



**Lutheran
Social Service**
of Minnesota

ABUNDANT AGING

Living the Second Half of
Your Life on Purpose

A book study by Marilyn Sharpe based on the book, Claiming Your
Place at the Fire by Richard Leider and David Shapiro

INTRODUCTION

Our Abundant Aging materials are the result of uncovering an "assumption" that our congregations have great expectations of our confirmands and high school graduates for their participation in and contributions back to our communities. Yet when our neighbors reach elderhood in our culture – or as we have come to call it, "life after full-time work" – we have virtually no expectations of our elders.

We believe that older adults have a rich role to play in the community. Our book study gives your congregation an opportunity to explore these questions and encourages individuals to design their own intentional elderhood.

This study guide includes both leader guides and handouts for each of the six sessions of a study based on the book [Claiming Your Place at the Fire](#) by Richard Leider and David Shapiro. All you need to do is identify a leader or two, recruit participants, copy the materials, and prepare the space for the study. Preparation resources and a schedule of readings and themes for the book study are at the link below.

WAYS FOR YOUR CONGREGATION TO IMPLEMENT ABUNDANT AGING

“Abundant Aging: Neighbor to Neighbor”

A vision for transforming the second half of life for Minnesotans and discovering new ways to be a neighbor.

1. Create a task force on Abundant Aging. Make sure that at least three generations are present on the task force.
2. Assess what opportunities are currently available in your congregation for older adults for
 - Services
 - Support
 - Leadership
 - Volunteer ministry
 - Connection to other generations present in your congregation
 - Learning
 - The Arts
3. Listen to your older adults when they describe the “holes” in opportunities your congregation provides. What would they like to see your congregation provide or connect to those available in the community? How might they help create and publicize these opportunities?
4. Consider which opportunities currently offered by your congregation might be adapted to the needs of older adults who
 - Need a ride to an event
 - No longer drive in the dark and would appreciate classes, meetings or events during daylight hours

- Need their volunteer or part time work schedules to be taken into consideration
 - Might be well partnered with a person with greater strength or physical stamina to lead Sunday school, care for children in the nursery, arrange items for a church garage sale or craft display
5. Teach a class or offer a series of forums or a retreat, using the Claiming Your Place at the Fire Study Guide and book.
 6. Identify the needs in your community that might offer opportunities for older adults to use their gifts, skills, passions, and time to serve the community.

For example:

- Reading buddies in the local elementary school(s), for kids who need extra time and attention to improve their reading skills
 - Staffing a latch key program after school, so children are not home alone until a parent finishes work
 - Teaching wood working skills to interested youth
 - Teaching needlework skills
 - Cooking and serving community meals
7. Offer older adults a chance to
 - Update or write a will
 - Create an advanced medical directive
 - Consider end of life planning
 - Learn more about estate planning
 - Consider pre-planning their funeral or memorial service
 8. Invite youth to interview older adults about their life experiences, their values, their accomplishments, their experiences with church and faith. Videotape these interviews for the individual, for the congregation's archives, and as a legacy to those who will survive them. Consider using clips (with permission) for church stewardship or mission videos.

9. Develop faith milestones for the last third of life:

- Retirement
- New employment or volunteer experiences
- Service to the community as an older adult
- Celebrating milestone birthdays
- Surviving the death of a spouse or partner or dear friend
- Moving out of the family home,
- Moving into senior or assisted living
- Funeral or memorial service

Faith milestones include an opportunity to name this transition as a part of a life of faith, as leaving a treasured place or part of life, of moving into and embracing new opportunities.

10. Make sure that the needs, concerns, and celebrations of older adults are present in the prayers of the people and in sermon illustrations.

A LITANY FOR ABUNDANT AGING

LEADER: God of all of the generations, thank you for abundant aging, a time of giving and receiving, of wisdom and learning, of purpose and meaning.

CONGREGATION: For the years and experience of our elders, we give you thanks. Let us learn from them.

LEADER: You created our elders in great love, filling them with your gifts, placing them among us to share those gifts, to build up this community of believers.

CONGREGATION: For their gifts and passion, for all they share with us on this journey of faith, we give you thanks. Let us receive and celebrate their gifts.

LEADER: From the time you named and claimed them in baptism, your Holy Spirit has stirred up faith in them. They have lived that faith in this congregation, in their homes, in their work, with their families and friends and neighbors.

CONGREGATION: For their stories and journeys of faith, we give you thanks. Help us to listen to their stories and learn from them.

LEADER: Those of you leaving full-time paid work, will you take on the mantle of becoming our new elders - full of wisdom, skills, and experiences - to share this priceless legacy with the next generations? Will you share your wisdom and teach your skills, to build up this faith family, our community, and our world?

ELDERS: We will, and we ask God's guidance and your support, as we discover a new place in our community.

LEADER: As new elders, will you inspire us, as you explore new vocations?

ELDERS: We will, and we ask God's guidance and your journeying with us during this time of exploration and discovery.

LEADER: As new elders, will you receive with open hearts and hands and minds the respect of your faith family; share with us the support and help you would like to receive; and offer us the riches of your life well lived?

ELDERS: We will, and we ask God for the grace to receive as well as give, to celebrate the relationships we are building together.

