

BE THE LIGHT

You're here to be the light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. Matthew 5:14

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“Here’s another way to put it: You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives.”
(Matthew 5:14-16, The Message)

Dear partners in ministry,

I love Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase of these verses in Matthew 5, and the clear commission they give to show up brightly in the world and be generous with our lives. That is the invitation extended in this year’s One Great Hour of Sharing theme, Be the Light.

The scriptures tell us that huge crowds were gathering, drawn to Jesus by his teachings and the miracles of healing he performed. So, Jesus climbed a hill and delivered his “sermon on the mount.” He opened his message by bestowing beautiful blessings that must have been like balm for those hearing it, and then he described a life of discipleship. He commands us in those verses to be light-bearers, to raise that light high and cast it wide.

Our giving to One Great Hour of Sharing is one way we can heed that call. When we participate in One Great Hour of Sharing, we shed light in places where circumstances make it difficult to imagine a future with hope. We create possibility for people forced to flee their homes in search of safety and new promise. We support life-giving recovery efforts when disasters devastate communities and overturn lives. We empower partners around the globe in their labors to build sustainable futures. We plant seeds of peace where war has wrought despair and destruction.





I think of the ministries our One Great Hour of Sharing gifts enable as a showering of unexpected blessings, much like those blessings Jesus granted in his sermon on the mount. Our offerings let people know that they are not alone, that people they don't even know see their pain and care enough to respond. They extend a mighty witness of love that is powerful and healing.

I hope you'll participate in the One Great Hour of Sharing offering this year with a spirit of joyful generosity! The OGHS Planning and Resource Guide can help you promote the offering in your setting and can be found online. You'll find resources for your use in worship and with your mission and stewardship committees. The suggested date for the OGHS offering this year is March 30, 2025, but we welcome your gifts whenever your church calendar allows.



Thank you for 'bringing out the God-colors in the world' by generously sharing your OGHS gifts. This is why we are here: to be shining witnesses of uncommon love and enduring hope, to share abundant blessings with others.

Grateful for you,

The Rev. Shari Prestemon
Acting Associate General Minister & Co-Executive for Global Ministries

Promoting the OGHS Offering in 4 Easy Steps

Thank you for your support of One Great Hour of Sharing. Each year, congregations promote the offering to help reach those in need worldwide. This guide aims to make promoting the offering easy by putting the resources in your hands and sharing where to find additional resources. Thank you, on behalf of each life that will be blessed because of our support.

- 1 ORDER MATERIALS** at www.uccresources.com to ensure you have adequate quantities. Discuss promotional and worship service ideas with your ministry leaders.
- 2 GENERATE EXCITEMENT** by getting others involved. Set a goal. Invite participation through a pastoral letter or regular newsletter. Get the children involved. Remind people of the offering at weekly services and gatherings or by sharing the moments for mission included in this guide, and available at ucc.org/oghs_resources.
- 3 HELP THE CONGREGATION** learn something new about the offering. Use the mission moments, adult and children's sermon suggestions, stories, skits, and video resources. Make OGHS a special part of the service on multiple dates prior to the offering. The suggested OGHS offering date is March 10, 2024.
- 4 SHARE THE GOOD NEWS.** After thanking the congregation for their support, announce the amount received for the offering in worship and in your church newsletter. Celebrate reaching your goal and send your congregation's gift to your UCC Conference Office making sure it is clearly marked "OGHS." Let members know they can give to One Great Hour of Sharing all year round using the OGHS donation website.



In addition to Our Church's Wider Mission (Basic Support), The United Church of Christ has 4 Special Mission Offerings (SMOs). The SMOs allow congregations and individuals to meet people at points of critical need in their lives. Though many options exist for direct, individual support of these needs, the SMOs allow a common witness and make a collective positive impact.

Our church has identified four areas where these critical human needs exist:

- In places lacking health and educational resources and/or where disaster has struck.
- Within systems of injustice that oppress daily life and opportunity.
- In the nurture of youth and congregations just beginning their lives of faith.
- In the lives of church leaders without sufficient resources to live with dignity.

4 SPECIAL MISSION OFFERINGS

The One Great Hour of Sharing offering is received on the fourth Sunday of Lent. It supports partners worldwide with ministries that fund health, education and agricultural development, emergency relief, refugee ministries, and both international and domestic disaster response.

The Strengthen the Church offering is received on Pentecost Sunday. It supports church growth, pastoral and lay leadership development, and youth and young adult ministries within conferences.

The Neighbors in Need offering is received on the first Sunday of October as part of World Communion Sunday and supports the Council for American Indian Ministry (CAIM) and Love of Church. It supports a variety of justice initiatives, advocacy efforts, and direct service projects through grants.

The Christmas Fund offering is received the Sunday before Christmas. It provides direct financial assistance to retired and active United Church of Christ authorized ministers and lay employees and their surviving spouses, including pension and health premiums.

Be the Light

Scripture: Matthew 5:14-16 [The Message]

“Here’s another way to put it: You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous [Parent] in heaven.”



Be the Light

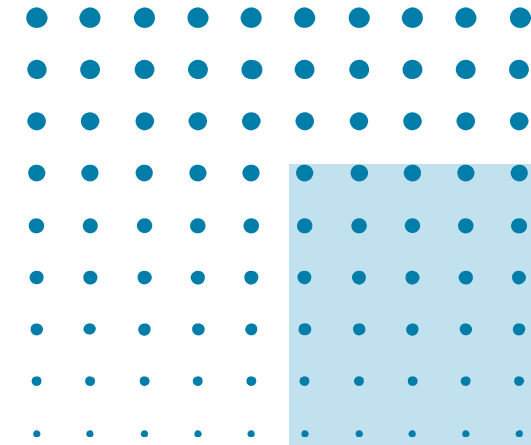
Background

For over 75 years, the One Great Hour of Sharing Offering (OGHS) has been helping American and Canadian Christians bring God's hope and healing to hurting people domestically and around the world.

OGHS's mission is to support domestic and international development, fight poverty and its consequences, bring aid and relief to communities torn by war or ravaged by national disaster, advocacy and resettlement assistance for refugees and displaced persons, and combat injustice in its many forms. OGHS provides funding and hands-on assistance in collaboration with local and international partners.

