

Community Churches Sunday 2024

Sunday, April 28, 2024

(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 28, 2023**, the Fifth 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 John 15:5. 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 General Fund 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 **John 15:1-8**. From this text we draw the theme "***Branches Bearing Fruit Together***" from John 15:5. Churches which use the *Revised Common Lectionary* will see this is reading as one of the texts for April 28, 2024.

John 15 is part of a larger section known as the 'Farewell Discourse' of John 14-17. In these chapters the author has Jesus preparing his disciples for his departure through encouraging them to abide and love, trusting in the Spirit which will come as Advocate and Spirit of truth, and praying for them. John 14 is given in the context of Jesus' last meal with the disciples, while John 15-17 given either on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane or shortly after arrival.

As John 15 begins, Jesus gives a new metaphor for how the disciples are to understand their relationship to Jesus in the face of his coming physical absence. These verses contain the final of seven "I am" statements in John (John 15:5). Here Jesus is the "vine" and disciples the "branches". In light of Jesus' coming absence, the disciples are encouraged to abide, continue, remain or dwell in Jesus. These statements remind the disciples of their continued reliance and dependence on Jesus, stressing a branch is dependent on the provision and sustenance of the vine. The vine means life. Without connection to the vine, the branch's life is not possible. This connection allows the branches to abide in the vine, enabling them to bear fruit. In John bearing fruit is often connected to loving one another as Jesus loves us.

On Community Churches Sunday we notice that Jesus the vine has more than one branch, instead Jesus says “you are the branches” (notice the plural). Jesus the one vine has many branches, each individually connected to the vine, and each bearing fruit, abiding and loving as branches connected to one vine. Churches in the International Council of Community Churches have always valued the autonomy of every local church, yet like individual branches, each church is connected to one, common vine- the true vine- Jesus. As individual churches we best produce the fruit of love, loving as Jesus loved us, as branches of one vine, if we produce and share our fruits of love **together**. As “*Branches Bearing Fruit Together*”, we as ICCC churches can best be Christ’s presence in the world.

In September, 2022, Hurricane Ian, a category 5 hurricane came ashore in Fort Myers, Florida. Peace Community Church, a member of the ICCC, sustained damage to their building with both wind damage, and water and mud inside their building. Like branches attached to Jesus the vine, ICCC local churches contributed to a Hurricane Ian Fund which helped Peace Community Church repair and restore their church building, while also providing funds to allow Church World Service to provide other hurricane aid in Florida. As branches, ICCC churches produced the fruit of love together to help Peace Community Church.

In 2021, the ICCC began providing Local Church Mission grants to ICCC churches engaged in local mission projects in their communities. Because of your church’s support of the ICCC and its General Fund, the ICCC has aided People’s Community Church serve hot lunch on Mondays in intercity Detroit, MI, helped Second Community Church in Columbus, OH, partner with a local Presbyterian Church, to provide meals and a food and hygiene pantry, allowed Protestant Community Church in NJ to provide casseroles for a local homeless center, and Church of the Loving Shepherd in PA to have a food pantry that delivers to food insecure people with mobility issues. Together as branches- our ICCC churches are bearing fruit **together** as a Community Churches family. Truly your churches part in the International Council of Community Churches allows us to be “*Branches Bearing Fruit Together*”!



Worship Resources

Hymns:

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."

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 7 and 8 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 9 and 10.

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.



In John 15, Jesus on the evening before death, prepares his disciples for his physical absence. He uses the metaphor of vine and branches. The disciples are branches that remain attached to Jesus, the vine. Because the branches are attached to the vine, the vine provides life and allows the branches to bear the fruit of love.

The International Council of Community Churches (ICCC) have churches that exist as individual branches attached to Jesus the vine. Yet Jesus has more than one branch, and as branches, the many churches of the ICCC draw their life from Jesus the vine and thus are "**Branches Bearing Fruit Together**". Over the last few years, together as branches bearing fruit, the churches of the ICCC have aided Peace Community Church in FL with their recovery from Hurricane Ian, People's Community Church in MI provide hot meals in intercity Detroit, and Church of the Loving Shepherd in PA provide a mobile food pantry that delivers to food insecure people with mobility issues. Together as the ICCC we are "**Branches Bearing Fruit Together**"!

The ICCC continues 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 church staff and property insurance for churches, and local mission grants to aid local churches in serving their communities. Together as the ICCC, our churches are "**Branches Bearing Fruit Together**".



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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 2024 ICCC Annual Conference will be July 16 - 19, 2024, in Kansas City, MO. 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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