

In 2018, Celebrate the Gifts of Women Sunday focuses on women who have modeled for us what it means to “lead with love.” This resource may be used on Celebrate the Gifts of Women Sunday on March 4, 2018, or on any date that you choose to celebrate women whom God has called to lead with love.

When I think of women who lead with love, there are two particular characteristics they have—1) the gift of hospitality and 2) the gift of building consensus. These women serve as role models for the rest of us.



Sisterhood, Catie Atinson

Silas to stay in her home (16:13–15), where she extends to them warm hospitality. She offers this kindness more than once (16:40). When our mothers taught us, “It doesn’t cost anything to be nice,” I think this was partly meant to include showing hospitality. Through the ages, women have shown they know the effect and the importance of extending hospitality. Today, women continue to open their hearts and their homes and warmly welcome others to

enjoy food and fellowship together.

Have you ever thought about the fact that we do not like to break bread with people whom we dislike or with whom we disagree? It is difficult and awkward. How might the world be different if we tried to engage more with those with whom we have serious differences? This does not mean having a meeting where we try to iron out our differences. It means simply having fellowship with no other agenda.

As women who continue to demonstrate hospitality in our churches and in our homes, we need to remember Leviticus 19:34: “The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself . . .” We need to practice radical

The Gift of Hospitality

After Pentecost, breaking bread in homes together was among the central practices for believers in the early church. Acts 2:42–47 reveals that the most important of these practices included:

- worship in the temple and praying together—**worship**,
- recalling teachings of the apostles—**education or kerygma**,
- sharing as any had need—**service or diaconia**, and
- meals and fellowship in homes—**koinonia**.

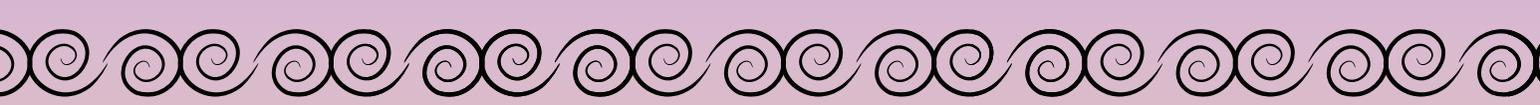
Women certainly were a part of these practices as the early church took shape.

The first thing Lydia does following her baptism is to invite Paul and

Women Called To Lead with Love

BY JUDY RECORD FLETCHER

**Celebrate the Gifts of Women Sunday
March 4, 2018**



hospitality, welcoming the most alienated in our communities. The strangers among us have names and stories and value. Welcoming them not just in our churches but in our lives can become a source of growth for us as individuals on our own journey of faith.

The Gift of Building Consensus

A second gift, like the gift of hospitality, is building consensus. This is a gift that Presbyterian Women demonstrate when they meet in small groups or “circles.” A dominant form of decision making today comes from the practices of white, European males. Think of a board room where men, and now some women, meet at long tables with sharp corners. The group deliberates on matters at hand and then votes up or down on actions pertaining to the situation. In this decision-making model, there are winners and losers. Unfortunately, this model is often practiced in our congregations today.

In contrast, some groups—like the Inuits in Alaska and other Native Americans—sit in circles to deliberate and make decisions, not by voting but by building consensus. This model has long been used by Presbyterian Women, sitting in a circle, sharing, learning and coming to decisions by building consensus.

Note that sitting in circles eliminates the practice of a person of authority sitting at the head of the table. There is a sense of equality and inclusion when we sit in circles. And, when we make decisions by consensus, we also avoid winners and losers. Building consensus calls for careful and sensitive listening, clarifying, encouraging, suggesting and being attentive to all the voices in the room. It avoids hasty decision making by voting and moving on. It is a helpful and grace-filled way to deliberate and come to decisions. Families can make decisions by consensus while sitting around the kitchen table. Consider implementing it whenever possible in your own lives.¹

These two traits—the gift of hospitality and the gift of building consensus—are gifts exhibited by women who are called to lead with love. What would our church and world look like if women committed themselves to increasing their practices of hospitality and building consensus and became role models for others, men and women alike?

For Group Discussion

Invite each person in the group to think of at least one person who they think leads with love. Discuss the characteristics this person demonstrates. How many of the leaders extend hospitality? How many are gracious and inclusive and take others’ opinions seriously? Consider ending the discussion with prayers of thanksgiving for the leaders who are remembered.

A Service of Worship to God

Call to Worship

Leader: We gather to worship God, for God is good.

All: God’s steadfast love endures forever.

Leader: We gather to worship God, for God has called us, God’s own people, and has given us gifts to be a faithful people.

All: We remember that God’s steadfast love endures forever.