LEADER: Help us to be neighbors with one another - the old, the young, children of God of every age. Teach us to offer and receive assistance. Teach us to value one another, celebrating the gifts God has poured out on all of us.

ALL: In this community of old and young, braid us together to be your people, to give and receive, to be beloved neighbors to one another, so that all of us can hear Jesus proclaim, "I came that you might have life and have it abundantly."

Amen

ABUNDANT AGING STUDY

Living the Second Half of Your Life on Purpose

Session I - Invitation to the Fire

The goal of this study is that we can plan for and live the second half of our lives, with great intentionality and purpose and joy. During each class, you will have the opportunity to share your wisdom and learn from one another. Section II invites us to begin working together towards aging abundantly.

Session II - The Flame of Identity: Recalling Our Stories

Your stories are a vitally important part of your legacy. What stories of yours stand out to you and how can you share them with others? Section III encourages us to tell our stories, see God's presence in them and wonder at God's beautiful creation and the stories he has yet to lead you to.

Session III - The Flame of Community: Re-finding Our Place

“Traditionally people called a place home for a combination of two main reasons: Home was the place they were most needed and the place where their own needs were best met.” What does home mean to us? Home is not always simply a place but a sense of belonging. Section IV urges us to think about where we have felt at home and what made it so.

Session IV - The Flame of Passion: Renewing Our Calling

When you hear the word vocation, what comes to mind? God has bestowed upon each of us gifts that we are to use on behalf of our human family. Section IV encourages us to find endeavors that use our gifts and stir up passion in our hearts to fulfill your will.

Session V - The Flame of Meaning: Reclaiming Our Purpose

In an earlier book, Leider and Shapiro reported that research shows that people’s No. 1 fear is the fear of “having lived a meaningless life.” Naming our purpose can help overcome this fear and may be the most critical task of the second half of life. Section V pushes us to pursue a life of meaning and purpose.

Session VI - Keeping the Fire Alive

Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your father in heaven – Matthew 5:16. Section VI provides space for reflection on the past five sessions. What have you learned? How will you continue to grow and share your light with others in your life?

PREPARING FOR THE STUDY

This study guide includes both leader guides and handouts for each of the six sessions.

All you need to do is identify a leader or two, recruit participants, copy the materials, and prepare the space for the study. Here are a few suggestions:

RECRUITING A FACILITATOR (OR TWO)

Find someone (or two – Jesus sent them out two by two, and many of us will do with a partner what we would never do alone) who loves to read, cares about living well and helping others do the same, and models a passion for passing on faith. Invite them, letting them know the gifts of God that you see in them. Give them a copy of the book and this study guide. Ask them to look it over and to pray about it. Contact them in a week.

Let them know that they are responsible for reading the book and the study guide and arriving early for each session, to welcome participants.

RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

In this study guide, you will find a copy for a brochure, bulletin insert, letter, or newsletter.

Consider inviting members of the community through other congregations, through community newspapers, or area bulletin boards. Make sure to give enough information about where, when, what, cost, and how to register.

Personal invitation is the most powerful way to invite participants to come and learn together. Find a group of individuals of varied ages who are interested in this study and have them invite others. This book is a wonderful fit for all adults. An intergenerational group allows all to share their wisdom and experience and to benefit from the wisdom and experience of others.

PREPARE THE MATERIALS

Order a copy of the book for each participant.

Make a copy of each handout for each participant. It is a nice touch, but not necessary, to copy the handouts for each session on a different color of pastel paper. It makes it easier to see that all have the correct handout or to identify the handout for a participant who missed a week.

PREPARE THE SPACE

A space for a book study is especially hospitable if it can be set up ahead of time, so participants arrive to a welcoming space:

- Having coffee or hot water and tea bags or a pitcher of water and/or iced tea is a lovely touch.
- Name tags help the group to bond right away.
- Have handouts for the current session (and any from previous sessions) available.
- Set one table as a family altar with a cloth, candle, matches, and Bible. The facilitator(s) may stand at a podium or sit near this table. If the group is six or fewer, sit at one large table or cluster of tables, incorporating the family altar in the setup. If the group is larger, have

them sit in groups of three or four at individual tables, with the home altar where all can see it. Have a candle on every table.

- Create a second place for participants to sit, a circle of chairs with a cluster of candles in jars. You will light these candles near the end of the session and sit around “the fire.”
- Make sure that the facilitator arrives early to set the home altar and welcome participants as they arrive.

COPY FOR NEWSLETTER, BULLETIN INSERT, OR LETTER

Here is a suggested copy for publicizing a class or book study or small group. Add the name(s) of facilitator(s), modify the text, or write your own.

Claiming Your Place at the Fire: Living the Second Half of Your Life on Purpose Book Study

Are you living the abundant life that Jesus promised? If you are in, or about to enter, the “second half of life” join (names of facilitator[s]) for a six-week opportunity to explore how you might claim your rightful place among the “new elders”; those who regard the second half of life as a gift, in which they are invited to grow whole, not old. This practical guide will show you a new model for living this time in your life with vitality, intentionality, and joy, so that you will live your life on purpose and leave the legacy you choose. Through inspiring stories and thought-provoking exercise, you will explore four important questions for this part of the journey: Who am I? Where do I belong? What do I care about? What is my purpose?