Each year, the Offering is gathered by several denominations and Church World Service (CWS) under a single theme developed by the ecumenical OGHS Committee. In addition to posters, brochures, and interactive media, the Committee commissions a Planning and Resource Guide that contains a variety of resources and activities for pastors and church leaders to use as they promote and receive the offering.

Thank you for supporting One Great Hour of Sharing for over 75 years. You continue to be light in places that need it.





Theme Interpretation and Scriptural Exegesis: Be the Light

The fifth chapter of Matthew's Gospel opens with the Sermon on the Mount and Beatitudes. At first glance, Jesus' words are shocking—people who are burdened in mind, body, and spirit are actually blessed!

Despite their situation or condition, they are already winning...or maybe, it is because of their pain that blessings come. The anxiety, fear, grief, confusion, hunger, discouragement, and despair they experience actually put them closer to God. Jesus does not glorify pain; rather, he teaches that such suffering puts them first in God's heart. God is there to help and heal—as a gift, no conditions, and no strings. They are part of God's family, God's Reign, and God's Kingdom. God's Kingdom is more than a place or future destination—it is a relationship with a loving and just God.

Jesus does not sugar-coat the reality of most people during his day. He declares that their suffering is not the end of the story. God sees them and hears their cries; God moves to alleviate their pain, in the short run and the long run. God's Reign of love and healing is already happening—bringing life out of death, joy out of sorrow, hope out of despair.

Jesus cautions that the response to God's blessing is not one of passivity. He makes clear that God's children are blessed and are to be a blessing to and for others; those who receive, are to give back.

God's Reign is not a spectator sport; the faithful do not have the option to sit back and watch events unfold. They are invited and challenged to be something and to do something. Followers of Jesus are transformed—from the inside out—as they receive the gifts of God's grace and are called to gift others with love, compassion, and generosity.

Jesus' entire ministry is active—teaching, preaching, healing, connecting. Jesus sets the standard for “Kingdom-living”—where love, unity, and harmony are the benchmarks for community life. Jesus invites us all to be active—doing what we can to embody compassion; to stand up for equity and fairness; to care for those in need without seeking reward or notoriety. Jesus teaches his disciples—and us—that God's Reign is a present reality and a future hope.



Theme Interpretation and Scriptural Exegesis: Be the Light (Continued)

For Jesus, God's Reign is about forming communities of diverse people, living as siblings, caring for each other and the created order, and building communities of justice and love where all are fed, sheltered, healed, and safe. Jesus declares that God's Reign is happening right now, even as we wait for its fulfillment.

Jesus invites his listeners—and us—to fully embrace the gift and grace God offers and be the gift that keeps on giving, the light that keeps on shining. Many of the ordinary people listening to and eavesdropping on Jesus' conversation with his disciples that day understood and dedicated themselves to the challenge.

Jesus assures us that we are what God intends: open-hearted, generous, and compassionate. By fully living into our identity as children of God, we spread God-colors throughout the world, bearing light, hope, and love to a desperate and dying world.

Have you ever watched suncatchers? Suncatchers are ornaments made of glass, crystal, or some translucent material. Usually hung in a window or outdoors, they spin to reflect and filter light, casting color in the area surrounding them—hues of blue, red,

green, purple, and yellow—a limitless array of colors and patterns that symbolize warmth, love, compassion, generosity, and hospitality. Suncatchers bear and spread color—just as our good deeds bear light and send color into the world.

Be light—in your home, church, and community—tutor students after school; make a casserole for a bereaved family; gather signatures for petitions that highlight important issues; pick up trash around your neighborhood; make blankets for the unsheltered—let the need beckon you to action.

Be light—in the world by making a generous contribution to One Great Hour of Sharing. Your gift supports those doing ministry throughout the United States and across the globe—bringing hope, expertise, compassion, and love to places we may never visit and people we may never meet. Your giving to OGHS provides funding and hands-on assistance and promotes collaboration with local and international partners.



Theme Interpretation and Scriptural Exegesis: Be the Light (Continued)

Be the light! For the sake of sisters and brothers who have renewed hope because you care enough to shine.

Be the light! So that women and men around the world can find their way and know that there is a path forward.

Be the light! Sharing God-colors with all you encounter!

Give generously to One Great Hour of Sharing! Follow in the footsteps of The Light of the World! Shine brightly!

Scriptural Commentary and Sermon Starter

What would you do if you knew you could not fail? It's a question we should ask ourselves regularly. It is a question that Jesus implies when he tells his disciples—and us—to be light, bringing God-colors in the world.

Jesus stands in the tradition of Moses by interpreting God's vision for creation. The Beatitudes and Ten Commandments let us know that communities of justice, love, compassion, and generosity are desired by God and are possible—here and now.

God calls us to live with integrity—with head and heart connected, with intention and action aligned.

In Matthew 5, Jesus teaches that God is already transforming and loving the world, already empowering God's people to be all they can be—lights bringing God-colors to every corner of creation.

Jesus challenges his disciples—and us—to live as if believing in and trusting God makes a difference. To be light because that, simply, is who we are.

Jesus sets a high bar for discipleship: preaching and teaching despite resistance from some and outright hostility from others; healing on the spot instead of keeping office hours; meaningfully engaging those cast out and on the margins of society; breaking bread with the ne'er-do-wells at tables denied to them.

Jesus challenges us to do likewise and from a place of blessedness—we already have everything we need to be light-bearers. We need only to shine.



Scriptural Commentary and Sermon Starter (Continued)

As you prepare to preach and teach for One Great Hour of Sharing, make clear that Jesus is not promoting transactional faith. We don't bargain with God for favors or blessings. We expect nothing in return for being fully who God has created us to be. We do good works in gratitude for all that God has done for us, as a response of thankfulness.

If your church has stained glass windows, invite the congregation to think about what the windows portray and why. Share any history you have about the windows. Ask how the scenes look as the intensity of sunlight changes throughout the day. How are the windows light-bearers of God's love and presence?

If your church does not have stained glass, use an example found on the Internet. One example is the website for St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco (<https://www.saintgregorys.org>). While not stained glass, the "Dancing Saints" is an iconic installation of ninety persons that wraps around the church rotunda—with a 12-foot-tall dancing Christ.

The saints are a wide array of persons from a multitude of time periods, faith traditions, and backgrounds—King David, Frances of Assisi, Anne Frank, and Malcolm X, among others. As the congregation dances around the altar during the liturgy, the saints dance above, proclaiming a sweeping, universal vision of God's light shining through human life.

