

Cedar Ridge Annual Plan

August, 2019

Introduction

Jesus came with an enticing invitation into an experience of rich, fulfilling, dynamic life—life to the full (John 10:10). Such life is not just about personal meaning and fulfillment, but is for the healing of humanity as a whole through justice, mercy, and reconciliation. Jesus didn't just teach about this, he lived it, showing us the way and calling us to follow. At the heart of his vision for a new way of living was the essential premise that God is Love and we are one with God. This "divine life" to which Jesus calls us comes from an understanding and experience that the divine realm and the human, the spiritual realm and the material, are not separate, but part of one beautiful reality. Jesus embodied heaven on earth: God with us; divinity and humanity in perfect union.

As followers of Jesus, we dare to dream of heaven on earth in this way. We long for God's presence, we long to feel God's love, we long to see the world in this fuller way, and we long to flow in the current of this divine life. But we also struggle to experience this reality, and our struggle can turn to disappointment and even disillusionment at times.

So this year, as a whole church community, we are going to resolutely commit ourselves to growing in the art of experiencing more of God's love and presence. If we could each enlarge our capacity to experience and share this love (even just a little), imagine the kind of transformation it could bring in our own lives and the world! Together we will help one another grow through all kinds of intentional practices, like silence, solitude, fasting, and mindfulness, as well as gratefulness, celebration, and the joy of friendship. We will also seek to heighten our awareness of God's presence in the flow of our everyday experience as we encounter all the beauty and all the challenges that life brings.

Our approach will be very personal, rather than "one size fits all." We are all unique and respond in different ways, so we'll be open to all kinds of practices, and go with what resonates most for each of us. Our approach will also be communal, with the understanding that some aspects of this divine life are best experienced (perhaps only experienced) together in community. We'll seek to help and support one another, as well as focus on our own journey. Our approach will be sincere but playful, recognizing that we can't control outcomes. We'll treat this as an adventure into unknown mysteries and surprises, rather than a guilt-ridden pilgrimage. This adventure will inevitably require great courage as we step out of our comfort zones, let go of cynicism, and give up worrying about the risk of failure and disappointment. And our approach will be authentic, knowing we are not always going to "feel it." There will be ups and downs, and we will share and celebrate both, encouraging one another, and valuing the faithful journey over the destination.

In the coming year, let's all honestly face the reality of our multifaceted lives: the areas where God seems present, as well as those that seem devoid of God's love. Let's embrace the next 12 months as an adventure—a journey into more of God. Let's commit together to take on and stick with practices that make space for God to become more real to us—practices that may well transcend our normal thoughts

and feelings, but are grounded in our real lives, making us all better people: better friends, better family members, better workers, better neighbors. Let's dare to dream of heaven on earth!

Goal and Objectives

The goal for this coming year is to be a community where everyone is increasingly able to experience God, individually and corporately.

The objectives that contribute to this goal are as follows:

1. To develop a sustained rhythm of spiritual practice that helps us all grow in awareness of and immersion in God's love.
2. To grow in our ability to perceive and share God's love in all the daily experiences of our regular lives.

Timeframe for Spiritual Practices

During the year, we will focus on various types of spiritual practice, grouped under general themes such as mindfulness, scripture, fasting, silence and solitude, and service. We will articulate these practices in accessible ways, avoiding religious terms to the extent possible; and we will present a range of ways to practice, recognizing we are all at different places in our faith journey. We will focus on each set of spiritual practices for an extended period of time to enable us to become accustomed to them, and to find ways of integrating them into our everyday lives.

We will do this together as a community—incorporating the practices in appropriate ways into all ages content, as well as including them in relevant events. This will be a relational process: We will experience God corporately through spiritual practices integrated into Sunday services. We will process our experiences in groups—both our established discipleship groups and short-term groups formed around a specific set of spiritual practices. And we will encourage one another to find someone to share with honestly and openly, for personal encouragement and accountability.