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

This schedule assumes a six-week class or small group, with 1 ½ to 2 hour sessions.

SESSION	DATE	PAGES	TOPIC
1		vii-11	Invitation to the Fire Prologue Introduction
2		13-46	The Flame of Identity: Recalling Our Stories
3		47-66	The Flame of Community: Re-finding Our Place
4		67-101	The Flame of Passion: Renewing Our Calling
5		103-125	The Flame of Meaning: Reclaiming Our Purpose
6		127-139	Epilogue: Keeping the Fire Alive

SESSION ONE

Leader's Guide

Invitation, Prologue, and Introduction

BEFORE CLASS BEGINS

- Put out name tags, pens, reading and topic list, and Handout 1.
- Check on refreshments, if you choose to serve them.
- Lay the home altar with cloth, candle, matches, and Bible. Place a candle on every student table.
- Create a circle of chairs with a cluster of candles in jars in the center, to use later in the class as your "fire."
-

At the table light the candle.

DEVOTIONS

Open with Prayer

*God of joy, you sent Jesus that we might have life, and have it abundantly. Some of us dread the second half of life, as a time of loss and leave taking. Help us learn to celebrate this time in our lives, to live it fully and with joy. Thank you for this opportunity to discern what you would have us do with this precious time of life. Be with us as we intentionally shape our lives to hold the fullness you intend for us, to leave a legacy worthy of this gift. Ignite in each of us the sense of what is possible through your Son,
In whose name we pray,
Amen.*

RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

Light a candle on the home altar and on each table. Read John 1:1-5 and 8:12.

We will light a candle each time, reminding us that we gather around the light of Christ, the primary presence in this room.

CARING CONVERSATIONS & SERVICE

(The entire class will be a caring conversation and your service.)

WELCOME

As facilitator, welcome all, telling them how glad you are that they have come. Introduce yourself, modeling what you will ask them to do in their introductions.

Tell them why you agreed to facilitate this book study.

WHAT DO YOU BRING TO THIS BOOK STUDY?

As participants, you bring your stories, your lived experiences, your hopes, your fears. During each class, you will have the opportunity to share your wisdom and learn from one another.

WHY AND HOW WE'LL STUDY THIS BOOK

Review the handout with topics and reading assignments. Encourage them to come, whether or not they have done the reading.

Goal: That we can plan for and live the second half of our lives, with great intentionality and purpose and joy.

So why are we doing this in a church? Life, all of it, is God's gift to you.

How you live it is the way you thank God for and celebrate this gift.

INTRODUCTIONS

If the group is small, do this as a group. If you are a larger group, have them do it at their tables in groups of four.

Share:

- Your name
- Your attitude toward aging: What makes you apprehensive?

If the class is doing this in table groups, have a person from each table share the lessons from their table.

INVITATION TO THE FIRE

Metaphor of Fire

Read aloud the first paragraph of page vii, the metaphor on fire.

Vital Again: Growing Whole, Not Just Old

This is a time in our lives when we are still growing, becoming all that God has created us to be.

- Circle of elders at the fire, passing on their wisdom.

Leaving a Legacy

Focus of this time in our lives.

Four Components

This is what we will do in our six weeks together:

- Recall our stories
- Refind our place
- Renew our calling
- Reclaim our purpose

PROLOGUE: AT THE FIRESIDE – THE NEW ELDER

The Setting of the Book

Read aloud the story that is the setting for the book on page ix.

The Story: The Gift of the Honey Guide

Read the story on page x, through the end of the paragraph on page xi.

“Getting what really matters in life depends above all on giving it back.”

Ask the group:

- How, in your experience, has this been true?
- Is this something you hear in our culture?

The Four Flames

In our sessions together, we will reflect on the four flames:

1. Identity: Recalling Our Stories (Who am I?)
2. Community: Refinding Our Place (Where do I belong?)
3. Passion: Renewing Our Calling (What do I care about?)
4. Meaning: Reclaiming Our Purpose (What is my legacy?)

Move to the circle of chairs and light the candles. Share the following insights from Leider and Shapiro.

INTRODUCTION: THE FOUR FLAMES OF VITAL AGING – LIVING ON PURPOSE IN THE SECOND HALF OF LIFE

Elders

- Not just old
- Qualities of an elder:
 - Vitality and purpose
 - Wisdom to share

- Make a difference in the world
- Vital resource for the community
- Valuable

Ask the group:

- How does this compare to what you see and hear in our culture that values youth? *(Optional: Bring ads from magazines that reflect the cultural emphasis on and worship of youth in our culture and the cultural encouragement to look out for yourself.)* Brainstorm.
- How would you answer Maroba's question, "Who are the elders in your tribe?" *(Let participants wonder about this question out loud together.)*
- Who is an elder who has taught you to age well? What is that person's lesson? *(Go around the circle, giving all a chance to name a person and that person's lesson.)*
- What might Scripture have to say about this time in your life? *(Read the following and discuss what these passages have to say to us today.)*
 - John 10:10
 - Jeremiah 29:11
 - Genesis 12:1-3

FOR NEXT WEEK

- Read pages 13-46
- With a friend or spouse, consider what is one lesson you have learned about life that you can pass on? Who needs to hear your lesson for life?

