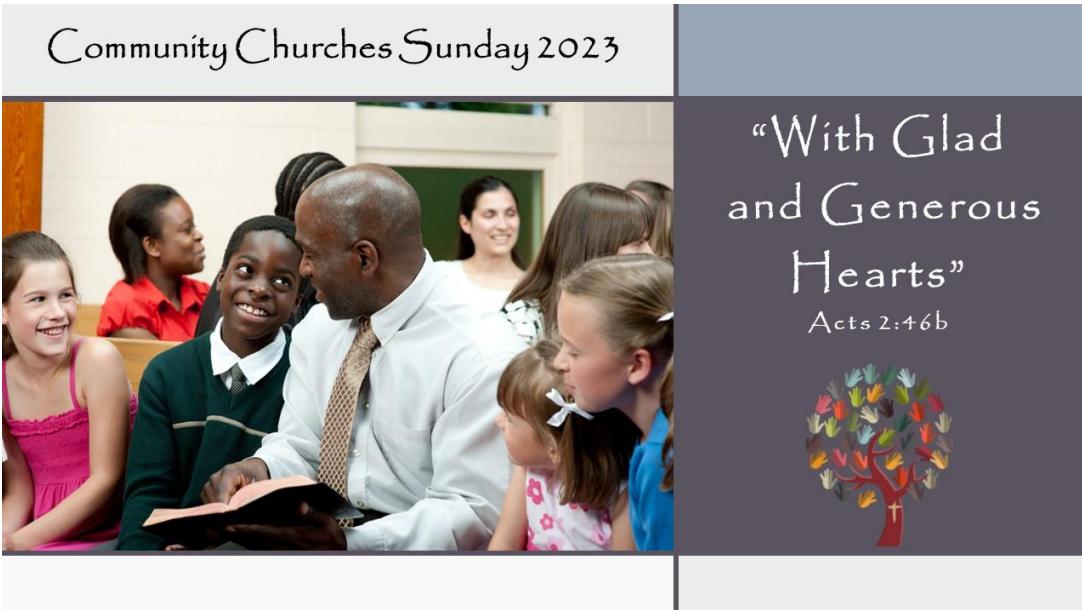


Community Churches Sunday 2023

Sunday, April 30, 2023

(or another Sunday chosen by your church)



Why Community Churches Sunday?

Community Churches Sunday gives local churches an opportunity to celebrate being a part of a unique part of Christian family – the Community Churches Movement, and being a member of the International Council of Community Churches (ICCC). Marking this special Sunday helps congregations learn more about their church's connection to the ICCC.

When is Community Churches Sunday?

Traditionally, Community Churches Sunday has been celebrated on the last Sunday of April, thus putting it close to the church's celebration of Easter, and themes of new life and new creation that season brings. The Community Churches Movement is a new way and expression of the Christian community. After centuries of division, which have left the Christian family fragmented in many denominations, the Community Church Movement desires a new way of Christian community – brought about through reconciliation, unity, love and new life.

This year the date is **April 30, 2023**, the Fourth Sunday of Easter. In those churches where it is not convenient to use that particular Sunday, we hope the local church will choose another Sunday in the year to celebrate Community Churches Sunday. For this reason, materials use only the year and not a specific date.

How Can My Church Celebrate Community Churches Sunday?

Here are a few suggestions your church may wish to consider:

1. Use the enclosed bulletin insert to distribute to your congregation. This is the quickest and easiest way for your church to mark its connection to the ICCC.
2. The theme Scripture chosen for this year is taken from Acts 2:42-47. Use this Scripture as a sermon text and relate this Scripture to your church's connection with the ICCC. Suggestions for this can be found in the "Sermon Help" later in this resource.
3. Use in worship some of the other "Worship Resources" found in this resource.
4. Have someone in your church who has been involved with the ICCC and/or has attended an ICCC Annual Conference, speak briefly to the congregation about the Council in a "Minute for Mission" or "Mission Moment".
5. Collect a special offering to be given to the ministry of the International Council of Community Churches.
6. Invite someone from the ICCC to speak or preach at your church that Sunday.
7. Be creative! Find a unique way to celebrate your connection to the ICCC (and let the ICCC know afterwards what you did!).

Sermon Help

The suggested Scripture for Community Churches Sunday this year is **Acts 2:42-47**. From this text we draw the theme "*With Glad and Generous Hearts*" in Acts 2:46b. Churches which use the *Revised Common Lectionary* will see this reading as one of the texts for April 30.

A Christian community has just been birthed by the wind and flames of the Holy Spirit in the opening verses of Acts 2. Following Peter's sermon about 3,000 are baptized and these persons now form a new entity we call "church". So what does this new "church" do? How do they live in community seeking to carry out the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ?

