

What Are You Looking For?

A White Gift Service

Call to Worship

Leader: A lamb, a coin, a lost boy.

People: God will find it.

Leader: In the crowded paths, in the lonely desert, in the midst of demanding life,

People: God finds us.

All: God floods the world with light and hope, bringing the lost home and keeping us company on the Way. Let us seek God in worship.

Gathering Prayer

(unison)

The time is now for us to gather as your beloved community of faith. We may not be sure what has brought us here today--but here we are: open, waiting, expectant, and almost ready. Create in us hearts of courage and faith, to continue to stumble and dance our way to Bethlehem. Find us and guide us, Holy One. Amen.

Theme Time with Children

"Nothing Is Found That Is Not Looked For," a story from Cheryl Perry's *Youth Spirit: Program Ideas for Church Groups* (Kelowna, BC: Wood Lake Books). An older class can lead in telling, reading, or acting out with characters or with puppets.

Prayer of Confession

(antiphonally by a Sunday school class or by two or three students, or responsively with the congregation)

Loving and patient God, **teach us to wait**. For all the moments we have rushed and panicked and missed, **forgive us**. Loving and patient God, **teach us to trust**. For all the times we have doubted, done it ourselves, and disappointed others, **forgive us**. Loving and patient God, **teach us to search**. For all the times we have given up, decided it's not worth it, and left too soon, **forgive us**. Loving and patient God, **teach us to say "Yes."**For opportunities rejected, for all the regret and fear, **forgive us**. Loving and patient God, **teach us to heal**. For the wounds, and words of hurt, and memories that ache, **forgive us**. Hold us as we let go!

Words of Forgiveness and Freedom

In God's love, there is enough! Enough grace, enough mercy, enough compassion, and enough time to forgive our sin and restore our relationships. Dare to begin again, loved and free. Thanks be to God!

Prayer of Illumination

Exquisite and tender God, foster in each of us an openness to hear your Word, to live your Way, and to celebrate the wonder that is you. May we discover a truth that frees us to be who you would have us be. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

White Gift Drama: "What Are You Looking For?"

(It's a few days before Christmas. Two "adults" are trying to find the gifts they bought last year in the Boxing Day sales. If actors do not have time to memorize the script, this scene could be performed by four people--two readers and two people to mime the actions.)

Voice 1: *(looking for gifts and carrying a large laundry hamper with wrapping stuff)* I distinctly remember putting all the gifts from that "100 percent off" sale at Smartmart in this back room closet, but I can't find them. Did you move them?

Voice 2: I did take a few bags out to the garage and hid them under the workbench, but then we used some of those gifts for the birthdays in the summer. Remember how much Tommy really loved that plastic flying saucer in the middle of August?

Voice 1: Oh that's right, but I'm sure I bought more than what's here. I will have to check my other hiding spots. We have got to get this wrapping done today!

Voice 2: Did you check in the basement? There are those shelves over by the washing machine.

Voice 1: You're right. I'll go do that. You look under the beds!

Voice 2: *(thinking aloud, to no one in particular)* It's not right that we have presents hidden all over our home. We have so much, we've lost track of it, can't remember who we bought it for, where we put it, or why it was necessary in the first place...and I have to wrap the darn stuff. *(finding bags of merchandise)* That's all this is...stuff!

Voice 1: *(bringing bags and a laundry basket full of gifts)* I've got it, well most of it I think. I know there is more in the back of the linen closet. I will find the little stuff, and you get busy wrapping.

Voice 2: *(again thinking aloud)* But we don't even know who it's going to, or why they need it, let alone whether they want it. As a small token of our affection in the Spirit of giving and love that Christmas brings? This is nuts!

Voice 1: *(coming in with more bags)* Hey, what's up? Let's put the Spice Girls' Christmas CD on and really get into the spirit of things!

Voice 2: You know, I think we're off track. This does not feel like the Christmases I remember. I miss thinking about the person I love and wanting to find the one perfect gift for them. I miss taking the time to remember my favourite gift from when I was a kid. I miss being out in the

stores and streets, listening and watching people. I miss Christmas being wonderful and fun. This is a chore and it's too much.

Voice 1: *(a little frustrated)* I was trying really hard to be organized this year, to save money, and to not get trapped into all the buying and commercialism. That's what I tried to do. I can't win.

Voice 2: Thank you for trying. How about this...let's gather it all up and call some friends over tonight. We can have an impromptu party, put on the Spice Girls, wrap everything in white, and give these gifts at our White Gift service at church.

Voice 1: I'll get on the phone.

Gospel Reading

Luke 15:8-10 (One person may read the text, or several may act it out.)

Offering Invitation

We can't give what we don't have. We must find it first. Locate our joy, our abundance, and offer it to God.

(The offering may be gathered in two stages. The money gifts may be received in the usual manner. The second offering, the White Gift offering, may include toys for children in need, toiletries for families in shelters, food for a food bank, or perhaps a special offering for the Mission and Service Fund. The recipient(s) of the White Gifts will have been chosen weeks before by the outreach committee, by the Sunday school, or by a similar group.)

Hopefully, the young people leading the White Gift service will have been offered a voice in the decision, based on information presented to them about various options. Perhaps they might have participated in an educational field trip to several agencies being considered as recipients of the White Gifts. Intentional advance promotion to help people prepare their gifts might include:

- posters by the Sunday school children
- e-mail letters
- flyers sent home with everyone who attends church and/or Sunday school
- newsletter articles, bulletin announcements, and Web site promotions
- verbal announcements before worship for several weeks prior to the White Gift Sunday
- radio public service announcements
- community news press releases

Several churches have reported fun ways to collect the White Gifts, e.g., children wheel their wagons up and down the aisles to pick up the gifts, which have been passed to the end of each row and stacked in the aisle beside each pew or row of chairs. The wagons can be parked or

the gifts can be unloaded and piled around the communion table or manger for the following prayer.

Offertory Prayer

This discovery of your blessings in our lives is cause for celebration. We give thanks, O God, for the gift of your presence and the gift of our faith. Accept the offerings we give in love. Amen.

Prayers of Our Heart

God, whose nature is hidden and yet revealed, we walk with amazement along this journey toward Bethlehem. Guide us in right action and right thinking, so that all we attempt to do may be infused with courage and faithfulness to you.

Provide us eyes to see the ministry near us, the work we are called to in your name. Open our hearts to love in brand new ways that shatter our fears and reluctance.

Offer us opportunities to explore our giftedness, celebrate our abundance, and give generously in the hope that you have given to each of us.

We lift up our prayers for the world....

For others....

Humbly, we lift up our prayers for ourselves....

God of all things, bring us to that fullness of time, when all will be found. Amen.

Blessing

Throughout our lives, God finds us.

Again and again and again.

Go in Peace!

Hymn Suggestions

- "A Woman and a Coin" (*Voices United* 360)
- "Small Things Count" (VU 361)
- "Prepare the Way of the Lord" (VU 10)
- "O Ancient Love" (VU 17)

Worship Leaders, Please Note... We ask that you include this statement when using the above material from "Gathering":

Written by Deborah Walker. *Gathering, Advent Christmas Epiphany 2003-2004*, pages 66-68.

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