

OUR DAILY BREAD



Introduction and Suggested Program

When we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "*Give us today our daily bread,*" we pray not just for what is to come but for a recognition that God provides what is needed for now. We pray in gratitude for what was there the day before. We pray that we might trust it to be there tomorrow. We pray that what we have might be used well and shared for the flourishing of all.

So, too, our congregational stewardship. At times the invitation to members to commit to a future year of giving is met with reluctance or a discomfort with an ask for *more*. That is true even more so in this cultural moment in which exhaustion and depletion seem prevalent both in terms of energy after years of pandemic and in terms of financial uncertainty. This may be a particularly good time to pause and give thanks for what we do have already in our midst. We do hope that people will find ways to grow in their giving, but this moment in a congregation's cycle ought to be an opportunity to pray that prayer for daily bread: in gratitude, in trust, in the spirit of sharing for the flourishing of all. That is true for what we already have right now, not only in some future in which we hope we have more.

The theme scripture for this series, to go along with the familiar phrase "Our Daily Bread," is the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:7-16). In this account Elijah is sent to a widow and her son who are about to prepare the remaining bit of oil and flour for their last meal before all is gone and they face death. Elijah proclaims the words God so often speaks to us: "Don't be afraid." Use what you have right now and trust that there will be some tomorrow. And so there was until God sent something new in the form of rain to the land.

We are not naïve in supposing that God will provide infinite finances for all our congregations – we still have a responsibility to realistic and honest appraisal of our resources. But we do trust that God will give what is needed – resources for God's mission to continue in the world. We encourage you to use this opportunity to help your community recognize the gifts in their own lives and the gifts in the congregation's life. And then to wonder together, "How might we use what we have, trusting God for daily bread?"

What follows are suggestions for how to share this theme in a series of events and communications. You are welcome to use them as is or adapt them in whatever way you need for your local circumstances. If you have questions, feel free to contact Pastor Steven Wilco, Associate to the Bishop for Stewardship, at swilco@nesynod.org or 508-791-1530, ext. 104.

Proposed Timeline

Before you start:

Send out a teaser email or postcard using the logo, inviting people to join you for the kickoff Sunday and any other special events you plan during the series.

Sunday 1: Kickoff!

On this Sunday, have a stewardship moment in worship. Read 1 Kings 17:7-16 and introduce the series, perhaps using some of the material from the above introduction. Provide an update about what is to come and invite people to participate.

Sunday 2:

Make space each week in worship to sing “God of the Fertile Fields” in the new hymnal supplement All Creation Sings #1063 (also available for download on Sundaysandseasons.com), starting this week by singing only stanza 1.

Invite a speaker from your congregation to share in worship about some time in their life when they were surprised to discover something that God had provided for them. Consider people who might not be the usual stewardship speakers.

Midweek, Week 2:

Send out a letter to the congregation with estimate-of-giving cards to prayerfully consider and return on Sunday 5. Templates for the letter and the cards are included in these resources.

Sunday 3:

Sing “God of the Fertile Fields,” stanzas 1-2; invite a speaker from a local community organization to share about gifts they see in the community and describe a time they discovered a gift that helped change the community for the better.

Sunday 4:

Sing “God of the Fertile Fields,” stanzas 1-3; invite a speaker from a nearby church to share about the gifts they see in their congregation’s life and describe a time that God used those gifts in a surprising or unexpected way. You could invite a lay leader from another congregation or consider a pulpit swap with their pastor and have the pastor share this in their sermon.

Sunday 5:

Sing all 4 stanzas of “God of the Fertile Fields” and receive estimate-of-giving cards in worship. Celebrate after worship with a bread-themed lunch (soup and a variety of breads, sandwiches with lots of bread choices, and/or dessert bread).

Other Ideas to Incorporate

Involve the kids! Use these in worship, Sunday School, Children's Sermon, or other venue:

Kid's books:

Fry Bread: A Family Story by Kevin Noble Maillard— This story helps us see the ways that bread is more than just a food to eat. Suggest to kids that sometimes we might think that bread is just food. But when we look closely, we discover it's a gift that really is so much more. That happens at communion. What other ways might that happen?

Daniel's Good Day by Micha Archer— In this story, a child asks others in his neighborhood what makes a good day. In doing so, he discovers all kinds of gifts all around him. Remind kids that right now the congregation is thinking about all kinds of gifts and looking to discover what kind of gifts might already be around that we haven't noticed. Invite them to notice gifts in the community and ask grown-ups what makes a good day for them.

A brief lesson for all ages: Teach the refrain "God Bless to Us Our Bread" found in *All Creation Sings* #1056 (see/hear a children's choir sing this with hand motions here: https://youtu.be/v6FOPE_dpps). Perhaps teach the song in Sunday school and invite some kids who are comfortable to help teach it to the congregation in worship. Invite people to remember that not everyone has enough to eat. At the same time everyone has things they need and things to share. How might we look for the gifts we have and come up with new ways to share them with others in our community?

Communion Bread

Invite 5 different bakers to bake 5 different kinds of bread each week for communion to have something a little different to mark this series. Some people have even used a bread-machine to bake bread in the sanctuary shortly before worship, so the aroma is in the air during worship.

And/or

Have the kids ever helped make communion bread? Invite them to come before worship and make a simple bread recipe together like the one found here:

<https://inside.luthersem.edu/community-care/chapel/> Talk with them about bread, communion, and the gifts they have to share in the world.

Bread Recipe Book

Collect favorite bread recipes and share them in a booklet or PDF. Or have people sign up for coffee hour each week with a bread-theme and have them share recipe cards.

Breadbasket of Gratitude

Provide participants with a cut-out of bread printed on bread-colored paper (see included template of bread shapes). Invite them to write gifts they have in their own lives or gifts they see in the congregation. Then have them put it up on a bulletin board or poster with a basket drawn on it, creating a display of our daily bread. Alternatively, you could use an actual basket placed prominently in the worship space.