

RESOURCE FOR VETERANS DAY AND BEYOND

RETHINKCHURCH®



WELCOME HOME

A Veterans Day Worship Packet

Ideas to Enhance Your Worship Experience



Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors.
The people of The United Methodist Church™

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INTRODUCTION

As the body of Christ, caring for others is our responsibility. The military and their families are often overlooked in a time when so many of them are in transition.

While many of us at home may not understand the traumas of war, we can still show support to their families while they are away. We understand the need to demonstrate hospitality when they return. Whether they served in wars past and live on with those memories, or whether the mental, physical or spiritual wounds are still fresh, the church has the opportunity to help them heal.

We can welcome them home. We can say, “You have a family.”

This packet contains communications resources for planning Veterans Day and other military ministries. Included in the packet is a postcard to invite the community, a worship service to build upon, ideas to enhance a worship experience, questions for small group discussions and tips for local church participation. These items are customizable, and you can adapt each to fit the needs in your community for military ministries all year long.

ORDER OF WORSHIP

You Have A Family

(insert date here)

*The people stand as able

CALL TO WORSHIP

- ★ **Opening Hymn** **No. 4285** *For the Healing of the Nations*
- ★ **Affirmation of Faith**
- ★ **Prayers of the People**
 - Passing the Peace**
 - Special Recognition**
- ★ **Responsive Reading**

Leader: For all who have served in the armed forces to ensure our freedom,

People: We honor you.

Leader: For the families who kept the home fires burning and provided continuous support for their soldier(s),

People: We thank you.

Leader: For the wounds you have suffered at the hands of war

People: For the times of loneliness you have felt on the battlefields of life

Leader: For the sacrifices you have made

People: For the times you were not thanked

Leader: For the times you chose courage in the face of fear

People: For the times you were not shown compassion

Leader: For the difficult decisions you had to make

People: For the losses you have suffered

Leader: We thank you now

People: We honor you now

ALL: YOUR SACRIFICE WILL NOT BE FORGOTTEN!

IDEAS FOR WORSHIP

IDEAS TO GET STARTED:

- Videotape veterans and soldiers saying their name, branch of military, length of service and where they have served. Intersperse with photos of fallen soldiers and their service information.
- Introduce the new outreach ministry for military personnel.
- Set up a prayer station for the military and the congregation before the service, i.e. prayer for healing, prayer for forgiveness, prayer for reconciliation, prayer for peace.
- Hang red, white and blue swags on the first 5–6 pews for military to sit to be recognized. Ask them to wear their uniform, if possible. Hang red, white and blue wreaths or yellow ribbons with a soldier's name lining the sidewalk or attached on the walls of the church honoring all members who have served.
- Host a special food or clothing drive to benefit veterans, military and families on the day of worship.
- Consider using posts for Veterans Day on social media (see below for examples).

SOCIAL MEDIA POST EXAMPLES:

Facebook

- Veterans Day. A day of honor, respect, support and service for those who have served our country through the armed forces and their families. What should service look like? Join us for [insert event details] on [insert event date] to honor those who served.
- Veterans day is just around the corner! Come to [insert event location] on [insert event date] to help us serve those who have served us.
- Wondering what you can do to help honor local veterans this year? Come out to [insert location] on [insert event date] to [insert event details] in honor of our nation's heroes. We will see you there!

Twitter

- Tweet: In 140 characters, what is your prayer for veterans?
Retweet the responses or use the answers to scroll through during worship or in the narthex of your church.
- Tweet quotations from veterans in your congregation.
- As with the Facebook posts above, use Twitter to invite your community of online followers to any special services planned.

AN IDEA FOR PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:

*Heavenly Father,
Who promised to never leave your children's side,
we give thanks to You for the soldiers who
have made it home safely and we are grateful for those
You have ushered into Heaven straight from the battlefields.*

*Bless our soldiers, and hold them safely in the palm of Your hand.
Bless our soldiers' families and friends;
help them to always be a source of joy and strength for our military.
We ask for healing, Lord. Of wounds we can and cannot see,
Of memories that may never be resolved.
And of the spiritual relationship with You that sometimes feels so broken.*

*Let Your grace pour down upon those who have served in the battlefield,
who often return to a continuous battle of transition to civilian life.
Lift up those who are feeling lost, those who are feeling unappreciated,
And those who cannot accept the magnitude of their sacrifice.*

*Guide us, as Your Church, to minister to the sons and daughters of war,
not just on special occasions, but every day, seeking new ways to
support them in gratitude for their ultimate sacrifice.
May we become soldiers of relief for them, responding with patience and
understanding, and providing assistance where it is needed.*

*Help us to become good listeners, a safe haven for our soldiers to speak of their experiences,
regardless of the horror they may have seen. For in speaking, begins healing.
Refresh us, Lord. Fill us with Your Holy Spirit so that Your love
may overflow in all of us, bringing peace and joy and wholeness to us and to those
who have served and to those who continue to serve our blessed nation.*

*We thank them for their sacrifice. And we thank You for the ultimate sacrifice in Your Son, Our
Lord Jesus Christ, Who taught us to pray, [The Lord's Prayer]*

IDEAS FOR SPECIAL RECOGNITION:

- Recognize retired and active military.
- Skype with a soldier on duty and have prayer with them.
- Play video *Ways Churches Can Support Military and Veterans*:

<https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/ways-churches-can-support-military-and-veterans>

or *Wounded Warrior*:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=off1qhsGuyk

- Play prepared video of active and retired military. Do not forget to include visiting military.