HANDOUT ONE

Invitation, Prologue, and Introduction

"Getting what really matters in life depends above all on giving it back."

At the table light the candle.

YOUR ATTITUDE TOWARD AGING

- What makes you apprehensive?

METAPHOR OF FIRE

VITAL AGING: GROWING WHOLE

LEAVING A LEGACY

FOUR COMPONENTS:

- Recall our stories
- Refind our place
- Renew our calling
- Reclaim our purpose

THE SETTING OF THE BOOK

THE STORY: THE GIFT OF THE HONEY GUIDE

THE FOUR FLAMES

In our session together we will reflect on the four flames:

1. Identity: Recalling Our Stories (Who am I?)
2. Community: Refinding Our Place (Where do I belong?)
3. Passion: Renewing Our Calling (What do I care about?)
4. Meaning: Reclaiming Our Purpose (What is my legacy?)

Move to the circles of chairs and light the candles.

Elders

- Not just old
- Qualities of an elder:
 - Vitality and purpose
 - Wisdom to share
 - Make a difference in the world
 - Vital resource for the community
 - Valuable
- How would you answer Maroba's question, "Who are the elders of your tribe?"
- Who is an elder who has taught you to age well? What is that person's lesson?

THROUGH THE LENS OF FAITH

Read:

- John 10:10
- Jeremiah 29:11
- Genesis 12:1-3

FOR NEXT WEEK

- Read pages 13-46
- With a friend or spouse, consider what is one lesson you have learned about life that you can pass on? What needs to hear your lesson for life?

SESSION TWO

Leader's Guide

The Flame of Identity: Recalling Our Stories

BEFORE CLASS BEGINS

Put out name tags, pens, Handout 2, and for those who were not there last week, copies of topics and readings (Handout 1).

Check on refreshments, if you choose to serve them.

Lay the home altar with cloth, candle, matches, Bible, and a photo album, scrapbook, or journal (blank is fine).

At the table, light the candle.

DEVOTIONS

Open with Prayer

God of story, in scripture, you gave us stories – stories of your faithful, creative, loving, connecting, saving actions throughout human history. You also gave us stories of humankind – stories of humans who love you, follow you, misunderstand, turn away, and are invited back into relationship with you. Let us tell our stories, see you present in them, and wonder how you have created us and where you are leading next.

In the name of Christ we pray,

Amen.

RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

Light a candle and read John 1:1-5 and 8:12.

We will light a candle each time, reminding us that we gather around the light of Christ, the primary presence in this room.

CARING CONVERSATIONS & SERVICE

(The entire class will be a caring conversation and your service.)

WELCOME

Welcome participants back to class.

- Last week: Invitation to the Fire
 - Prologue
 - Introduction
- This week: The Flame of Identity: Recalling Our Stories

In small groups, have participants introduce themselves by sharing:

- Names
- The stories of others:
 - Growing up, who told you stories about their lives?
 - What did you learn from the stories you heard?
 - What stories do you wish you knew or could hear again?

Now, have participants reflect on their stories. Hold up the photo album, scrapbook, or journal on the home altar and ask them to imagine that they are opening their own item with artifacts of their lives. Then, ask them to imagine their lives as a chapter book. Each chapter represents a significant event, experience, person, or place in their lives. Give them 5 to 10 minutes and some scratch paper to list the “chapters” and to see if a “title” for the

book of life stories emerges. Then, ask them to share them. If the group is 6 or fewer, do it as one group. If the group is larger, do it in groups of three or four.

YOUR STORIES: LIFE AS A CHAPTER BOOK

- Title for the book
- Three chapters (titles and what changed)
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.

Your stories are a vitally important part of your legacy. The nonprofit StoryCorps began creating and recording oral histories in 2003. They invite pairs (often a grandparent and grandchild) to enter their small, soundproof booth, have the younger interview the elder with questions they help provide, then record it for both participants and place a copy in the Library of Congress. Often, they have provided both participants a tissue box, as both are touched by the story, and by the opportunity for the child to hear the stories that shaped the elder and for the elder to be heard and have their stories valued.

Ask members of the class to think about the person they would invite to go to a StoryCorps booth and interview – or someone who needs to hear their stories and why?

- Whom do you want (or who needs) to hear your stories?
 - Name(s):

 - Story (or stories):

 - Why?

Move to the circle of chairs and light the candles.

YOUR STORIES AS FIRE

(See page 46 for this exercise.)

Imagine that you are celebrating your 90th birthday, gathered around a fire with your dearest family members, friends, and colleagues. You can throw a log on the fire for each time you made a significant difference in the life of another person. Is your fire a bonfire or a flicker?

Those gathered have requested that you share a few significant stories from your life. Which one will you choose to begin with? Why?

Consider the following categories of life experience:

- Music, literature, and art
- Spirituality and religion
- Education and lifelong learning
- Vocation and work
- Play and recreation
- Friends and colleagues
- Family and spouse/life partner
- Your own parents and their aspirations for you

What will you do with the second half of your life so that at age 90 you will be celebrating with a roaring fire?