Who would you include in a modern stained glass window? Who would you see in a window that represents One Great Hour of Sharing? This is an opportunity to identify and honor those who have been or are living into the light to which God has called them. Invite your members to think about how they can be light-bearers for others.

Jesus' call for us to be light is ongoing. Communities are in crisis. Storms devastate the countryside. Far too many persons are vulnerable—lacking power, resources, and social support—and are brutally mistreated. The earth is abused and creation is disrespected. Justice is denied.



Scriptural Commentary and Sermon Starter (Continued)

When you give to One Great Hour of Sharing, you are light for people in need.

You offer light when disasters hit.

You offer light when conditions threaten families and communities.

When you give to One Great Hour of Sharing, you are light for communities here and across the globe.

You offer light that restores structures and transforms lives.

You offer light that blesses others to shine.

When you give to One Great Hour of Sharing, you are light that shines today, tomorrow, and well into the future.

You—we—are light-bearers.

Let us be the light.

Let us shine.

Let us go public.

Find a hilltop.

Let us keep open house and be generous with our lives and in our giving.

Let us make a difference—give to One Great Hour of Sharing!

Rev. Barbara Essex

Be the Light



Matthew 5:14-16 (The Message)

14-16 “Here’s another way to put it: You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.

Call to Worship

One: Be the light, bearing it to all the world

All: No hiding.

Be the light, sharing it with all you encounter.

No stalling.

Be the light, so that our neighbors can find their way.

No holding back.

Be the light, so that the world will know there is a path forward.

No hiding. No stalling. No holding.

We move forward to be the light.

Prayer of Invocation

Creator and Creative God, The sun rises in the morning, bringing forth the many-colored hues of light illuminating the day. At night, the moon rises to illuminate the sky. The stars shine, giving light where there is none. Regardless of the time of day or night, God sends light to the world. Each of us is called to bear the light in that same way, no matter the time of day or the situation we find ourselves in. As we worship, we follow in the footsteps of the one who was the light of the world, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.



Litany or Responsive Reading

One: When communities are in crisis,

All: Be the light.

When tornados devastate the countryside,

Be the light.

When human beings are mistreated,

Be the light.

When the earth is abused and creation is disrespected,

Be the light.

When justice is denied,

Be the light.

When another is in need,

Be the light.

Light-bearers you are,

We will be the light.

Go public. Find a hilltop.

We will be the light.

Invitation to Communion

“It is late at night,
so dark you cannot see the path home,
and you are suddenly lost
in this place
that once felt familiar and safe.”

Thus begins the poem by Tom Atkins. As we move through life, we often find ourselves lost, even in places that can seem quite familiar. This can happen for many reasons and at many different times in our lives.

The sacrament (or time) of Holy Communion is a moment that beckons us home, no matter how lost we may feel. In these simple elements of bread and wine, and through an invitation from Christ to this table, we realize that the meal is for all and that it is Christ who serves as the host.



Invitation to Communion (Continued)

However, Atkins' poem concludes by reminding us that the table is a place where we are never alone:

“Next time, you vow, as the path grows clear,
you will bring a lantern,
your own light,
and join others lost in the night,
a defiance of the dark,
a beacon,
a reminder to all who see you
that they are never, ever
alone.”

At this table, we share in the fellowship of one another and with Christ. We bring the light of Christ with us and others are able to find the table, dine with others and find that which is familiar and safe. Come, now, as Christ shares the best with us.

Communion Prayer

From the beginning of creation, light has been an ever-present gift to humanity. God spoke forth light and it shone over all the earth. Human beings were created with the breath of God and the light shone forth from each person, formed in the very image of God. After the flood, a rainbow lights up the sky to remind us of the covenant with God for the rest of time.

There were times where (or when) the light was not as visible. Humanity did not react to the light as we should have. We followed kings and despots, when the sages and prophets were calling us to follow along different paths.

Eventually you sent your son, Jesus, who called himself the light of the world and called us to join him in sharing the light with all we encounter. After his death and resurrection, you sent the Spirit to illuminate our lives so that we could continue to bear the light of Christ into the world for ages to come.

Sharing that light still today, we boldly proclaim this truth, which we believe, live, and proclaim:

Continue with the Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy) and the Great Thanksgiving as your tradition practices.



Invitation to the Offering

Lea Morris wrote a song called “Be the Light.”

There is always a light – when we are ready to see it
There is always a light – when we are ready to be it
To see the light, to be the light, to raise our eyes in the dark of night

[To climb this hill, together we will].

The song ends with the words, “Be a gift to the world.” You are invited to offer the gift of light to others around the world through One Great Hour of Sharing.

[Optional addition: Your gifts assist people like Orfelina (pictured on the One Great Hour of Sharing poster and bulletin insert), who works with families in the northern regions of Honduras to help them understand how to transform their families and communities through agriculture. She teaches, monitors, prepares, chats, supports, and encourages. She brings light wherever she goes. Imagine how many more people can be empowered for mission as we give generously.]

Jesus’ call for us to be light is an ongoing opportunity for us to offer a gift to another. The world needs light more than ever before. We cannot be in all of these places ourselves or even see them with our own eyes, but through our generous tithes, offerings and special gifts, we can be a light which shines day or night. In that spirit, let us share now!

Prayer of Dedication

Generous God, we offer these gifts in the spirit of light and with a heart full of gratitude for what we’ve been given. These offerings show our commitment to sharing with those in need, neighbors near and far, whom we are unlikely to meet. As we share, we shine the light of our faith with brothers and sisters we may never meet. Bless the gifts, just as you have us, with an extra measure of your grace. In Christ’s name, Amen.



Charge and Benediction

[Encourage those in your congregations to shine the lights on their cell phones during the benediction as a way of signaling that they will be the light shining in the places where they find themselves but that, collectively, the light is brighter when we join others in being the light.]

One: May you always be the light, shining bright in the darkness, just as Jesus calls us to.

All: Let your kindness be a beacon, your compassion a guiding star, and your love a radiant flame.

One: As you illuminate the world with your actions, may others see your good deeds and be inspired to glorify the divine.

All: We go forth, empowered by faith, let our light shine for all to see.