The beginning verse in Acts 2:42 gives us the first glimpse of the life of this new community as they focus on teaching, fellowship, breaking bread and prayer. These four marks of early Christian life resonate with almost everyone who has ever been in a church on Sunday morning. "Teaching" or the Greek *didache* reminds us of the handing down of Christian beliefs from generation to generation. Even a generation following Luke's gospel the church produces a book known as "The Didache" or "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles". Most Christians quickly attach the concept of sermon to this teaching today. Next is "fellowship" or the Greek *koinonia* which contains such ideas as "communion, sharing, or participatory help", speaking of a common life shared by the Christian community. "Breaking of bread" for Luke can be simply sharing a meal (as in Acts 2:46) but is most often the term used for what churches know as Holy

Communion, Lord's Supper or Eucharist. Today whether it be weekly, monthly or quarterly, the sharing of a sacred meal in worship is of central importance to most Christians. Lastly is "prayer" which in Greek is *proseuchais* from the base word *proseux* which means "an exchange of wishes", reminding us of the two-way communication prayer is between us and God.

We also note in verses 44 & 45 the common way the early Christian community cared for one another. As property was held in common there seems to be a sense of pure and true justice within that community. All of this sharing leads the people to a response of "glad and generous hearts" and "praising God" in verses 46 & 47.

Some may look at this picture of the early church in a rather utopian way. At this Rev. Dr. Karoline Lewis, professor at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota writes, "On our own, left to our own devices, achieving such ideals is impossible. However, with the power of the Holy Spirit, we are at least called to lean unto this kind of community. Moreover, the Spirit might just teach us how to expect it." (*Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship*, © 2019 by Westminster John Knox Press, p. 243.)

Pondering this type of new Christian community in the days following Pentecost, allows us to think about the new type of Christian community that the early pioneers of the Community Church Movement were trying to create. In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century as Community, Union, People's, Independent and Ecumenical churches were being formed around this country by leaving the security, finances and resources of big denominations or when local churches of various denominations chose to merger and not stay in the comfortable confines of at least one denomination, or even a new ecumenical church was founded in a community to serve the whole community, one wonders what kind of new Christianity was being dreamed and created.

This year, 2023, marks the centennial of the formal organization of the Community Church Movement. In 1923, the first national meetings were held for Community-type churches to enable them to fellowship, network, and develop and share resources. In May, 1923, staff from Community churches met to begin formation of the Community Church Workers of the USA, while in September of that year other pastors met to form the National Council of People's Community Churches (later known as the Biennial Council).

This new way of being the church in 1923 was not utopian. Even this new Community Church Movement conformed to the racism of its day with Caucasian churches in the Community Church Workers and African-American churches in the National Council of Peoples' Community Churches. Gladly, within a decade the leaders of these groups began working together, and even though delayed by economic depression and a world war, finally in the midst of Jim Crow America an interracial, International Council of Community Churches was born in 1950.

To this day the International Council of Community Churches (ICCC) seeks to advance a new kind of Christianity based in unity, inclusion, and reconciliation. We are a long way from the community of Acts 2, but today The Vision of the ICCC reads:

The Council is an international, intercultural, interracial fellowship of churches and ministry centers which seeks to realize Christian unity in local, national, and world relations. The Council seeks fellowship, mutual support, and common ministries that reflect the unity of all who see themselves within the Christian tradition. The Council seeks:

To be faithful to the prayer of Jesus Christ that “they may all be one;”
To witness to the inclusive love of God that overcomes all divisions;
To love and serve God, God’s people, and God’s creation;
To seek and share the truth;
To build toward a new world of peace;
To affirm individual freedom of conscience;
To affirm communities of justice, mercy, and love; and.
To be an integral partner in the worldwide ecumenical movement.

(ICCC Constitution Preamble-Vision)

With glad and generous hearts the early Christian community met to witness to the new life, new reality and new world given us by the Risen Christ. The ICCC seeks to carry on that spirit of a new community in Christ. Together with glad and generous hearts we celebrate our common life in the International Council of Community Churches.

Worship Resources

Hymns:

Now With Glad Hearts

(Hymn for Community Churches Sunday, 2023)

Now with glad hearts we come to sing;
the glory of God’s name.
To celebrate the Spirit here,
with voices raised as one.

In one community now formed-
by teaching and by prayer,
in breaking bread and fellowship,
the many are made one.

With generous hearts we seek to give
ourselves away in love.
To strive for justice, love and hope,
as one community.

Tune: AZMON 8686 Carl Gotthelf Glaser
Words: Robert Fread

The Community Church

Through centuries of conflict and clash of thought with thought,
Our forbearers for opinions and formal creeds have fought;
But we have greater freedom, the Way of Christ to prove,
“Let us resolve to differ, while we resolve to love.”

The living God we worship, the Lord of humankind,
Almighty and all loving, creating, ruling Mind,
The universe pervading, to heaven's remotest sphere –
Yet with each soul indwelling, that calls upon God here.

Let each believe in Jesus, according as one sees,
Revealed in gospel story, the Savior, One who frees
Our lives from sin and sorrow, and who before us trod
The way that finds through service, we seek the reign God.

Our lives and deeds we govern by Jesus' own commands;
That we love God and neighbor, this simple law demands,
With prayer and praise and worship, with tolerant mind to know
The truth that makes for freedom, this church shall forward go!

