



Devotionals Based on our Church Statement

These devotionals are for use by committees and small groups as a way of opening a meeting prayerfully while also reflecting on our new church statement. These are designed to take between 5-10 min. The questions were intended for quiet reflection, however, if a group chooses to, the answers can be shared.

Select a devotion based on a topic that will support your meeting agenda. To prepare, be sure that committee or small group members have access to the church statement, either with a printed copy, access via the home page of the fumc-a2.org site, or on a recent bulletin.

Give everyone a moment to review the church statement, then read aloud the excerpt. Read the scripture. Ask the first reflection question, and give everyone time to reflect. Repeat with additional questions. Ask for comments or general sharing following the time for reflection, followed by prayer concerns, then close in prayer.

If your group is interested in a deeper conversation about the church statement, the sample conversation guide at the end is designed to guide a 20-minute conversation that may be of value to your group.

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FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
OF ANN ARBOR

We seek to know God. We are grounded in unconditional love.
We affirm all persons.

We learn from one another as we follow the teachings of Jesus Christ, an outsider who tore down dividing walls and calls us to unity. We are progressive, relevant, and committed to seeking peace and building hope through worship, service, social justice, and education.

No matter where you are on your faith journey, or how you worship, we welcome you to help us build our community. This includes all races and ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identities, ages and stages of life, abilities and disabilities, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Knowing God

Church Statement excerpt: “We seek to know God. We are grounded in unconditional love. We affirm all persons.”

Scripture: *So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.*

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. 1 John 4:16

Questions for reflection: What does it mean to know God? How have you sensed God’s presence in the past week?

Prayer: God of Love, all that we do in our service to the church and our community is out of love for you. Your love for us knows no bounds and so we hope to be the same. Help us to grow in our understanding of you so that we can grow in love. Show us how you are working in the world around us and where we might work with you. Guide us in loving and affirming all who we meet as an act of worship to you. Amen.

Sing: UMH 549 verses 1, 6 “Where Charity and Love Prevail”

1. Where charity and love prevail, there God is every found;
Brought here together by Christ’s love, by love are we thus bound.
6. Love can exclude no race or creed if honored be God’s name;
Our common life embraces all whose Maker is the same.

Unconditional Love

Church Statement excerpt: We are grounded in unconditional love.

Scripture: *Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love. 1 Corinthians 13:8-13*

Questions for reflection: Unconditional love is given without any expectation of mutuality. Who has loved you unconditionally? Who do you love unconditionally?

Prayer: God of unconditional love. We offer thanks for the people who have shown us love and showed us how to love. We know that all that is around us is temporary, but your love is eternal. We know that we are fully known by you, but we grow in our love for you as our faith deepens. Guide us in our faith so that we may seek you more earnestly. Fill us with hope and the knowledge that you are working in ways that we may not see or understand. Your love is our strength, and we pray that we have the courage to go forth and share this abundantly. Amen.

Seeking Peace and Building Hope

Church Statement (excerpt): We learn from one another as we follow the teachings of Jesus Christ, an outsider who tore down dividing walls and calls us to unity. We are progressive, relevant, and committed to seeking peace and building hope through worship, service, social justice, and education.

Scripture: *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.* Romans 12:2

Questions for reflection: Who have you learned something new from recently? What would it mean for you to seek peace and build hope?

Prayer: God of Wisdom, give us the spirit of humility so that we may approach life with an attitude of openness to new experiences and information. Show us areas where we should be open to growth. Allow our hearts to be broken by injustice, and our will to be aligned with yours so that we may take positive action. Transformation and renewal starts with us, and then spreads to others. May we be channels of your grace and mercy to all as we seek peace and build hope. In Christ name we pray. Amen

Social Justice

Church Statement: “We learn from one another as we follow the teachings of Jesus Christ, an outsider who tore down dividing walls and calls us to unity. We are progressive, relevant, and committed to seeking peace and building hope through worship, service, social justice, and education.”

Scripture: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”* Luke 4:18-19

Questions for reflection: Who do we serve well? What oppressed groups might we look to support in the future?

Prayer: God of Justice. You call us to the work of collective liberation; ensuring that all people are free to be who they are and have all their basic needs met. Guide us as we seek to do this work as a church community. Give us a deeper understanding of the experiences of others and how we might walk alongside them supporting them as they seek justice and wholeness. Show us where we as individuals might need liberation or support in order to fully express who we are and receive compassion. Surround us with your protection as we do this difficult and much needed work. Fill us with courage. Invite us to seek rest when we need to. May your will be done. Amen

Love of Neighbor / Affirming All Persons

Church Statement: “We seek to know God. We are grounded in unconditional love. We affirm all persons.”

Scripture: *Jesus said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’* Matthew 22:37-39

Questions for reflection: Who do we know (individual or a people group) that is difficult to love. How could we love them better?

Prayer: God of all people. There are some people who are difficult to love. Sometimes we are the ones who are difficult to love. There are people groups who have been cast as unlovable in our country. Your love transcends all our human limitations, stereotypes, and prejudices. We pray to be able to give love unconditionally and that we may be loved and accepted in return, a good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into our laps. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

We are Grounded in Unconditional Love

Church Statement: “We seek to know God. We are grounded in unconditional love. We affirm all persons.”

Scripture: *If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.* 1 Corinthians 13: 1 - 3

Questions for reflection: It is human nature to do things with an ulterior or unconscious motive. How often do you reflect on your reasons for doing something? What does a motive grounded in unconditional love feel or look like?