Hymn Suggestions

- This Little Light of Mine – African American Spiritual
- Bring Forth the Kingdom – Marty Haugen
- Gather Us In – Marty Haugen
- O Word of God, Incarnate – William W. How
- Jesus Bids Us Shine – Susan Warner
- Christ Be Our Light—Bernadette Ferrell
- As a Fire Is Meant for Burning – Ruth Duck
- O Jesus I Have Promised – John E. Bode / Arthur H. Mann
- Song for the Nations – Chris Christensen (referenced in last year's materials)
- Salt & Light – Jan and John L'Ecuyer
- Shine, Jesus, Shine – Graham Kendrick
- Go, Light Your World – Kathy Troccoli
- We Are Called to Be God's People – Thomas Jackson
- Pass It On – Kurt Kaiser
- Sois la Semilla (You Are the Seed) – Cesareo Gabaraín



Children's Activity – Shine Brightly!

Overview and instructions

To begin this children's lesson, there are two optional activities. Option 1 is for older children (4th grade and above) while option 2 is for children pre-school through 3rd grade. Devoting about 20 minutes to each segment will result in an 80 minute class. For shorter class periods, you could choose between the object lesson and activity for 60 minutes. The beginning of each segment notes supplies that are needed.

Option 1 – Create an Acronym (4th grade and Older)

Post the letters S H I N E on a sheet of paper or newsprint. If you want to make it an individual activity, give each participant a paper with the letters written down the left margin. If you want to make it a group activity, post it on newsprint.

- Ask participants what words go with each letter to create a phrase. An example:
- S – Son's
- H – Heart
- I – Is
- N – Never
- E – Empty

Jesus' heart is never empty and always giving and generous toward us.

If this is done as an individual activity, share the acronyms with the group.

Option 2 – Read a Book (Pre-School through 3rd Grade)

Read the book Little Mole Finds Hope by Glenys Nellist. Little Mole lives underground, where it is dark, but his mother helps him find signs of life and spring around him.

After reading the book, lead a discussion in which you ask participants how they can see signs of light even when things feel like the opposite.



Children's Activity – Shine Brightly! (Continued)

Scripture Reading

Read the One Great Hour of Sharing focus text in these two versions:

Matthew 5:14-16 from The Message paraphrase:

14-16 “Here’s another way to put it: You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.”

Matthew 5:14-16 from The International Children’s Bible:

14 “You are the light that gives light to the world. A city that is built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 And people don’t hide a light under a bowl. They put the light on a lampstand. Then the light shines for all the people in the house. 16 In the same way, you should be a light for other people. Live so that they will see the good things you do. Live so that they will praise your Father in heaven.”

As you read, ask the children to act out the scripture. Rather than giving them actions, invite them to create actions. You could read the scripture a few times and then see what actions emerge.

Afterwards, ask them to reflect on why they chose certain actions for the various phrases.

Object Lesson

You will need the following supplies: clear plastic cups, tissue paper (yellow and orange), scissors, glue, tea light candles or battery-operated tea lights

Instructions:

Cut the tissue paper into small squares or strips. Mix yellow and orange pieces together to create a warm, glowing effect.

Have the children glue the tissue paper pieces onto the outside of the plastic cup. They can cover the entire surface or create patterns — the goal is to make the jar look like it’s glowing with light.



Children’s Activity – Shine Brightly! (Continued)

Once the glue is dry, place a tea light candle inside the jar or use a battery-operated tea light. Turn off the lights in the room and let the children observe how their lanterns shine and glow. If the room cannot be darkened, they will be able to take them home and see how it works then.

Remind them of the scripture reading from earlier. Discuss what it means to “be the light” in their own lives — how can they show kindness, love, and help others around them?

Encourage them to think of specific actions they can take to brighten someone else's day or to make a positive impact in their community. After the discussion, have a moment of reflection where each child can think about one way they can be a light to others this week. They can write or draw their ideas on a small piece of paper and place it inside their lanterns as a reminder.

Activity: Chalk Art

You will need the following supplies: sidewalk chalk

With permission, invite the children to draw images that depict light on their driveways or sidewalks (or the sidewalk of the church). Examples could include candles, the sun/moon/stars, light bulbs, etc...

By doing this outside, they are making a public witness of bearing light in the world.

Conclude this lesson by reminding the children of the importance of letting their light shine, just as Jesus taught. Encourage them to go out and spread kindness, love, and goodness wherever they go.



Youth Activity – Find the Light

Overview and Instructions

Devoting about 20 minutes to each segment will result in a 60-minute class. You could adjust the Divine Game of Pinzatski for a longer youth session.

Opening Activity – Just a Glimpse

You will need the following supplies: two small Lego sets for each group you have.

Instructions

Before the class begins, the adult leader of the activity builds a small structure with the Legos and conceals it from the group. Then, the whole youth group works together to recreate the structure.

Alternatively, you can even have two groups working on the project if your group is large enough.

1. When the session begins, one member comes up to look at the block structure for 30 seconds. They try to memorize it before returning to their group.
2. After they return to the group, they have 30 seconds to instruct them about how to build an exact replica of the completed structure using their own set of Legos. The team cannot start to build until he/she has finished their instructions. Once instructions are given and they are building, the first member can no longer say anything.
3. The group then gets 1 minute to attempt to recreate the structure.
4. After 1 minute of building, another group member can come up for “just a glimpse.” They then get 30 seconds to look at the structure before returning to the group to explain for 30 seconds and then the group continues to try to recreate the structure.
5. The game continues until the group completes the structure as best they can or, alternatively, you can designate a time for the game.



Youth Activity – Find the Light (Continued)

Discuss

After the groups have built the structures, ask some of these questions (or some of your own):

- What was difficult about the game?
- What was easy?

When the structure was hidden it was more difficult to make. Then only certain people could see it. They were the ones who were providing “light” to the group.

- How much easier was it as more and more people were sharing the “light” (information) with the group?

Connecting to Scripture

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reminds us that we are the light of the world. Eugene Peterson’s *The Message* paraphrase says it like this:

14-16 “Here’s another way to put it: You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.

The One Great Hour of Sharing focus story this year is about Orfelina (pictured on the poster and bulletin insert), who works with families in the northern regions of Honduras to help them understand how to transform their families and communities through agriculture. The list of things she does is exhausting: Checking on local farmers’ harvests. Monitoring water projects. Teaching the women in the community how to prepare more nutritious meals for their families. Chatting up community leaders for support. Running workshops for things like creating organic fertilizers and sprays.