Read John 19:30. Jesus from the cross said, "It is finished." What would make your life feel finished, rather than just ended?

FOR NEXT WEEK

- Read 47-66.
- Select one of the people you named and tell them your story. Be ready to share their response and your response.

HANDOUT 2

The Flame of Identity: Recalling Our Stories

At the table, light the candle.

THE STORIES OF OTHERS

- Growing up, who told you stories about their lives?
- What did you learn from the stories you heard?
- What stories do you wish you knew or could hear again?

YOUR STORIES: LIFE AS A CHAPTER BOOK

- Title for the book
- Three chapters (titles and what changes)
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.

Whom do you want (or who needs) to hear your stories?

- Name(s):
- Story (or stories):
- Why?

Move to the circle of chairs and light the candles.

YOUR STORIES AS FIRE

Imagine that you are celebrating your 90th birthday, gathered around a fire with your dearest family members, friends, and colleagues. You can throw a log on the fire for each time you made a significant difference in the life of another person. Is your fire a bonfire or a flicker?

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FOR NEXT WEEK

- Read 47-66.
- Select one of the people you named and tell them your story. Be ready to share their response and your response.

SESSION THREE

Leader's Guide

The Flame of Community: Re-finding Our Place

BEFORE CLASS BEGINS

Put out name tags, pens, Handout 3, and HOME: some poetic reflections, and previous handouts for those who have missed a session.

Check on refreshments, if you choose to serve them.

Lay the home altar with cloth, candle, matches, and Bible.

DEVOTIONS

Open with Prayer

Creator God, you have given us such varied places to live, to sink down deep and sustaining roots that feed us. Help us to feel at home in the place we live or to find the courage to explore where in the world we have that sense of home and to be there. Remind us that wherever we now dwell, we have our permanent home with you.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.

RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

Light a candle and read John 1:1-5 and 8:12.

We will light a candle each time, reminding us that we gather around the light of Christ, the primary presence in this room.

CARING CONVERSATIONS & SERVICE

(The entire class will be a caring conversation and your service.)

WELCOME

Welcome participants back to class.

- Last week: The Flame of Identity: Recalling Our Stories
- This week: The Flame of Community: Refinding Our Place

In small groups, have participants introduce themselves by sharing:

- Names
- Describe a favorite home in which you have lived. What made it feel like home?

Collect ideas on things that made a favorite place feel like home. What are the common themes?

HOME: SOME POETIC REFLECTIONS

Ask three of the members of the class to volunteer to read the three offerings on the handout titled “Home: Some Poetic Reflections.” In small groups, ask each person to select one of the three as capturing his or her idea of home and explain why.

Ask:

- Because home is not always simply a place but a sense of belonging, where are three “places” that you feel you belong? *(Point out that these might be any of the following or another idea.)*
 - Geographic area, with features that represent natural beauty or familiarity

- A circle of friends
- A family dinner table
- The location of work or volunteer work
- A remembered place of joy (family home, vacation spot, etc.)
- A not-yet-visited location, read about, dreamt about, yearned for

RUTH'S STORY

Read aloud the story of Ruth Shapiro on pages 47-49. Which of Ruth's understandings of what makes a place home have you heard already from the group?

Page 56 begins with this:

"Traditionally people called a place home for a combination of two main reasons: Home was the place they were most needed and the place where their own needs were best met."

Ask the class:

- How does this reflect what you look for and value in "home"?

Invite class members to ponder the following question. (Page 53 offers some good discerning questions to consider.)

- If you could no longer live in the place you call home now, where in the world would you most like to live? How would you make your choice of the next place to call home?

Reassure them that no one is forcing them to move anywhere, but invite them to share what they chose and why they chose that place. What are their criteria?

Move to the circle of chairs and light the candles.

REFLECTIONS

- Read Genesis 28:16. Jacob, awakening from a dream in which God reiterates to him the promises God made to Abraham, proclaims, “Surely the Lord is in this place.”
 - Where have you experienced the presence of God?
- Read Exodus 3:5. God speaks to Moses, out of the burning bush, and says, “Remove your sandals for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” Invite participants to slip off their shoes or sandals (or to imagine they have done it.)
 - Where is your holy ground? Tell us about it.
- Read John 14:1-3. Here Jesus promises to go to prepare a place for us, to come again to take us to that place. Invite participants to reflect on these questions:
 - What makes you trust (or not trust) this promise?
 - What difference does it make to you that Jesus has gone to prepare a place for you?

FOR NEXT WEEK

- Read pages 67-101.
- With a trust conversation partner, share the places that are holy ground for each of you.

HOME:

SOME POETIC REFLECTIONS

“Warren,” she said, “he has come home to die: You needn’t be afraid he’ll leave you this time.”

“Home,” he mocked gently.

“Yes, what else but home? It all depends on what you mean by home. Of course he’s nothing to us, any more than was the hound that came a stranger to us out of the woods, worn out upon the trail.”

“Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.”

“I should have called it something you somehow haven’t to deserve.”

FROM “THE DEATH OF THE HIRED MAN” BY ROBERT FROST

We must not cease from exploration
and the end of all our exploring
will be to arrive where we began
and to know the place for the first time.

