themselves to teaching.

The sacred space of community required love and justice.

Conversions added to the number of the faithful, and Paul's emergence as a leader broadened the fellowship of believers and provided sacred space for the growth of new churches. Barriers were being removed so that Gentiles could be included.

In Acts 18:1-4, 24-28 we read about Paul's relationship with a refugee couple from Italy. They were tentmakers, the same profession as Paul, and ended up in Corinth. They listened to Paul in the synagogue and when he left they were able to help the ministry of another spiritual leader, Apollos. Apollos was from Alexandria and knew the scriptures. Priscilla and Aquila took him aside and schooled him further and he became a very powerful speaker for the Christian faith. They used the sacred space of community to assist Apollos and expand the message of the gospel.

Esther represented her community and intervened for them at great personal risk. Ruth refused to leave her mother-in-law, Naomi, choosing instead to remain with her on her return to her homeland (Ruth 1:16-18) and to become part of Naomi's community.

Each of these individuals recognized the sacred space of community and devoted themselves to the common good of that community. Their choices increased their faith and resulted in manifesting God's work in their tribe, family and people. God has placed the sacred space of community, in relationship to others. Our encounters with people help us to live out the image of God placed within us. It is a life of abundance in grace and love. It is a life of lavishness in faith and hope. It is a life of wealth in justice and service. It is a life of richness in forgiveness and healing.

DISCUSS:

1. How are you living out the sacred space of community?
2. In what ways does the faith community demonstrate itself as the body of Christ in its life together?