But Orfelina doesn’t just work with farmers and their families, she supports and encourages them. Visiting them in their homes. Bringing God’s light to everyone she meets.



Youth Activity – Find the Light (Continued)

Discuss

- Orfelina is just one person, but she brings God’s light to situations through her education and advocacy. Can you think of ways you can bring God’s light in those same ways? What other ways can you think of?
- Have you ever “hid” your light from others? Why do you think you did that? Share some examples if you are comfortable.
- When we are open to others by sharing our light, they may find their own path to also share. Re-read the scripture above. What spiritual practices can you think of which help us remain “open” to sharing our light?

Additional Optional Activity: The Divine Game of Pinzatski

Arthur and Ellen Pinzatski developed this fantastic game many years ago, while on their yearly camping trip to a beautiful lake. The original game consists of choosing a natural object and then describing to the best of your ability what characteristic of God is revealed. For example, a campfire might illustrate the purity of God, for God uses fire to burn what is holy, such as a sacrifice, but he also uses fire to burn up what is unholy in our lives.

What might God be saying to us through cloud formations or a hummingbird, a flower or moss on a rock?

As an adaption of this game for One Great Hour of Sharing, you are being asked to choose a natural object and to describe how it shines light through it. For example, a campfire (as described above) gives off light to illuminate the darkness or could be used to cook food for hungry people.



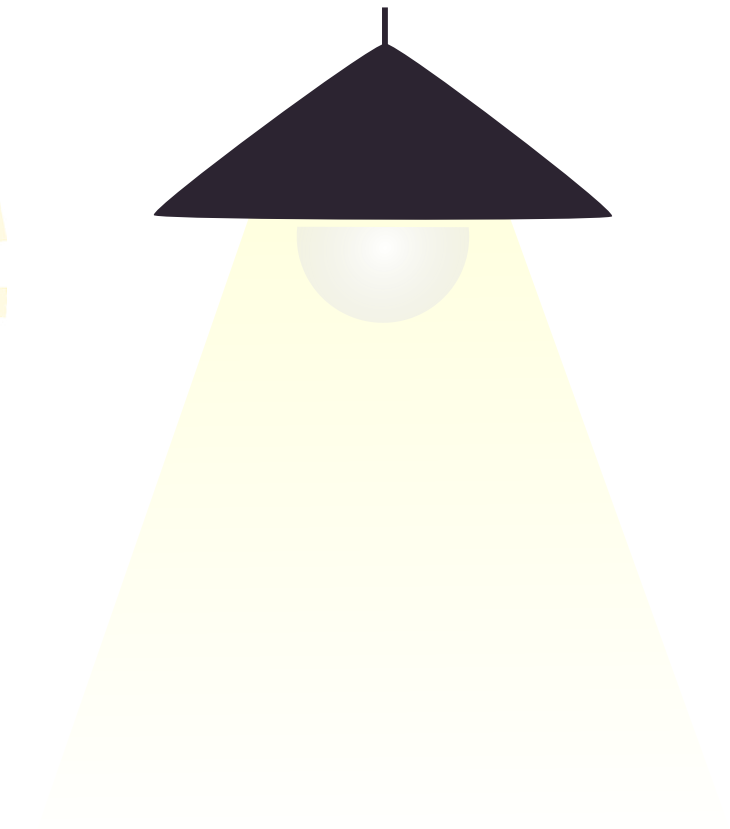
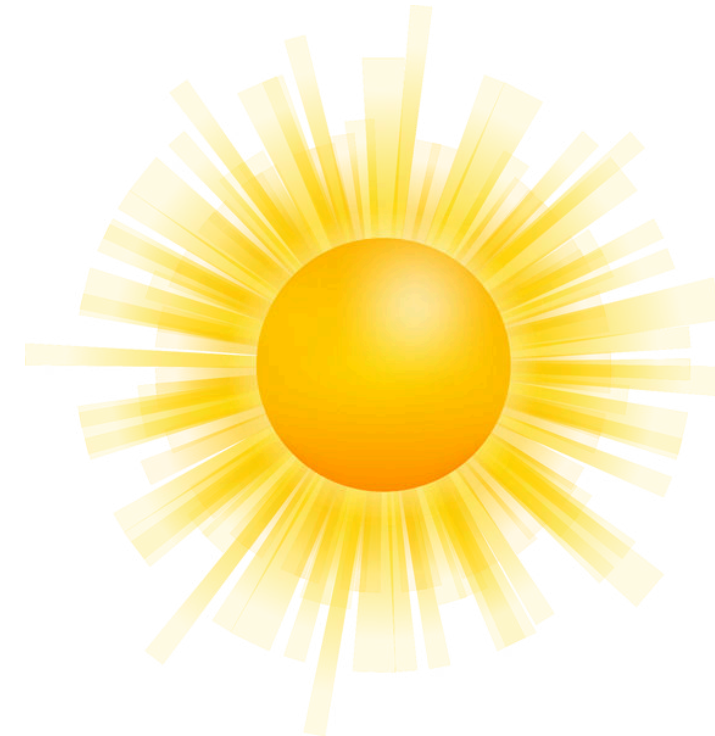
Youth Activity – Find the Light (Continued)

There are two options for this game. First, you can simply mention an item and ask how this might shine the light of God’s love through it.

Alternatively, you can send the youth out (individually or in groups) to look around the church and in the nearby area (ensuring safety of all involved) to take digital pictures of objects they see. When they return at the appointed time, they would show their images and explain how they shine the brightness of God’s love and grace through them.

After the game, ask them to discuss:

- How did you pick your objects? Did you have certain criteria?
- What would it be like if God kept the light (hid it) from shining from this object?





Intergenerational Activity – The Light Shines Through

This activity is designed to help multiple generations work with one another to tell stories and create a project together. It can be adapted in many ways as the context and time available allows.

Take a Trip to the Sanctuary

The first part of this intergenerational activity is to take a trip to the church sanctuary (if your sanctuary has stained glass windows). If the church has a historian or window expert, ask them to lead the tour. If your church does not have stained glass windows, you could design a presentation on a computer from pictures found online.

