

Be still [2 Minutes]: As you hear these Centering Words, let us greet each other, greet the Holy Spirit, and begin with 1 minute of silence, breathing in the breath of God and allow the group to open themselves to the Holy Spirit today:

CENTERING WORDS:

Be bold before God, for Christ, the rejected one, has become the cornerstone of our faith. Through the Good Shepherd, you are found, comforted, and loved.

OPENING PRAYER:

Shepherding God, guardian of our souls, you offer us rest in the safety of green pastures. Shower us with your love, and offer us fullness of life in your name. When our spirits are parched, you lead us beside still waters and quench our thirst for righteousness; you restore our souls and heal our battered spirits. Touch our hearts and minds, that your goodness and mercy may follow us every day of our lives. May we abide in your love and grace for all eternity. Amen.

Be the Word: New Testament Scripture Lesson: 1 John 3:16-24

¹⁶This is how we know love: Jesus laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷But if someone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but refuses to help—how can the love of God dwell in a person like that?

¹⁸Little children, let's not love with words or speech but with action and truth. ¹⁹This is how we will know that we belong to the truth and reassure our hearts in God's presence. ²⁰Even if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows all things. ²¹Dear friends, if our hearts don't condemn us, we have confidence in relationship to God. ²²We receive whatever we ask from him because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. ²³This is his commandment, that we

believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love each other as he commanded us. ²⁴ Those who keep his commandments dwell in God and God dwells in them. This is how we know that he dwells in us, because of the Spirit he has given us.

L: The Word of God for all people

P: Thanks be to God

Be present: [Being mindful of others and sharing time]

1. Take a deep breath. How is it with your soul?
2. What do you think are the roles/responsibilities of a Shepherd? Have you ever been on a farm or ranch before? What was that experience like? Have you ever met a real-live Shepherd?
3. Have you ever mentored someone or have been mentored by someone? What is the best/worst memories of being mentored?
4. Are mentors and shepherds the same thing? (Similarities? Differences)

Be rooted: [Bible Study]

1. Read 1 John 3:16-24 again and look at the cartoon-flow chart. Is it helpful? What are your first thoughts about this week's text?

Context for the Book of 1 John (or an EPISTLE, a letter from John)

The slender book of 1 John might seem simplistic on the surface, but its emphases on love, faith, and standing in God's promises of eternal salvation make it one of the more encouraging and helpful books of the New Testament.

While the first epistle of John does not identify an author, most scholars believe it was written by the apostle John, who also wrote the Gospel of John. Not only do its style, vocabulary, and themes strongly mirror the Gospel of John, but we also know 1 John is written by an eyewitness of Christ's ministry (1 John 1:1-3). The apostle John was part of Jesus' inner circle, one of the 12 disciples chosen by the Lord to walk and learn with Him during His time on earth. John, a fisherman, was the son of Zebedee and brother of James, another of the 12 disciples (Matthew 1:21-22).

Scholars think 1 John was written around A.D. 85-95 to believers in what is today Turkey. It is believed he wrote the letter while living in Ephesus. At the time of its writing, many Christians were experiencing a crisis of faith because of persecution and false teaching. Some had returned to Judaism, and others were floundering, confused by messages that Jesus was perhaps not fully human or the actual Son of God. Others wrestled with loving one another. Still, others struggled with cultural pressure to worship the Roman emperor.

"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life," the letter says (1 John 5:13).

Indeed, John writes to remind Christians that Jesus truly is God's Son, those who believe are guaranteed eternal life, and if we believe, we must model His ways. That includes having authentic love for all people, just like Jesus.

From Christianity.com

<https://www.christianity.com/bible/niv/1-john/#:~:text=Context%20and%20Background%20of%201%20John&text=Scholars%20think%201%20John%20was,of%20persecution%20and%20false%20teaching.>

2. 1 John reads more like an encouraging speech or sermon rather than an instructional letter. It is filled with inspiration and reassurance about the core truths of the Gospel, offering simple yet morally critical parallelisms that underscore the message of the cross: love vs. hate, light vs. dark, Christ vs. antichrist, etc.
 - How do you think this text was encouraging for other early Christians?
 - What does this text from 1 John 3 say to you?
 - What is the most helpful to you in your life?