FROM “THE FOUR QUARTETS” BY T.S. ELIOT

Home is where you are even when you’re not;

Where you unbutton whatever is pinching you, loosen whatever is choking you, set down whatever is breaking you, and tell whatever is bothering you.

Home is where someone is expecting you,
where your chair, your plate, your bed are always kept for you,
where a memory, a plan, a dream, a laugh, or a tear is freely shared with you.

Home is where you let up and let down,
where you stop hiding and let yourself be found, where you quit being someone else and are just your needy little old self.

“HOME” BY GERHARD FROST

HANDOUT 3

The Flame of Community: Re-finding Our Place

At the table light the candle.

Describe a favorite home in which you have lived. What made it feel like home?

Of the three poetic selections on the handout “Home: Some Poetic Reflections” which one most nearly captures your understanding of home. Why?

Because home is not always simply a place but a sense of belonging, where are three “places” that you feel you belong?

1.

2.

3.

“Traditionally people called a place home for a combination of two main reasons: Home was the place they were most needed and the place where their own needs were best met.”

- How does this connect with your sense of home?

- If you could no longer live in the place you call home now, where in the world would you most like to live?
- How would you make your choice of the next place to call home?

Move to the circle of chairs and light the candles.

REFLECTIONS

- Read Genesis 28:16.
 - Where have you experienced the presence of God?
- Read Exodus 3:5.
 - Where is your holy ground? Tell us about it.
- Read John 14:1-3.
 - What makes you trust (or not trust) this promise?
 - What difference does it make to you that Jesus has gone to prepare a place for you?

FOR NEXT WEEK

- Read pages 67-101.
- With a trust conversation partner, share the places that are holy ground for each of you.

SESSION FOUR

Leader's Guide

The Flame of Passion: Renewing Our Calling

BEFORE CLASS BEGINS

Put out name tags, pens, Handout 4, and copies of previous handouts.

On newsprint or other large paper, copy the following quotations. Have masking tape available to post them on the wall:

The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need. – Frederick Buechner

Vocation is something I can't not do, for reasons I'm unable to explain to anyone else and don't fully understand myself. – Parker Palmer

Check on refreshments, if you choose to serve them.

Lay the home altar with cloth, candle, matches, Bible, and a few brightly wrapped gift boxes or bags.

At the table, light the candle.

DEVOTIONS

Open with Prayer

God, giver of all good and perfect gifts, you have bestowed on each of us gifts that we are to use to serve you by using them on behalf of your human family. Be with us in what each of us is called to do this day. For those who do not have endeavors that use the gifts you have given them, help them to find that which uses their gifts and fulfills your purpose.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.

RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

Light a candle and read John 1:1-5 and 8:12.

We will light a candle each time, reminding us that we gather around the light of Christ, the primary presence in this room.

CARING CONVERSATIONS & SERVICE

(The entire class will be a caring conversation and your service.)

WELCOME

Welcome participants back to class.

- Last week: The Flame of Community: Refinding Our Place
- This week: The Flame of Passion: Renewing Our Calling

In small groups, have participants introduce themselves by sharing:

- Names
- When you hear the word *vocation*, what comes to mind?

Collect the words and concepts they heard at their table about vocation. Now post the paper with the quotations by Palmer and Buechner and ask the class to respond to them:

- Parker Palmer and Fredrick Buechner: How do they help you to reflect on what might be your vocation?

Read the following scriptures and discuss as a class or at tables:

- Read Isaiah 43:1.
 - How has God called you by name? (*Make sure the Baptism is remembered here.*)
- Read Psalm 139:1-3, 13-14.
 - What does it mean to you to be God's intentional, wholly known creation?
- Read Genesis 12:1-3.
 - When has God called you out of the familiar and comfortable, into something new?

Discuss:

- How has God blessed you? (What are your gifts?) (*Hold up the wrapped gifts or gift bags.*)
- How has God blessed you to be a blessing? (How are you called to use those gifts to bless others?)
- Through you, all the families of Earth will be blessed. (This is outrageous, but how have you seen this happen?)
- What is the worst job you ever had? What made it awful?
- What is the best job you ever had? What made it wonderful?
- What can you learn from these two jobs about how God has made and blessed you?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-7. This scripture affirms that all are given good gifts, which are to be used to build up the body of Christ, to serve all God's children.

- What gifts has God given you?
- How do you use those gifts for "the common good"?
- How might you use them?
- What is one thing you do to touch the life of another person?

Read pages 78 (beginning at the second full paragraph) and 79, about the film *Harold and Maude*. Then ask the class:

- Which one will you be: Harold or Maude? (pages 78-79)
- What traits do you have now?
- What traits would you like to develop? Why?

Read Jeremiah 29:11.

- What hope do you have for your future?
- If age, cost, practicality, and not being sure that you could do it were not in the picture, what would you do?

Move to the circle of chairs and light the candles.

Discuss the following questions in the group:

- What is the gift, lesson, or legacy you most want to pass on to those who follow you? Why?
- What most excites you about the world?
- What most angers you?
- What do you care about most deeply?
- If you could teach three things to others, what would you teach? Why?
- To whom would you teach it?

FOR NEXT WEEK

- Read pages 103-125.
- With a trusted conversation partner, discuss how you are currently using your gifts. How might you use them?