Share the following information as you view the windows:

Throughout history, stained glass windows have been a staple in many Christian churches, known for their intricate designs and stunning visual display. Why do these windows play such an important role in religious architecture?

Despite being primarily decorative features, stained glass windows hold a deeper symbolic meaning that has been appreciated by the Christian community for centuries.

Each color in stained glass windows has a specific symbolism in Christian art. Blue represents heaven, red signifies Christ's sacrifice, green symbolizes hope and growth, and purple represents royalty and penitence.

Stained glass windows are also used to visually narrate biblical stories. The intricate details and colors of the windows help to portray the story to non-reading congregants.

The use of light in stained glass windows represents the divine presence and illuminates the sanctuary with a mystical and ethereal glow. It symbolizes the presence of God and the light of faith.

Ask some wondering questions:

1. Do you have a favorite window? Why is it your favorite?
2. How do these windows help you describe your faith?
3. Does one of these windows stand out to you? Why?
4. If you could design a window, what would it be?
5. Do you think it looks different in the morning light than in the afternoon? Why do you think the light looks differently at various times of day?



Intergenerational Activity – The Light Shines Through (Continued)

Make a Suncatcher

This activity is to create suncatchers, either ones that you purchase or ones that you make. You can purchase these online or at a craft store. Alternatively, you can make them. This video provides step by step instructions, including the materials that you will need:

<https://youtu.be/jlwyF9yKoJo>.

Once you have made the suncatchers, display them in an area where they can be seen and catch light!

Alternative Activity

Supplies: Crayons, markers or colored pencils; a sheet of blank paper where participants can design their own stained glass window.

If you do not want to create suncatchers as described above, intergenerational groups may draw and color the design for a stained glass window. As a part of their drawing, they could share how this new window will serve as a shining light, offering a story of faith to those who see it.

Instructions:

On the sheet of paper, ask participants to draw their own creative design of a stained glass window that could be placed in their sanctuary. Ask them to include symbols or colors that connect their window to being the light for others who see it. What will they see? What will they learn when they look at this window?

Conclusion

Ask the smaller groups to reflect together how the world would be different if the light was shining through all of our lives all of the time. Ask the group to come up with 10 sentences describing how we would know we were experiencing this. Here is an example – “The people of the world would know that everyone is loved and respected for who they are.”

Give the groups only 3-4 minutes to work on this activity. See which group can come up with ten sentences.

Ask the groups to share their work with the whole assembly.

After they have shared, consider asking some more wondering questions:

- How can we “be the light” when we share an offering for One Great Hour of Sharing?
- How does the One Great Hour of Sharing offering shine the light of God’s love throughout the world?



Children's Sermon

This is based on a portion of the sermon written by Barbara Essex.

Constructed to be used in your own words, or to be followed as a script, this children's moment focuses on a particular person or persons in the congregation who shine their light into the world. The script and design may be adjusted to fit your virtual or hybrid worship context.

Theme

One Great Hour of Sharing reminds us that we are all to “be the light” through our actions in the world. There are many people who are examples of God's light and generosity through the way they live their lives. Sometimes, we just need to think about them in new ways.

Materials needed

You will not need any materials for this children's sermon except for an affirming listening ear, eager to engage children's ideas!

Script Suggestion

I want to ask you a very serious question: Have you ever failed at something?

Give time for responses.

Most of us don't like to fail, do we? If we are going to do something, we like to be a success.

Well, guess what. In Matthew 5, Jesus tells us there is something that we cannot fail at. Let me share it with you—

14-16 “Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven. (The Message)



Children's Sermon (Continued)

14 You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can't be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven. (CEB)

Jesus says, YOU are the light of the world. And that you are to let your light shine before people. Being light is something we really can't fail at. But, you know what? Sometimes we can struggle a little.

We want to shine our light brightly, but maybe sometimes we are mean to another person or we don't help when we are asked to by our parents.

We can share our light when we help others, share an encouraging word, or provide assistance through the One Great Hour of Sharing offering. We can be the light when we tutor students after school; coach a youth soccer team; make a casserole for a family who loses a loved one; pick up trash around your neighborhood; or make blankets for the unsheltered. There are SO MANY things we can do, right?

But you know what we need in our lives? We need examples that we can follow.

Here, it is appropriate to tell a story about a person in your congregation (or more than one person) who regularly shines their light brightly into the world. Alternatively, you can tell the story of Orfelina, feature on the One Great Hour of Sharing bulletin insert. You could even show her picture.

You have a chance to be the light! You can participate in today's service by giving a special offering to One Great Hour of Sharing. By doing that, you can shine your light throughout the world.

You can share any further details about the offering or other community details.



Children's Sermon (Continued)

Can we pray a blessing together?

Very good! Let's pray:

You can pray extemporaneously or use this prayer:

Dear God, thank you for loving us so much and showing us how we can love others by being a light in the world. By offering a gift today to the special offering or doing something good for another person, we shine as Jesus wanted us to. We can love those we will never even meet, sharing light with them through our gifts. With thankful hearts, we pray. Amen.





Offering Reminder

Imagine the difference we can make – the light we can be in the world – when we join together with other people of faith who are giving to the same cause. For over 75 years, One Great Hour of Sharing has been allowing like-minded churches and followers of Christ to generously share out of their bounty with those who may need some assistance. You will have the opportunity to do just that as next week (two weeks, three weeks, on Sunday _____), we will receive a special offering for One Great Hour of Sharing.

Your generous gifts to our yearly focus on mission enables our church and our ecumenical partners to make a difference in lives and communities around the world. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reminds us that we are the light of the world. Eugene Peterson paraphrases that quite simply – You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world.

One Great Hour of Sharing understands the needs—immediate and long-term. OGHS is there when needs are most pressing. By giving generously, you are the light that brings life forth in desolate places. By giving generously, you are the light providing spaces for others to be the light—bringing expertise and sustainable approaches to farming.

By giving generously, you are sharing beams of light today, tomorrow, and well into the future.

Rev. Dr. Derrek Belase

Mission Moment

Be the light for leaders like Orfelina

Orfelina Portillo is an agricultural technician working with families in northern Honduras. She teaches sustainable approaches to growing crops; monitors water projects; shows women in the community how to prepare more nutritious meals for their families; and leads workshops for things like creating organic fertilizers and sprays.