3. What do you think Jesus would think of all of the bureaucracy and politics in the world? How about within the church? (Including both the local church to the UMC General Conference?)
 - How is this showing God’s love for us?
 - Or is this humanity trying to be faithful to Christ’s word through their own interpretation?

Be transformed: [Call to action]

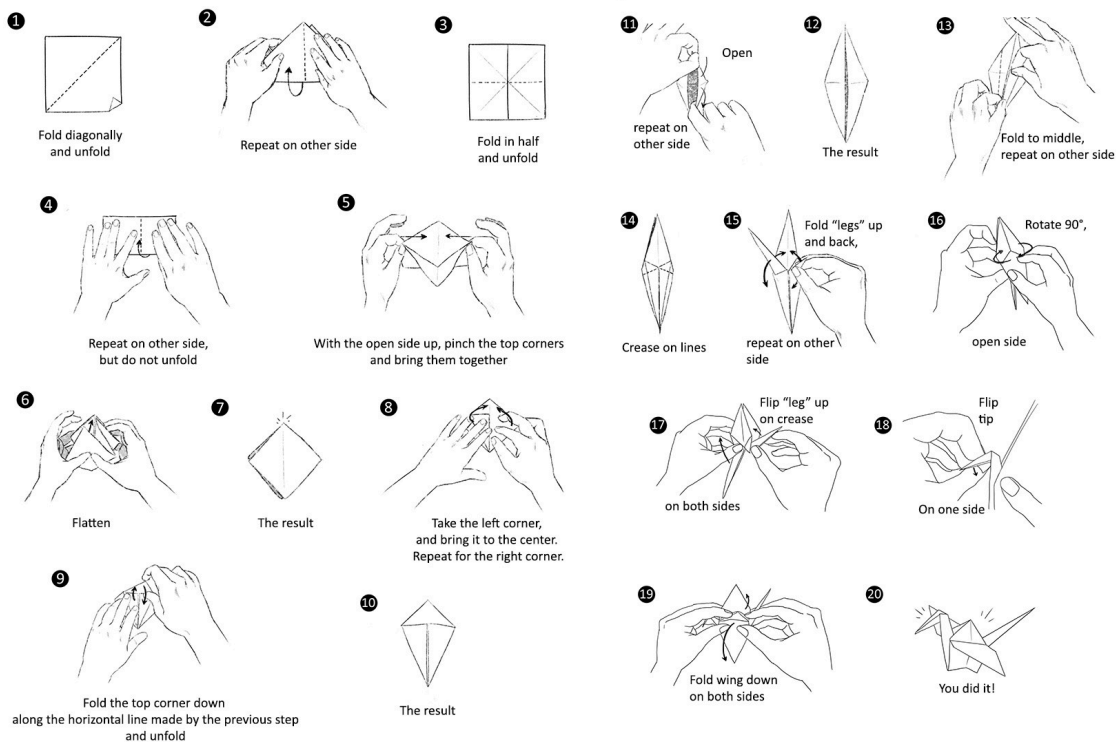
1. What’s happening in the greatest United Methodist Church? Check out the “legislative body” of the UMC at work and live stream parts of the conference. (You can look at the schedule and calendar agenda to see what interests you!--and I will send out updates when the good stuff happens!): <https://www.umc.org/en/who-we-are/structure/general-conference>
2. Pray for the 1000 delegates at GC as we try our best to be the arm of the church that is Truth and Faith in Action, as well as all of the leaders of the UMC who are in attendance! (There are another 1000+ folks here for that too!)



3. Read Rev. Jeremy Smith’s “Crane Church” of “Hacking Christianity” (or attached below). <https://hackingchristianity.net/2024/04/the-crane-church-a-new-hope-for-united-methodism.html>
 - What do you think of a “Crane Church?”

4. Fold a paper crane as a prayer and peace crane to life up both our UMC and our world in your prayers life. OR you can fold paper cranes like Bishop Carlo Rapanut and leave them for other to find and leave your own trail of peace.

How To Fold a Paper Crane



Prayers & Concerns

Celebrations...

Yuki Lucia Matsumoto-Penton (granddaughter of Jane & Terry Matsumoto; parents: Kate & AJ born, 3/5/24)

Daniel Hiro Yuan (grandson of Diane & Brian Fujimori; parents Nicole & David born, 3/24/24)

Rev. Eric Iki, passed his Ordination interviews to be Ordained at AC in June (June 15 @1pm)!