The provisional timeline for the initial themes is as follows:

September

- Theme—Introduction to spiritual practices and an invitation to engage in them
- Events—Ministry Fair, movie night, Burtonsville Day

October-November

- Theme—Mindfulness and gratitude
- Events—Harvest Festival, Harvest Service, Community Sunday, Annual Meeting, Thanksgiving Service, Interfaith Thanksgiving Service

Advent

- Theme—Scripture (*Lectio Divina*, Ignatian reading, etc.)
- Events—Advent in the Barn, Quiet Day

January-February

- Theme—Fasting and simplicity
- Events—Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Creative Cup Coffeehouse

Lent

- Theme—Silence and solitude
- Events—Quiet Day

April

- Theme—Service
- Events—Service Day and Earth Day Celebration

Activities

To achieve the objectives listed above, the following set of activities is proposed. Although broken out by objective, the activities are mutually reinforcing and do not fully correspond to only one objective.

Activities principally contributing to Objective 1:

- Involve people with a range of experiences and temperaments in designing Sunday content for children with a stronger focus on connecting to God.
- Regularly incorporate prayer and singing into children’s gatherings, and teach specific, age-appropriate spiritual practices that can be carried out during the week.
- Increase ownership of Sunday content by youth through working with them to identify helpful, relevant spiritual practices, drawing on traditional, creative, and technology-enabled practices.
- Provide training and support to discipleship group leaders in the various spiritual practices and in the development of a “mini-retreat” for group members.
- Organize short-term groups focused on different spiritual practices.
- Encourage prayer and worship through simple songs, interactive non-musical forms of worship, and prayer practices integrated into Sunday (and other) services.
- Promote the farm as a place to connect with God through “Stories from the Farm” posts, signage, and on-farm resources and activities for all ages.
- Promote an understanding of our oneness with all of humanity in all ages content and discipleship group materials.
- Make experiencing God accessible to newcomers through a continued focus on finding God in our culture (art, music, books, etc.) in all ages content.

Activities principally contributing to Objective 2:

- Ministry areas and children’s leaders meet to plan activities specifically aimed at deepening children’s understanding and engagement with the farm, Guatemala, and service day projects.
- Foster intergenerational relationships through facilitating mentoring of youth by older people, establishing online mechanisms to connect during the week, organizing “hang-out” times for youth and recent graduates, inviting guest speakers into Sunday youth gatherings, having mixed-age challenge groups, and other mechanisms.
- Develop group materials that encourage and support individual engagement with spiritual practices, and group reflection on how these practices are helping members experience God, and how to apply these experiences to practical, everyday situations.
- Share stories on Sundays, in *The Quarterly*, and online about increased awareness of God’s loving presence in people’s regular lives.

- Develop resources to promote worship and prayer practices that can be built into everyday life. (e.g., devotions, guided meditations, web/app resources).
- Explore more formalized partnerships with Manna Food, Greencastle, and others to address food security issues and awareness raising in our area.
- Share more stories about where the farm food goes and the impact it has.
- Promote more understanding of racial and justice issues and ways to address them through events, informational resources, and sharing personal stories.
- Continue to explore ways to best support local MCPS schools through partnerships with other faith communities, businesses, etc.
- Increase education and awareness about the history and larger issues of justice impacting Guatemala, and provide resources on how to engage in these justice issues locally.
- Continue to work with CIDHER on registration as an NGO, strategic planning, and the identification of priority initiatives.
- Invite the local community to Retreat Days, a version of the prayer walk, and other ways to “unplug,” particularly during the election season.
- Communicate our values and identity and promote our events in compelling, engaging and accessible ways.
- Increase youth engagement in Cedar Ridge’s social media presence.
- Promote giving of time and money as acts of worship through all ages content, including through personal stories.

Upcoming Series

The series descriptions below are tentative and will be influenced by a number of factors, including current events, cultural pressures, and community responses to previous series.