Prayer: God of Love and Light, you loved us first with a love that knows no bounds from which we cannot be separated. Help us to fully accept and embrace your love and then to look out into the world with that same love. May everything that we do be rooted in this love and may people come to know you through the love that we share. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

Sing: UMH 408 “The Gift of Love”

1. Though I may speak with bravest fire, and have the gift to all inspire,
And have not love, my words are vain, as sounding brass, and hopeless gain.
2. Though I may give all I possess, and striving so my love profess,
But not be given by love within, the profit soon turns strangely thin.
3. Come, Spirit, come, our hearts contrl, our spirits long to be made whole.
Let inward love guide every deed; by this we worship, and are freed.

Radical Inclusion

Church Statement: “No matter where you are on your faith journey, or how you worship, we welcome you to help us build our community. This includes all races and ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identities, ages and stages of life, abilities and disabilities, and socioeconomic backgrounds.”

Scripture: *There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.* Galatians 3:28

Questions for reflection: Where do you see yourself in our church statement? What are your identities? Who do you know in our community that has a different identity to yours?

Prayer: God of all people. You intentionally created people to be unique, and we recognize our diversity as a gift from you. Help us to learn and grow from those who are different to us. Bring others into our community from whom we can learn more and in so doing gain a wider perspective. Help us to honor you by celebrating the gifts that each person brings. To God be the glory. Amen.

Sing: UMH 548 “In Christ There is No East or West” vs. 1, 3

1. In Christ there is no east or west, in him no south or north;
But on great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth.
3. In Christ is neither Jew nor Greek, and neither slave nor free;
Both male and female heirs are made, and all are kin to me.

Loving Well

Church Statement: “We are grounded in unconditional love.”

Scriptures: *“Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”* 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 1 John 4:7

Questions for reflection: Who do we know (an individual or a people group) that love well? What do they do that is loving? What can we learn from them?

Prayer: God of Love, we are grateful for the people who have come into our lives and taught us how to love. May we in turn be those people to others.

Sample Conversation Guide for a Small Group or Committee

Opening Prayer: (Open with gratitudes and prayer requests, end with below)

“We seek to know God. We are grounded in unconditional love. We affirm all persons.

“Help us to learn from one another as we follow the teachings of Jesus Christ. Let us follow His example by tearing down dividing walls, working to build community, and welcome all races and ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identities, ages and stages of life, abilities and disabilities, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

“Amen.”

Share the Statement: “Today/tonight, I’d like to share FUMC’s new statement, combining our vision, mission and beliefs, and our welcoming statement. This statement was crafted by a subgroup of our church Leadership Council over a multi-week period, with input sought from a number of staff, members, community members and others outside the community.

(Display the statement in PowerPoint, or pass out copies of the statement on paper.)

“Let’s start by reading the statement:

We seek to know God. We are grounded in unconditional love. We affirm all persons.

We learn from one another as we follow the teachings of Jesus Christ, an outsider who tore down dividing walls and calls us to unity. We are progressive, relevant, and committed to seeking peace and building hope through worship, service, social justice, and education.

No matter where you are on your faith journey, or how you worship, we welcome you to help us build our community. This includes all races and ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identities, ages and stages of life, abilities and disabilities, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

“Now let’s pause to read it again to ourselves and consider what is new.”

(Give your group about 60-75 seconds. It should seem like a long time.)

Discuss the statement:

“What do you notice that is new or different in the statement?”

(No comments or answers are needed yet. Let the group comment and ask questions.)

Share that the statement has three parts:

The first paragraph describes the vision, and replaces our journey statement:

We seek to know God. We are grounded in unconditional love. We affirm all persons.

Know God. Love Unconditionally. Affirm All.

Note that the new language is similar to our old journey statement (“Know God, Love Others, Serve the World”), but it is not a direct replacement. What does the word “affirm” mean to

each of you? (Use the definition and graphic on the following page to talk about how affirmation can be more encompassing than service.)

The second paragraph describes the mission and beliefs:

We learn from one another as we follow the teachings of Jesus Christ, an outsider who tore down dividing walls and called us to unity. We are progressive, relevant, and committed to seeking peace and building hope through worship, service, social justice, and education.

Your committee or small group may find that this paragraph can be used to guide your group:

- Does our work or decision promote or follow the teachings of Jesus Christ?
- Is this an opportunity to learn from one another?
- Are we promoting unity?
- Is this decision progressive? Is it forward-looking for our church and our community?
- Are we relevant in this modern era? Do we appeal to all who are seeking, and not just to our traditional membership?
- Does this decision support our commitment to seek peace and hope?
- Is everyone in the room who should have a voice in this decision, or have we considered the points of view of those who are not represented?

The third paragraph is our welcoming invitation:

No matter where you are on your faith journey, or how you worship, we welcome you to help us build our community. This includes all races and ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identities, ages and stages of life, abilities and disabilities, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

We truly want to welcome and affirm all. How can your group or committee ensure that you are removing barriers and creating an explicitly welcoming environment at FUMC?

What does it mean to “affirm”? How can our charge to Affirm All be greater than our commitment to service?

AFFIRM (def.): Declare one's support for; uphold; defend, offer (someone) emotional support or encouragement, give (life) a heightened sense of value, typically through the experience of something emotionally or spiritually uplifting.



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