Sally & Ken's 54th Anniversary (1/31/24)

Kainoa Kent Barajas born to Lauren & Carlos (2/4/24) - (Great-grandma is Jane Kiyohara!)

Prayers for healing and wholeness...

*Mutsuko Nishi (Henry's mom)

*Claretta Foster

Jack Hamada

The Sasaki Family; Jordan Sasaki, Sally, Ken, & Jason

Jerry Osaka

*Victoria Dela Torre

*Diane & Destiny Ueda-Banda

Audrey Goto

Tak and Irene Ryono

*Ralph Ichikawa's brother, Jim (Tio)

*Alice Kajiya

*Faye Toma

*Virginia Flood - Stage 4 Cancer

Jason's friend, Kaitlyn Sabedra

Glenn & Millie Shimizu

*Faith Tanaka

*Sam Kobayashi

*Nancy Matsushima

Dan Yamashita

*Sumi Maruya

*Chic Miyake

*Winnie Osaki

*Postal Worker, Dexter

*Alveena Fukuhara

* Harry Lum

* Kyle Ichikawa (Ralph's son)

*Akiyamas

*Maxine Butcher

*Florence Uchida

Deron Tokishi (brother of Sheri Tong)

Fred Endo (father of Sharon Ann Endo)

Ireland Bone (health)

Prayers for Grieving Families...

*Sumi Maruya (passed on 4/17/24)

*Preston Akiyama (husband of Masako, passed on 4/15/24)

*Dr. Ernesto Fontecha, (Gilbert Vinluan's cousin)

*Shizue Nomiya, (Mother of Tash Nomiya, 4/10/24)

*Kyoko Nakahara, (Kelly DeGracia's mom)

*James Kawamoto

*Nelson Mark (husband of Alice, father of Darrell, passed on 3/10/24)

*Frances Yonemori (Florence Uchida's sister, passed on 3/12/24)

*Kurt Kuniyoshi (passed 3/xx/24)

*Bing Duck Pang (father of Stanley, passed

3/11/24)

*Bernice Kashiwai (mother of Kent/Nicole Morita-Kashiwai)

*Lori Takayesu (Georgine Morita sister)

*Pat Hiroshima (Harriet Tateyama's sister-in-law)

*Takako Takao (mother of Jerry, passed 2/22/24)

*Charles Kvitky (husband of Lily; passed week of 2/11/24)

Greg Kubo (passed away on 2/3/24)

Henry Uepi Isama'u (passed on 1/24/24)

* Elaine Suzuki (Ralph's sister)

Gene LeFebvre (Andy's mentor and friend)

Rev. Margaret Finney

For our hurting world...

Japan Earthquake / Volcanic Eruption in Sakurajima (near Kagoshima)

People of the Holy Land

Families rebuilding after natural disasters

Election year

Covid (and for those who are sick, ailing, in need of God's love and healing)

The United Methodist Church (General Conference)

And Know that He is God: Commission & Benediction (based on Psalm 23, John 10, 1 John 3:16-24)

Go now with your trust in the good shepherd,
and let us love, not just in words,
but in truth and action.

Believe in the name of Jesus Christ,
and love one another, just as he has commanded us.

And may God be at your side, even in valleys of death.
May Christ Jesus be the cornerstone of your life.
And may the Holy Spirit abide in you
...and tend you with love and mercy all the days of your life.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
...**In the name of Christ. Amen.**

The Crane Church: A New Hope for United Methodism

A tale from Japanese folklore holds a metaphor for the UMC of today and tomorrow.



The Crane Wife

One of the stories from Japanese folklore is *Tsuru Nyōbō* (鶴女房) translated as "The Crane Wife." As with any folklore, there are many variants and versions—now there are anime versions and a popular band the Decemberists' version of this folktale. But here is a retelling of the first version that I saw that had little details that I think were the Holy Spirit's way of capturing my imagination, and I hope yours too.

