

I've been meaning to ask...

a series for curiosity, courage, & connection

A creative worship & fellowship event

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Introduction

About So often we sit side by side and week after week in the pews without truly getting to know one another. After a year of isolation¹ made harder by political divisiveness and social unrest, our society is desperately in need of spaces for connection and conversation. We know that change, growth, and healing can only come through curiosity, empathy, and courage. In this event, we hope to move beyond small talk to practice curiosity, listening, and connection. Therefore, this liturgy exists to create a unique conversation-based worship service that might provide fellowship, connection, and a glimpse of the holy. At this one hour event, people will gather, hear scripture read, engage in thirty minutes of intentional and guided conversation with their neighbors as the sermon moment, and close with prayer and Holy Communion.

COVID-19 precautions Depending on your location and the reality of COVID spread in your area, we imagine that this event could be hosted outdoors with social distancing measures in force. Another option could be to replicate this event across several small groups. Invite people to register for a conversation night and limit the capacity to a certain number. With a smaller group, we encourage you to go deeper.

Supplies needed

- Name tags and markers
- A welcome table (*to hold the name tags and host greeters*)
- Snacks/drinks (*optional*)
- Speakers or audio setup to play music
- John 15:9-17 scripture text printed out on single sheets (*on a clipboard if no hard surfaces are available*)
- Pens (*one per person*)
- Post-it notes or index cards (*two per person*) to write prayers, placed under each chair
- A wall, dry erase board, or bulletin board placed on an easel (*to create a simple prayer wall*)
- Table with Communion elements
- Screen/projector to display conversation questions (*optional, but helpful*)

The flow of the service

- I. Gathering
- II. Scripture
- III. Conversation
- IV. Reflection
- V. Communion
- VI. Sending

Pre-event setup

Welcome table Set up a table with name tags and markers, hosted by a few greeters to guide those joining the event.

Audio/AV Play music as people enter. Nothing says, “This will be fun” like some music in the background! Find music ideas for this series on our blog:

sanctifiedart.org/blog/worship-music-ideas-ive-been-meaning-to-ask.² Consider using microphones for leaders. If you’re able, include a screen/projector to display conversation prompts throughout the event.

Snacks & drinks *(optional)* Provide some snacks or drinks, if desired. Studies show that people feel less socially anxious in a new setting when they have something to munch on or a drink in their hand. Providing a snack or drink can be a measure of hospitality. For COVID safety, we recommend individually-packaged snacks, and drinks in a cooler. If you are meeting outside during summer, consider popsicles and ice water.

Chairs Place two concentric circles of chairs with an outside ring and an inside ring. The chairs in the outside ring will face inward, and the chairs in the inner ring will face outward so that participants in each ring will sit directly across from a partner. As people arrive, invite them to pick a chair. If you anticipate having 40 attendees, place 20 chairs in the inner circle and 20 chairs in the outer circle. If you have a larger gathering, you could create multiple concentric circles of chairs. During the service, you will shift the inner and outer rings so that participants engage in conversation with new partners.

Alternative seating option If you do not have the space for a large circle, arrange chairs in pairs spread out in the parking lot or in a large gathering room. When the time comes to invite people to move, use cues such as:

- Which partner has the birthday closest to today? Please stand up and find a new chair.
- Which partner has lived here longer? Please stand up and find a new chair.
- Which partner is taller? Please stand up and find a new chair.
- Which partner finished reading a book most recently? Please stand up and find a new chair.

Scripture Print the scripture text, John 15:9-17, with double spacing and large font on single sheets. If gathering outside, attach each sheet to a clipboard. If gathering inside, people may be able to use the back of a hymnal to write on. As people arrive, hand them the printed scripture and a pen, or have those items pre-set on their seats.

Prayer wall Under each chair, place two blank Post-it notes or index cards. Near the end of the service, participants will be invited to write reflections and tape or place their prayer cards on a wall. The prayer wall could be a dry erase board, a large bulletin board on an easel, or a wall in or outside your building. Alternatively, you could use clothespins to attach the cards to string, or simply tape them to a window. Use what you have in your space to create some sort of visual display. As people exit the space, they will be invited to read over these reflections.