HANDOUT 4

The Flame of Passion: Renewing Our Calling

At the table, light the candle.

When you hear the word *vocation*, what comes to mind?

Parker Palmer and Frederick Buechner: How do they help you to reflect on what might be your vocation?

- Read Isaiah 43:1. How has God called you by name? (*Make sure the Baptism is remembered here.*)
- Read Psalm 139:1-3, 13-14. What does it mean to you to be God's intentional, wholly known creation?
- Read Genesis 12:1-3. When has God called you out of the familiar and comfortable, into something new?
- How has God blessed you? (What are your gifts?)
- How has God blessed you to be a blessing? (How are you called to use those gifts to bless others?)
- Through you, all the families of Earth will be blessed. (This is outrageous, but how have you seen this happen?)
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Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

- What gifts has God given you?

- How do you use those gifts for “the common good”?
- How might you use them?
- What is one thing you do to touch the life of another person?

Read pages 78-79

- Which one will you be: Harold or Maude?
- What traits do you have now?
- What traits would you like to develop? Why?

Read Jeremiah 29:11.

- What hope do you have for your future?
- If age, cost, practicality, and not being sure that you could do it were not in the picture, what would you do?

Move to the circle of chairs and light the candles.

- What is the gift, lesson, or legacy you most want to pass on to those who follow you? Why?
- What most excites you about the world?
- What most angers you?
- What do you care about most deeply?
- If you could teach three things to others, what would you teach? Why?
- To whom would you teach it?

FOR NEXT WEEK

- Read pages 103-125.
- With a trusted conversation partner, discuss how you are currently using your gifts. How might you use them?

SESSION FIVE

Leader's Guide

The Flame of Meaning: Reclaiming Our Purpose

BEFORE CLASS BEGINS

Put out name tags, pens, Handout 5, and copies of previous handouts.

Check on refreshments, if you choose to serve them.

Lay the home altar with cloth, candle, matches, and Bible.

At the table, light the candle.

DEVOTIONS

Open with Prayer

God, in the waters of baptism, you have called us by name, we are yours. Be with us as we listen to your call, recognize your gifts, given to build up the body of Christ. Ignite in us your flame of purpose, let us be your people called to serve your family here on Earth with your love. Help us to uncover the meaning of our lives.

*We pray as we live, in Jesus' name,
Amen.*

RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

Light a candle and read John 1:1-5 and 8:12.

We will light a candle each time, reminding us that we gather around the light of Christ, the primary presence in this room.

CARING CONVERSATIONS & SERVICE

(The entire class will be a caring conversation and your service.)

WELCOME

Welcome participants back to class.

- Last week: The Flame of Passion: Renewing Our Calling
- This week: The Flame of Meaning: Reclaiming Our Purpose

In small groups, have participants introduce themselves by sharing:

- Names
- Why do you get up in the morning?

The reason that you get up in the morning may be your purpose, the meaning you believe your life has. In an earlier book, Leider and Shapiro reported that research shows that people's No. 1 deadly fear is the fear of "having lived a meaningless life." Naming our purpose can help overcome this fear and may be the most critical task of the second half of life.

We aren't in this alone. All of us have people, both those we have known personally and those we got to know through books, media, or the stories of others, who have been our role models, our witnesses.

Read Hebrews 12:1-2

- Who have been your witnesses, your role models for living a life of purpose, often despite daunting challenges?
- What have you learned from them?
- Did they continue to live “on purpose” despite challenges?

This chapter begins with the story of Frederic Hudson, the new elder who is choosing to find purpose in his experience of Alzheimer’s. Read page 103 through the first two paragraphs of 104.

The authors point out that it is often an encounter with a near-death experience that helps individuals make meaning and find purpose.

Discuss:

- Experiences with a heightened sense of mortality: What difference has that made in your life?

In the concentration camps of World War II, it was noted that some inmates rose above the terror of the conditions of their incarceration to find freedom in making choices to serve others.

Viktor Frankl, in *Man’s Search for Meaning*, said that some people in concentration camps found the capacity to live for service to others. Leider and Shapiro write, “From them, we learn that freedom is not something we ‘have’, and therefore can lose, it is what we ‘are’. It is our deepest potential, only needing to be embraced.”

Discuss:

- In what sense are you free?

This is the primary task of this session. Expect participants to be unsure of their capacity to do this. Persevere. Have your response written ahead of time and share your experience of writing it. Encourage, encourage, encourage.

WRITING A PURPOSE STATEMENT

This is what you are about – the reason you are living the second half of your life. Begin with this concrete, specific task.

- Choose three verbs from the list on page 124.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.

(If participants have a hard time with this, ask them to imagine how their friends and family would answer this for them.)

- What do you stand for?
- What is at your core?
- Your purpose statement: (This is just a rough draft.)

Encourage participants to share their statements in their small groups.

Then ask:

- In what sense does your purpose fulfill Jesus' words in these passages?
 - Matthew 25:31-40 (serving others with the love of Christ)
 - Matthew 28:19-20 (sharing the good news of Jesus with others)

Move to the circle of chairs and light the candles.

In Indian culture, a person's wealth is measured not by how much they have, but by how much they give away.