Your contributions to One Great Hour of Sharing connect those who are doing ministry—leaders who are empowered to form partnerships to create programs like Project Green, where Orfelina shares her knowledge and skills to address food security, thanks to Church World Service (CWS) and the Mennonite Social Action Commission (CASM).

Orfelina has been light for communities in the Santa Bárbara region for 16 years—sharing her skills side-by-side with over 750 families. As a hands-on leader, Orfelina is often seen carrying sacks of food, delivering supplies, checking on crops and animals. Orfelina supports and encourages her communities—bringing God-colors to those seeking to improve their lives and support their families.

Orfelina proclaims, “This is what I am passionate about: teaching. My profession is a very important part of my everyday life. My work is my joy...I am part of the strong hand that feeds the world.”



Through your gift to One Great Hour of Sharing, Orfelina is empowered to be the light for her region. She is making a difference, transforming communities, and spreading God’s light and love.

Be the light for leaders like Orfelina. Give to One Great Hour of Sharing!

Mission Moment

YWCA of Palestine – Jalazone Kindergarten and Community Center

What better way to support a more sustainable and hopeful future than to support and educate future generations? The YWCA of Palestine, a United Church of Christ partner through Global Ministries and supported by One Great Hour of Sharing, has engaged local Palestinian communities since 1893.

Today, it offers programs of economic empowerment, women's rights, youth leadership, and children's education. An example of the latter is the YWCA's nursery schools and kindergartens in refugee camps, schools the YWCA has run for decades. In addition to regular classes, the YWCA offers skill-based camps such as photography and sports, as well as other extra-curricular activities at its schools.

In the occupied Palestinian West Bank, roughly one-fourth of the 900,000 Palestinian refugees registered with the United Nations live in 19 refugee camps. The YWCA kindergarten in the Jalazone Refugee Camp near Ramallah is a sign of hope for a community that has endured over 75 years of displacement.



Mission Moment

YWCA of Palestine – Jalazone Kindergarten and Community Center (Continued)

The school and connected community center address the needs of over 80 children and their families within the camp. In a place that is often subjected to raids and night-time patrols by the Israeli military, children are not immune from the trauma the residents of the camp experience. As a result, the YWCA has added awareness and counselling sessions to regular classes to help improve the psychological well-being of the children there.

The opportunities that the YWCA affords the community through the kindergarten benefit the children, their families, and the teachers as well, providing a safe space for play and employing techniques to cope with the stress of daily life living in sub-par circumstances of a refugee camp under military occupation.

The pride the children have when they dress up for their graduation ceremony is palpable. They enjoy the celebration of their accomplishment, and anticipate their next stages of education and life better able and prepared for the challenges they will face.



Mission Moment

The Council of Churches in Sierra Leone (CCSL)

The Council of Churches in Sierra Leone (CCSL) has made significant strides in empowering women and supporting communities through transformative programs. Serving approximately one million church members and nearly three million beneficiaries annually, CCSL is committed to breaking barriers and promoting women's leadership across various sectors.

A key initiative is the Women's Desk, which focuses on training, mentorship, and enabling women's active participation in church capacity building, community development, leadership, and economic sustainability. Through this platform, CCSL equips women with the essential skills needed to take leadership roles in society.

One notable program is the Council's microcredit initiative, established in 2020, which supports participants in the Village Savings and Loan Groups (VSLGs). This program includes 20 groups and empowers women to establish small businesses, provides finance education, improves access to clean water, and promotes community development. The microcredit program has proven to enhance women's leadership, business skills, and literacy.



Mission Moment

The Council of Churches in Sierra Leone (CCSL) (Continued)

In Kamara Town, women from the VSLG worked together to build a church and a school, which were previously unavailable in the community. Because of the lack of educational infrastructure, children had to travel long distances to attend school and often started school later than usual. With a school now in their community, children can begin their education at the appropriate age, and parents find peace knowing their children are safe and learning close to home.

In Campbell Town, a widow faced significant challenges after her husband's death, particularly around land ownership. Through the microcredit program, she secured a loan to formalize her land ownership. With the necessary documents now in hand, she proudly owns the land and has built a small house.

The program's impact is profound, with 70% to 90% of women contributing significantly to their households' welfare. These women not only focus on their personal growth but also dedicate themselves to supporting and mentoring other women in their communities. This shared commitment to uplifting others is a core value of the VSLGs.



TOP GIVING CHURCHES BASED ON 2023 DOLLARS

California, Nevada Southern

Mission Hills UCC San Diego, CA
 Danville Congregational Church Danville, CA
 Church of the Foothills UCC Santa Ana, CA

Central Atlantic

Rock Spring Congregational UCC Arlington, VA
 Little River UCC Annandale, VA
 Evangelical Reformed Church Frederick, MD

Central Pacific

First Congregational UCC Eugene, OR
 United Church of Christ Lake Oswego, OR

Florida

Pass-A-Grille Beach Community UCC Saint Pete Beach, FL

Heartland

First Congregational Church UCC of Columbus Columbus, OH
 The First Church in Oberlin UCC Oberlin, OH

Indiana-Kentucky

Saint John's UCC Vincennes, IN

Illinois

First Congregational UCC Crystal Lake, IL

Illinois South

Saint John UCC Mascoutah, IL
 Salem United Church of Christ Alhambra, IL

Iowa

The Congregational Church, United Church of Christ Iowa City, IA
 Plymouth Congregational UCC Des Moines, IA
 United Church of Christ – Congregational Grinnell, IA
 Hope United Church of Christ Hiawatha, IA
 Urbandale UCC Urbandale, IA

Michigan

Plymouth UCC Grand Rapids, Michigan
 United Church of Christ Midland, MI

Minnesota

Macalester Plymouth United Church Saint Paul, MN
 First United Church of Christ Northfield, MN

Top Givers: \$9000-\$20,000

First Church of Christ Congregational Glastonbury CT
 First Congregational UCC Eau Claire, WI
 Rock Spring Congregational UCC Arvada, CO
 First Congregational UCC Crystal Lake, IL
 Eastgate Congregational UCC Bellevue, WA

TOP GIVING CHURCHES

BASED ON 2023 DOLLARS

Missouri Mid-South

Hope United Church of Christ Saint Louis
Peace Christian Church UCC Kansas City, MO

Nebraska

First-Plymouth Congregational UCC Lincoln, NE
First Central Congregational Church UCC Omaha, NE