IDEAS FOR THE CHILDREN'S SERMON:

- If possible, have a soldier in uniform give the children's sermon. Have them ask if any of the children know a soldier and explain to them how important their prayers and cards are to the soldiers.
- Read poems written by children.

IDEAS FOR THE OFFERING OF OUR GIFTS AND TITHES:

- Have commitment cards for congregation listing ways individuals can serve veterans.

Examples:

- workday at a veterans home
- transitional assistance
- donating food to a local pantry
- financial counseling
- donating clothes to the DAV
- sending cards and letters to military
- For a special offering, have a soldier's helmet on the altar turned up so that donations can be placed inside the helmet.
- All donations given at the altar time of prayer would go to veterans or veteran services.

IDEAS FOR AFTER THE SERVICE:

- Form a receiving line of our military as people are leaving the service.
- Serve a Veterans Day lunch after church honoring the military and their families.
- Update Facebook and Twitter with thank yous, service details and pictures.

SERMON STARTER

authored by

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MISSION: In worship during Veterans Day Weekend, seek healing and reconciliation for the veterans and their families in your congregation and community.

Primary text: Judges 11

Jephthah is the bastard son of Gilead. His dad was a respected leader, victorious in battle, who saved the people from the enemy. While his dad was famous, his mom was a prostitute. Jephthah's half brothers did not want to share any attention or inheritance, and they drove him out of the house. Jephthah was an outcast from the start, having to fend for himself. Until one day, a rival tribe was once again threatening the peace of the Hebrews. The elders, presumably his brothers, sent for Jephthah to lead them against their enemy. Jephthah grew up as a fighter. Always being picked on because of his illegitimacy, he developed into a fierce opponent. No doubt they wanted Jephthah to channel his anger at their enemy. A bit reluctant at first and understandably so, Jephthah agrees to return to lead the army in battle. Like his father, Jephthah defeats the enemy. The end.

I love happy endings. Unfortunately, like many veterans stories, it's not so neat. Before he goes into battle, Jephthah makes a vow to God that if God would deliver him, he would sacrifice whoever was the first to greet him at home. His only child was the one who ran out to greet him, banging a tambourine and dancing. His daughter's happiness is only equaled by his grief.

An excruciating story that often befuddles preachers may resonate with our veterans. Coming home is complicated with a host of emotions. People change over time. How much more so with combat as the change agent? Don't let those YouTube reunions fool you. While there is intense joy and relief when a service member is reunited with loved ones, there is also anxiety over the arduous task of fitting back into the family and daily routine.

When Jephthah's daughter learns of her father's disappointment, she does not spend her last days with her dad. Rather, she goes off with her girlfriends. There are split loyalties between service members and their loved ones which creates estrangement.

Recall Uriah, who in Second Samuel chapter 11, King David ordered back from the battle to the city of Jerusalem. David wanted Uriah to cover up his adulterous affair. Uriah, however, does not go home to his wife. He stays in the city gate out of loyalty to his soldiers still in the field. He will not allow himself the comfort of his wife while his troops are still fighting. I wonder how that made her feel? Uriah chose his soldiers over her. Spouses and children make sacrifices themselves for the cause of freedom. Loyalty to the mission runs deep for service members, which competes with their loyalty and responsibility to their families, causing hurt feelings.

So the stories of Jephthah and Uriah unravel in the lives of our veterans. What is the message for them and for the church?

Whenever Jesus interacts with a soldier, He does not condemn. He applauds the faith of the Centurion and He forgives the troops who nail Him to the cross.

Jesus says, "Blessed are the Peacemakers for they shall be called children of God." Mt 5.9

Jesus speaks a word of acceptance to those who sacrifice their lives and their families for the cause of peace. Jesus recognizes that the service member follows orders so that there will be order. In following orders, the soldier is estranged from his or her family. Jesus says to the veteran, you are a child of the Father. You have a family, and that family is God's family.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Use the questions below to begin conversations that could lead to a military ministry in your church.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Use these questions in adult Sunday School classes or small groups in the weeks leading up to Veterans Day.

1. The Apostle Paul uses the soldier as an example of self-discipline. Is there a veteran in your congregation that can give some insight into the life of a soldier, sailor, airman or marine?

Beginning here should give insight as to what ministries would be supportive.

2. Discuss how to balance loyalty to God, family, and country. How can the church help?

Consider the Cokesbury resource titled, *Coming Home*.

<https://www.cokesbury.com/9780827205383-Coming-Home>

3. Physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual wounds have immediate and lasting financial, medical, personal and professional impact on veterans and their families. Some of the spiritual symptoms of combat trauma may include:

- Feeling abandoned by God
- Finding it hard to pray
- Doubts about core beliefs
- No yearning for righteousness
- Anger towards God
- No spirit of thankfulness
- Feelings of alienation from the church, Christian friends
- Loss of Faith and Hope

Where can the church provide support?

Familiarize yourself with the reasons military personnel may have disconnected from the church.

4. Can you introduce a young veteran that you know in your community to an older veteran in your congregation? Veterans of various foreign wars may share a bond, a commonality that spans generations. Sharing their stories with a fellow veteran can be greatly cathartic.

Use UMTV *Ways to Support Military and Veterans* video for illustration. Find the video at the link below.

<https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/ways-churches-can-support-military-and-veterans>

5. Just as we depend on the fellowship of our congregation, a deployed soldier needs the same support. How can you support a soldier while he or she is deployed? How can you support local military families while their loved ones are away?

After reading the discussion questions, list other areas where your church can provide support:

- Financial counseling
- Job placement
- Finding a home
- Providing temporary shelter, food and clothing
- Providing health services
- Other
