

SPECIAL  
SUNDAY

HUMAN RELATIONS DAY

# SERMON STARTER



Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.

The people of The United Methodist Church®



# HUMAN RELATIONS DAY SERMON STARTER

This sermon starter is part of the Human Relations Day pastor and leader kit and connects with the theme “Restoring Community.” It can be adapted for your context and integrated into your worship service with the other materials in the kit.

**F**rom their arrival around 1619, African people had illegally resisted legal slavery. They had thus been stamped from the beginning as criminals, Ibram X Kendi writes in *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*.

On Martin Luther King Day weekend, we remember that oppression and inequality have been legally stamped by humans from the beginning not only in the US but through the biblical texts like Exodus, and today in Isaiah, as the prophet proclaims the Word of the Lord to the Israelites in exile.

The prophet invites us to liberation by remembering God’s imprint on our own beloved souls and through recognizing the image of God that is stamped on every person we meet. “The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother’s womb he named me.” (49:1)

God shows up in Jesus, imprinted with Divine Love. Jesus frees us from the shackles that keep us from being fully relational with God and with one another.

God shows up again and again, reminding us of the love instilled in us that can be shared with others. We do not need to live by human labels that separate us and instill fear.

God shows us the way to navigate unjust systems by gathering us in community. When community relationships have been disrupted, the Spirit moves us to restoration. This restoration of community is not “going back to the way things were” but is about restoring relationships so they reflect God’s perfect love for us. That original divine imprint gets more distinct as we begin to move beyond our own desires and isolation and into a model of cooperative community.



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The prophet Isaiah stresses that it is in the restored community that we find salvation. We are redeemed from the worst parts of ourselves because we see the humanity in our neighbors.

Our offerings restore communities with grants that respond to non-violent youth offenders through education, advocacy, or leadership training and development.

That is part of what United Methodist Human Relations Day is about. Restoring a sense of community with one another so that God shines through each one of us.

*(Preacher can share a story of a local community service ministry here)*

The United Methodist Church is going through a challenging time. Many are feeling that they are in exile. But on days like today, we participate in God's promises. As a denomination, we are gathering from far and near as "a light to the nations." Our offerings become more than the sum of their parts when they join with the offerings of other churches as they transform and restore communities.

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Our offerings restore communities by supporting organizations and congregations that fight economic, racial and social injustices.

Our offerings restore communities with grants to racial, ethnic and multicultural congregations to hire community developers to empower the underserved.

Exile and separation are not the end of the story.

Isaiah assures us that the light we share exposes God's love for all. Today we are invited into that partnership with God who is our strength.



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