Leader: Let us now offer worthy worship to God,

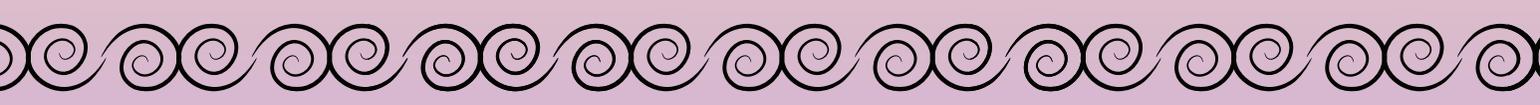
All: whose steadfast love endures forever.

Suggested Hymns²

“For All the Faithful Women” (GtG 324)

“Here in This Place” (GtG 401)

“Will You Let Me Be Your Servant” (GtG 727)



“I Sing a Song of the Saints of God” (GtG 730)

“Give Thanks for Those Whose Faith Is Firm”
(GtG 731)

Call to Confession

God has given us the ability to lead with love. God has promised to forgive us when we fail to do this. God extends loving and healing mercy to us always, even before we ask for it. Knowing and trusting this steadfast love that is ours in Jesus Christ, let us now confess our sins and offenses before God and each other.

Prayer of Confession

Loving and merciful God, you have searched us and known us and still you love us. We confess that we take this love and mercy for granted; we are careless with our gifts and resources, and we refuse to focus on you and your will for all creation. You call us to lead with love but we are reluctant leaders or we lead with only rules and efficiency in mind. Grant us, O God, caring hearts, attentive minds and renewed commitment to follow you and to help lead others to you. In the saving grace of Christ Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Leader: The psalmist reminds us that God wants to gather us in like a mother hen gathers her brood under her wings. Under the wings of God’s love, we can let go of sin and guilt. We can abide in the love and mercy of Jesus Christ. Friends, in Christ we are forgiven and loved.

All: Thanks be to God.

Responding to God’s Grace

“Surely, It Is God Who Saves Me” (GtG 71)—
sing refrain twice

“Glory to God, Whose Goodness Shines on Me”
(GtG 582)

Passing of the Peace

Leader: The peace of Christ be with you!

All: And also with you.

Prayer for Illumination

Leader: Gracious God, as we prepare to hear your word to us, quiet other voices that would draw us away from attentive listening and faithful responding. Grant us new understanding and insights to help us follow you more faithfully. We pray in Jesus’ name.

All: Amen.

Scripture Reading(s)

The following passages give instructions for leadership to those who follow God, leading with love:

- Psalm 32:8–11
- 1 Kings 2:1–3
- Romans 12:10
- Ephesians 4:1–6

Sermon Starter

Using any combination of the scriptures above, reflect on what it means to lead with love. What does this look like? Give examples of people and their stories about leading with love. It also may be helpful to explore times when leaders were not loving or compassionate and what the results were.

Develop further your thoughts on the important leader traits of practicing hospitality and building consensus in decision making. Add additional traits of those who lead with love, like active listening. Whenever possible, give specific examples and tell stories to illuminate the points.

Affirmation of Faith

**In a broken and fearful world
the spirit gives us courage
to pray without ceasing,
to witness among all peoples to Christ as
Lord and Savior,
to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,
to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,
And to work with others for justice,
freedom, and peace.³**

Litany of Thanksgiving for Loving Leaders

(Note: Litany could be read by several different individuals or read responsively as written)

Leader: Loving God, we thank you for mothers and fathers who lovingly raised and are raising their children and teaching them to be kind and thoughtful people. We thank you for the times they teach children how to work through difficult times, remembering they are always loved.

All: We thank you for teachers and pastors who challenged us to explore meaningful ways to be servant leaders serving with compassion and a sense of justice, with openness to all your people.

Leader: We thank you for strangers who do not look like us or sound like us, but serve as examples and role models as they lead and interact with others in tender, loving and caring ways.

All: We thank you for children and youth who are curious and searching and invite us to join them on their journeys. We are grateful that they remind us of the importance of play and not taking ourselves too seriously.

Leader: God, we also pray this day for those who do not lead with love. We pray for those who lead with a hardness of heart that shows disregard and disrespect for the human family and their welfare.

People: Give all leaders hearts of love and the desire to do better and be better. Grant them forgiveness and a commitment to be among those who lead with love, purpose and compassion. Be with all your people, loving God, this day and in the days to come. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Charge

As you go from this place, "lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."⁴

Benediction

Leader: And as you go, remember that it is in the goodness of God that we are born. It is in the providence of God that we are kept and cared for all the day long. And, it is in the love of God, fully revealed in Jesus Christ, that we are loved and redeemed. In the name of the Creator God, the Savior God, and the Spirit God.

All: Amen.

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Notes

1. See *Calling the Circle, The First and Future Culture* by Christina Baldwin (New York: Bantam, 1998).
2. GtG indicates *Glory to God! The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2013).
3. "A Brief Statement of Faith—Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)," *Book of Confessions: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part 1* (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, 2016), 312.
4. Ephesians 4:1–3