Tune: LANCASHIRE 7676D

Words: Samuel R. Scholes in 1928. As the decades passed and theological language changed some words were altered in 1978 by David Brown and in 2019 by Robert Fread.

Other Worship Resources:

An Affirmation of Our Call, Vision, and Commitment

The following “*Affirmation of Call, Vision and Commitment*” is based on the vision statement in the preamble of the current ICCC Constitution. It was written in 2022 by Robert Fread for Community Churches Sunday.

We are God’s people!

We proclaim a faith in the God who was and is and is to come:

Creating Love: Eternal source of life and being;
Incarnate Love: Jesus Christ, reconciler and savior;
Renewing Love: Spirit of justice and peace.

We affirm our call to be bringers of God’s vision:

to witness to the inclusive love of God that overcomes all divisions;
to love and serve God, God’s people, and God’s creation;
to seek and share the truth;
to build toward a new world of peace;
to affirm individual freedom of conscience;
and to affirm communities of justice, mercy, and love.

We affirm our place in the Community Churches family:
to be faithful to the prayer of Jesus Christ that “they may all be one;”
and to seek unity with the whole Christian family.

We commit our lives to be faithful servants of God,
and followers and disciples of Jesus Christ.

We are God’s people! Thanks be to God!

A Statement of Affirmation and Commitment for Community Churches

The following “*Statement of Affirmation and Commitment*” was written was written in 1997 (revised 2020) by Robert Fread for Kawkawlin Community Church, Kawkawlin, MI. It is based on ideas expressed by historic Community church leaders such as Orvis Jordan and J. Ruskin Howe, and in the former ICCC Constitution.

We are God's people- created in diversity, gathered in unity.

We affirm our faith in one God;
in Christ our Teacher;
in the Spirit as our Guide.

We affirm our ministry as a Community Church-
a church which tolerates religious opinions;
a church which respects the sincere convictions of every person;
a church which seeks to be as comprehensive as the spirit and teachings of Christ,
and as inclusive as the love of God.

We affirm our place in the body of Christ,
in the one, holy Church,
in the people of God.

We commit ourselves to the continuing mission of Christian unity-
that unity for which Christ prayed,
“that they all may be one.”

Rev. Robert A. Fread, Original Version © 1997 Community Church Press

Other Resources:

Over the years many churches have used the following in church bulletins and other publications:

We AGREE to differ.
We RESOLVE to love.
We UNITE to serve.

In recent years the following has appeared on the ICCC website:

As people devoted to following Christ
we are committed to community,
to treasuring diversity,
to living our faith in service and love.

Bulletin Insert

Pages 8 and 9 contain an 8 ½ X 11 (letter size) bulletin insert for use in your church. The insert is two sided. Please print as many inserts as needed for your church. If your church uses 11 X 14 (legal size) bulletins, please see pages 10 and 11.

Final Comments

This resource was developed by Rev. Bob Fread for the Informational Services and Outreach of the **International Council of Community Churches**, P.O. Box 846, Longmont, CO 80502, phone: 815-464-5690.

If you have questions or comments, you can contact the ICCC Office or Rev. Bob Fread at 319-830-2150 or email: RFread65@hotmail.com.

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"With Glad
and Generous
Hearts"
Acts 2:46b



Several weeks following Jesus' resurrection and days following the Spirit-filled wind and flames of Pentecost, we find a new Christian community emerging in Jerusalem. Central to their gathering was devoting themselves to "the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42) This lead these early Christians to live with "glad and generous hearts." (Acts 2:46b).

A century ago in 1923, people from Community, Union, People's, Independent and Ecumenical churches began gathering in a new Spirit-led Christian movement known as the Community Churches Movement. This movement was birthed to aid churches who had left the security of a denomination or were formed apart from a denomination, and was committed to pursuing unity in the church and celebrating reconciliation and diversity in the human family.

On this **Community Churches Sunday** we celebrate the International Council of Community Churches (ICCC) as the continuation of that Community Churches Movement. The ICCC continues today serving its member churches through offering resources to local churches, clergy and laity continuing education, opportunities to share in common national and international missions, offering voluntary pension plans for clergy and property insurance for churches, and local mission grants to aid local churches in serving their communities. With "glad and generous hearts" we celebrate your church's fellowship in the International Council of Community Churches.

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Currently, the Council includes about 50 churches/ministries in the United States plus affiliates in 3 other nations. The ICCC is headquartered in Longmont, Colorado, and maintains a minimal staff of an Executive Director and Office Administrator. The Council is governed throughout the year by a Board of Directors and a Board of Trustees.

Each year ICCC members are invited to the ICCC Annual Conference. The 2023 ICCC Annual Conference will be July 18-21, 2023, in Charlotte, NC. The conference is not just a business meeting but is a "family reunion" of clergy and laity from our member units around the country. Annual Conference involves times of fellowship, worship, Bible study, workshops, and business, while making new friends and renewing old relationships. **We hope you will consider joining us this summer!**

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