Fall series

In this introductory series, we will explore what it means to “experience God.” We will focus on the joy and adventure of interacting with God who is Love, and look at the various ways in which experiencing God can empower us to live life to the full and help others do the same.

Late fall series

We will incorporate practices related to mindfulness and gratitude into this 5-week study of Paul’s letter to the Philippians.

Advent

For the 4 weeks of Advent, we will focus on different types of scripture relating to the birth of Jesus—including prophecy, narrative, and early hymns. We will include practical guidance on how to read scripture, as well as being inspired by what we read, and experiencing God through traditional practices such as *Lectio Divina* and Ignatian (imaginative) reading.

Winter series

The 7 weeks from Epiphany to Lent are likely to be split into two short series. An underlying theme of these series will be the benefits of fasting for a season and simplicity as a lifestyle. Down through the

ages, many people have found joy in letting go of distractions and unhealthy practices, and of living purposefully and creatively with less.

Draft Fall and Winter Calendar 2019-20

Date	Event	Notes
Sun Sep 1	The Meaning of Miracles 6	Labor Day weekend, AAT
Tue Sep 3	Back to school for MCPS, PGCPSS & HCPSS	
Sun Sept 8	Fall series 1	Potluck picnic lunch
Sun Sep 15	Fall series 2	Ministry Fair and ice creams
Fri Sep 20	Movie Night – “Up”	
Sat Sep 21	Burtonsville Day	
Sun Sep 22	Fall series 3	Journey 1
Sun Sep 29	Fall series 4	Journey 2
Sat Oct 5	Harvest Festival	Middle school sleepover
Sun Oct 6	Harvest service	AAT. Journey 3
Sun Oct 13	Late fall series 1	
Sun Oct 20	Late fall series 2	Brian McLaren speaking
Sun Oct 27	Late fall series 3	Community Sunday Annual Meeting and potluck lunch
Sun Nov 3	Interfaith Day of Service	First Sunday
Sun Nov 10	Late fall series 4	
Sun Nov 17	Late fall series 5	
Sun Nov 24	Thanksgiving Service	AAT. Thanksgiving on 11/28. Christmas decorating with lunch
Tue Nov 26	Interfaith Thanksgiving Service	TBC
Sun Dec 1	Advent 1	AAT
Sat Dec 7	Advent in the Barn	Hayrides, mulled wine, outreach-focused afternoon
Sun Dec 8	Advent 2	
Sat Dec 14	Advent Quiet Day (TBC)	
Sun Dec 15	Advent 3	
Sun Dec 22	Advent 4	
Tue Dec 24	Christmas Eve service (5:30PM)	AAT
Sun Dec 29	Christmas/New Year	
Sun Jan 5	Epiphany	First Sunday. Christmas un-decorating
Sat Jan 11	MS Retreat (TBC)	
Sun Jan 12	Winter series 1	
Sun Jan 19	Winter series 2	
Mon Jan 20	Event TBD (possibly indoor service projects)	MLK Day
Sun Jan 26	Winter series 3	
Sat Feb 1	Creative Cup Coffeehouse	Or following weekend (depending on the weather)

Sun Feb 2	Late winter series 1	First Sunday
Sun Feb 9	Late winter series 2	Journey 1
Sun Feb 16	Late winter series 3	Journey 2
Sun Feb 23	Late winter series 4	Journey 3
Wed Feb 26	Ash Wednesday	
Sun Mar 1	Lent Challenge Series 1	First Sunday. Community Sunday
Sun Mar 8	Lent Challenge Series 2	
Sun Mar 15	Lent Challenge Series 3	
Sun Mar 22	Lent Challenge Series 4	
Sat Mar 28	Lenten Quiet Day (TBC)	
Sun Mar 29	Lent Challenge Series 5	
Sun Apr 5	Lent Challenge Series 6	First Sunday. Palm Sunday
Fri Apr 10	Good Friday	
Sun Apr 12	Easter Sunday	AAT
Sun Apr 19	Service Day and Earth Day Celebration	