The story goes that one winter, a man was heading toward the local village when he came across a crane that had been caught in a trap. He set the crane free and the crane flew away. *In Japanese culture, a crane is a symbol of good fortune, so that was a good act of kindness.* The next evening, a beautiful woman came to the man's doorstep, and asked to stay the night. The man was very poor but offered her his home, and eventually his heart, and they were married that same week. His new wife said she would be able to provide beautiful silks and textiles, but only if he promised that every seven days, he would leave her completely alone for a whole day to get the fabric prepared. He did this and upon his return, he saw his wife very tired but holding a beautifully woven cloth of fabric and feathers.

This went on for many months. He would go away for one day every seven days, return for a new woven cloth that he would sell at the village market and lift them out of poverty. Things were going very well, but he began to notice his wife was looking more and more tired each time he would return from the day away. So finally one day he broke his promise and doubled back and crept up to the window to look inside. There, in their house, was a crane that was plucking out all of its feathers and was weaving the feathers into the fabric. And as he watched, after all the feathers had been plucked out, the crane turned into the woman, bloody and bruised.

The crane saw him and said "Yes, I am the crane you helped those months ago. I have returned the favor, but since you have seen who I really am, I know you can no longer

love me. I must return home. Take this cloth and be happy.” She turned back into the crane and flew away in the night.

The Crane Church

The Crane Wife story makes me wonder if the United Methodist Church is a Crane Church in a dark echo of that story.

For too long LGBTQ+ United Methodists have plucked themselves out, offering their gifts without acknowledgement or acceptance of their true beautiful forms. My friend, the Rev. Sean Delmore, a trans pastor in New England, once said that queer community in the church is wrung out like lemons to make lemonade, and even then, the church cannot accept the community as they are; the church has to add sugar and dilute the community to accept them.

For too long, the church itself has contorted its natural form into something pleasing to a *particular* demographic and allowed that demographic to [erase 25% of the church](#) in the disaffiliations of 2022 and 2023.

For too long, women especially have given themselves in secret, the invisible work that women often do in households is no different in the church. Women take pieces of their selves and weave them into the very fabric of the Church’s existence, and we don’t dare look too closely at the blood, sweat, and tears mixed in with the fabric of our community.

For too long, we have forgotten who we are.

A Crane without the Magic

In some versions of the story, the woman loses her magical abilities when she plucks out her feathers; in the same way, the UMC has lost its magic from its origin story. There was a time when we poured ourselves out to expand the church to more and more people rather than forcing people to pluck themselves for our benefit.

- The ordination of women happened in 1956, over 30 years after women’s suffrage in America. A shameful wait but one earlier than many other denominations.
- The inclusion of African Americans away from separate but equal jurisdictions came in 1968, 14 years after Brown versus Board of Education. We got a little better.
- These were *amazing* acts of inclusion. But since then, for 52 years, we’ve been fighting to expand the circle to gays and lesbians and now the entire queer community. We forgot how to be an inclusive church...or this is what blowback looks to those twin acts of inclusion. This June is the 9-year anniversary of same-gender marriage becoming the law of the land, and I hope we keep narrowing the gap between societal and church affirmation.

For too long, we have been a Crane Church, and have forgotten who were meant to be, and we keep on forcing minority segments of our church to pluck out their feathers, to

give their gifts without regard for what they cost so that the Church to give grace and welcome to someone else, even as it hasn't given the same grace to its own members. (You can learn more about how we got here in our 2024 updates part [1](#), [2](#), and [3](#))

A New Hope

The 2024 General Conference has a chance to invite our Crane Church to be its authentic self, and no longer be twisted into a form that does harm to itself and to others.

- We can choose to support better polity that opens up the church to the full inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons—and add “gender” to our list of inclusive statements, which *bafflingly* is missing.
- We can choose better practices like divestment from fossil fuels and a more equitable church structure that gives the mission fields priority.
- We can choose to speak more clearly in our Social Principles in a world that would rather we keep silent.
- There's a whole list of things that we as a church could do better—and also vote for our values to hold the line against those who would turn the UMC into a lesser version of itself.
- [You can view many of these hopes here.](#)

My hope is that we realize we are a Crane, and we have been generous, plucking ourselves over for decades to satisfy someone else. But we are born to soar and to transform *not* ourselves to satisfy the world, but to be our best selves so that we *can* transform the world through disciples of Jesus Christ.

I pray you join me in that hope.