New York

Mountain Rise United Church of Christ Fairport, NY

New Hampshire

The Church of Christ At Dartmouth UCC Hanover, NH

Pacific Northwest

Eastgate Congregational UCC Bellevue, WA
University Congregational UCC Seattle, WA
United Church in University Place University Place, WA

Penn Central

Trinity UCC East Petersburg, PA
Church of the Apostles UCC Lancaster, PA

Rocky Mountain

First United Church of Arvada UCC Arvada, CO

Southeast

Central Congregational UCC Atlanta, GA

South Dakota

South Park UCC Rapid City, SD

Southern New England

First Church of Christ Congregational, Glastonbury, CT
The First Congregational Church of Guilford, Inc. Guilford, CT
Congregational UCC Topsfield, MA
Kingston Congregational Church UCC Kingston, RI
First Church in Windsor, UCC Windsor, CT

Southwest

The Good Shepherd UCC Sahuarita, AZ

Wisconsin

First Congregational UCC Eau Claire, WI
First Congregational UCC Baraboo, WI
United Church of Christ McFarland, WI
First Congregational UCC Madison, WI
Orchard Ridge UCC Madison, WI

Vermont

The Congregational Church of Middlebury, Middlebury, VA

TOP GIVING CHURCHES

BASED ON 2023 PER CAPITA

California, Nevada Northern

Danville Congregational Church Danville, CA

California, Nevada Southern

Neighborhood Church UCC Palos Verdes Estates, CA

Mission Hills UCC San Diego, CA

Church of the Foothills UCC Santa Ana, CA

Central Atlantic

New Ark Church UCC Newark, DE

Evangelical Reformed Church Frederick, MD

Glen Ridge Congregational UCC Glen Ridge, NJ

Little River UCC Annandale, VA

Rock Spring Congregational UCC Arlington, VA

Central Pacific

First Congregational UCC Eugene, OR

United Church of Christ Lake Oswego, OR

Florida

Pass-A-Grille Beach Community Saint Pete Beach, FL

First Congregational UCC Sarasota, FL

Venice United Church of Christ Venice, FL

Hawaii

Waikeola Congregational Church UCC Honolulu, HI

Illinois

First Congregational UCC Crystal Lake, IL

First Congregational UCC DeKalb De Kalb, IL

Illinois South

Salem United Church of Christ Alhambra, IL

St Paul United Church of Christ Columbia, IL

Saint John UCC Mascoutah, IL

Saint Paul UCC Waterloo, IL

Indiana-Kentucky

First Congregational UCC Indianapolis, IN

Friedens UCC Indianapolis, IN

Saint John's UCC Vincennes, IN

Iowa

Plymouth Congregational UCC Des Moines, IA

Urbandale UCC Urbandale, IA

UCC Congregational Grinnell, IA

Hope United Church of Christ Hiawatha, IA

The Congregational Church, UCC Iowa City, IA

Maine

First Congregational UCC Camden, ME

Top Givers: \$250-\$5,000

Plymouth Congregational UCC Des Moines, IA

First Congregational Church UCC of Columbus, OH

First Church of Christ Congregational Glastonbury, CT

First Congregational UCC Boulder, CO

First Congregational UCC Crystal Lake, IL

TOP GIVING CHURCHES

BASED ON 2023 PER CAPITA

Michigan

Plymouth UCC Grand Rapids, MI
United Church of Christ Midland, MI

Minnesota

First United Church of Christ Northfield, MN
Macalester Plymouth United Church Saint Paul, MN

Missouri Mid-South

Peace Christian Church UCC Kansas City, MO
Saint John UCC Saint Charles, MO
Hope United Church of Christ Saint Louis, MO

Nebraska

First-Plymouth Congregational Lincoln, NE
First Central Congregational Omaha, NE

New Hampshire

Center Harbor Congregational
Center Harbor, NH
First Parish Church, Congregational, UCC Dover, NH
The Church of Christ At Dartmouth UCC Hanover, NH

New York

Mountain Rise United Church of Christ Fairport, NY

Heartland

First Congregational Church UCC of Columbus Columbus, OH
The First Church in Oberlin UCC Oberlin, OH
United Church of Christ (Congregational) Strongsville, OH

Penn Central

Trinity UCC East Petersburg, PA
Church of the Apostles UCC Lancaster, PA
Hamilton Park UCC Lancaster, PA

Rocky Mountain

First United Church of Arvada Arvada, CO
First Congregational UCC Boulder, CO

South Dakota

South Park UCC Rapid City, SD
First Congregational UCC Redfield, SD
United Church of Christ Congregational Yankton, SD

Southeast

Central Congregational UCC Atlanta, GA
Pilgrimage UCC Marietta, GA

TOP GIVING CHURCHES

BASED ON 2023 PER CAPITA

Southern New England

Congregational UCC Topsfield, MA

First Church of Christ Congregational, Glastonbury Glastonbury, CT

The First Congregational Church of Guilford, Inc. Guilford, CT

Kingston Congregational Church Kingston, RI

First Church in Windsor, UCC Windsor, CT

Southwest

The Good Shepherd UCC Sahuarita, AZ

Vermont

The Congregational Church of Middlebury, UCC Middlebury, VT

Congregational Church of South Hero, UCC South Hero, VT

Pacific Northwest

Eastgate Congregational UCC Bellevue, WA

University Congregational UCC Seattle, WA

United Church in University Place University Place, WA

Wisconsin

First Congregational UCC Baraboo, WI

First Congregational UCC Eau Claire, WI

Pilgrim UCC Grafton, WI

First Congregational UCC Madison, WI

Orchard Ridge UCC Madison, WI

United Church of Christ McFarland, WI

St. Stephen's UCC Merrill, WI

Congregational UCC Neenah, WI

Wisconsin

First Congregational UCC Baraboo, WI

First Congregational UCC Eau Claire, WI

Pilgrim UCC Grafton, WI

First Congregational UCC Madison, WI

Orchard Ridge UCC Madison, WI

United Church of Christ McFarland, WI

St. Stephen's UCC Merrill, WI

Congregational UCC Neenah, WI

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Additional print resources can be ordered online - www.uccresources.com

Electronic resources can be found online - www.ucc.org/oghs_resources

[Share the Light Promotional Video](#)

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Please mail your church's gift to your Association or Conference.

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