² [Follow us on Spotify](#) to enjoy a unique playlist crafted for this series, I’ve been meaning to ask...

Order of the worship event

Gathering *As people enter and find their seats, make sure each participant has the printed scripture and a pen, and that two prayer cards (either index cards or Post-it notes) are placed under each chair. Welcome participants to the space, introduce yourself, share the hope for evening (to get to know one another a little better, and to practice the art of curiosity and conversation), and share the flow for the event. You can pull language from the “About” section of this document to open the event.*

Begin by inviting people to introduce themselves to the person sitting directly across from them. Invite them to share their names, how long they’ve been involved at your church, and a fun fact about themselves.

Call to worship

Guide the congregation in full-body prayer.

To begin this hour of worship together, we will start with a kinesthetic call to worship.

This call to worship will be a sensory scan of our surroundings to help us open our minds to curiosity, wonder, and awe.

I invite you to close your eyes.

Take a deep breath in, and release it.

First, I invite you to pay attention to touch. *What do you feel?*

Feel your feet on the ground.

Feel the earth supporting you. Thank it for holding you up.

Feel the softness of the clothes on your body.

Thank them for protecting you from the elements.

Feel the chair behind your back. Thank it for providing you a place to belong.

Now I invite you to transition to sound. *What do you hear?*

Listen for the sound of the breeze. Listen for the sound of the wind in the trees. Listen for the sound of your heartbeat. Listen for the sound of the rustles that come with community. Let all of these sounds remind you that God is in this space, and that we are not alone.

Now I invite you to open your eyes. What do you see?

(Tweak this section to fit your setting.)

Look around this space. Notice who is here. Pay attention to the elements that make this space unique—Communion, a candle, the blue sky above us. Make eye contact with a neighbor.

Now breathe in and breathe out.

Repeat after me:

This space is holy.

This space is special.

God is here.

We are open to possibility.

Passing of the peace

Teach the group how to pass the peace in sign language (instructions for how to pass the peace: [youtube.com/watch?v=bJ0cXDJy10o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJ0cXDJy10o)). Invite them to pass the peace to their neighbor directly across from them, as well as to those around them.

Let us now pass the peace to one another!

Music *(optional)*

If possible, include a congregational song or soloist here. Invite the congregation to sit or stand—whichever you prefer.

*Music ideas:*³

“They’ll Know We Are Christians” by Peter Scholtes (Tune: ST. BRENDAN’S), 1991.

“The Church’s One Foundation” by S.J. Stone (Tune: AURELIA), 1886.

Prayer for illumination

Friends, one of the key parts of worship every week—no matter where we are or what the service looks like—is hearing and reading scripture. So today we are going to read our scripture passage three times, and as we do, we invite you to make note of the words and phrases that stand out to you.

Before we read, let us pray:

Jesus, you asked questions as much as you answered them.
You never shied away from conversation.
You were always sparking curiosity,
opening people’s minds,
and engaging in the art of connection with everyone around you.
As we come to your Word and as we approach one another tonight,
give us the same curiosity, openness, and connection.
We are here. We are listening. Amen.

Scripture reading + doodling

Invite participants to grab their printed scripture and pen, as they will be prompted to doodle and annotate the text as it’s read aloud three times. Allow three different worship leaders to read aloud the scripture (paying attention to diversity and representation).

Read John 15:9-17 (Common English Bible)

Love each other

⁹ “As the Father loved me, I too have loved you. Remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy will be in you and your joy will be complete. ¹² This is my commandment: love each other just as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater love than to give up one’s life for one’s friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I don’t call you servants any longer, because servants don’t know what their master is doing. Instead, I call you friends, because everything I heard from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You didn’t choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you could go and produce fruit and so that your fruit could last. As a result, whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you. ¹⁷ I give you these commandments so that you can love each other.”

3 For more music ideas inspired by this series, see our blog: sanctifiedart.org/blog/worship-music-ideas-ive-been-meaning-to-ask