- What do you have to give away?
- What is your purpose?
- What is the legacy you want to leave? To whom?
- What difference are you making in the world?
- Whom have you voluntarily helped in the past month?
- What connections do you have to something greater than yourself?
What difference does that make in your life?

FOR NEXT WEEK

- Read pages 127-139.
- This week, talk to five people who know you well and try out your purpose statement on them. Refine it, if necessary. Bring the final version to class next week.

HANDOUT 5

The Flame of Meaning: Reclaiming Our Purpose

At the table, light the candle.

Why do you get up in the morning?

Read Hebrews 12:1-2

- Who have been your witnesses, your role models for living a life of purpose, often despite daunting challenges?
- What have you learned from them?
- Did they continue to live “on purpose” despite challenges?

Experiences with a heightened sense of mortality: What difference has that made in your life?

Viktor Frankl, in *Man's Search for Meaning*, said that some people in concentration camps found the capacity to live for service to others. Leider and Shapiro write, “From them, we learn that freedom is not something we ‘have’, and therefore can lose, it is what we ‘are’. It is our deepest potential, only needing to be embraced.”

- In what sense are you free?

WRITING A PURPOSE STATEMENT

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- Choose three verbs from the list on page 124.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
- What do you stand for?
- What is at your core?
- Your purpose statement:
- In what sense does your purpose fulfill Jesus' words in these passages?
 - Matthew 25:31-40 (serving others with the love of Christ)
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Move to the circle of chairs and light the candles.

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What difference does that make in your life?

FOR NEXT WEEK

- Read pages 127-139.
- This week, talk to five people who know you well and try out your purpose statement on them. Refine it, if necessary. Bring the final version to class next week.

SESSION SIX

Leader's Guide

Keeping the Fire Alive

BEFORE CLASS BEGINS

Put out name tags, pens, Handout 6, and copies of previous handouts.

Check on refreshments, if you choose to serve them.

Lay the home altar with cloth, candle, matches, and Bible.

DEVOTIONS

Open with Prayer

Eternal God, you know no age, but are the source of ongoing creation and presence, love and comfort to your children. We are created in your image. Let us learn from you the gifts of being light and heat to those with whom we share life. Help us to grow whole in this chapter of our lives to be all that you have created us to be.

*We pray as we live, in Jesus' name,
Amen.*

RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

Light a candle and read John 1:1-5 and 8:12.

We will light a candle each time, reminding us that we gather around the light of Christ, the primary presence in this room.

CARING CONVERSATIONS & SERVICE

(The entire class will be a caring conversation and your service.)

WELCOME

Welcome participants back to class.

- Last week: The Flame of Meaning: Reclaiming Our Purpose
- This week: Epilogue: Keeping the Fire Alive

In small groups, have participants introduce themselves by sharing:

- Names
- Their purpose statement (This will be the revised ones.)

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES HAVING A PURPOSE STATEMENT MAKE?

A purpose statement is like a:

- *North star*. This is the goal that helps us steer our lives.
- *Hedgehog*. In *Good to Great* by Jim Collins, we are invited to explore what we are best in the world at, what we have passion for, and what gets us where we want to go.
- *Compass*. Use it to figure out where we are and where we want to go.
- *Guide*. A purpose statement guides us in making choices for how we invest ourselves and our resources – time, money, thoughts, and relationships.
- *Evaluation*. Use it to evaluate choices and to plan for the future.

BECOMING A NEW ELDER

- *Growing for all of life.* New Elders grow and learn through all of life. “When we cease growing, we die.”
 - Story of the lobster. In order to grow, the lobster must shed its shell and grown a new one. To do this, the lobster allows itself to be buffeted by waves, smashed against rocks on the floor of the ocean, until the shell is broken and shed. Then, it lies, utterly vulnerable on the floor of the ocean until it excretes the substance that hardens and becomes the new, larger shell. If it doesn’t go through this process, it will die, because its shell is too small. How is this essential to becoming a new elder?
- *Pass it on.* New elders pass on what they learn and leave a legacy.
 - What?
 - How?
 - To whom?
- *It’s spiritual work.* This is essentially spiritual work. Where do you find God in the midst of this time in your life?
 - What does it mean to live your baptism daily? As Christians, the call comes to us in our baptism and the Holy Spirit is given to walk with us and guide us. God has given us good gifts, intended to be used to bless God’s family and the world. How are you doing that now?

Move to the circle and light the candles.

This is an opportunity to share what the group has learned and how individuals have changed.

- What is something you have learned in this class?
- What will you do differently?
- What difference will that make in your life?
- What will you do next?

CLOSING BLESSING

Close by giving each participant a candle, lighting it, and reading the following blessing from Matthew 5:14-16.

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your father in heaven.

HANDOUT 6

Keeping the Fire Alive

At the table, light the candle.

Share your purpose statement.

What difference does having a purpose statement make?

- *North star*
- *Hedgehog*
- *Compass*
- *Guide* (helps guide choices on how to invest time, money, thoughts, and relationships.)
- *Evaluation* (use it to evaluate choices.)

BECOMING A NEW ELDER

- *Growing for all of life.*
 - “When we cease growing, we die.”
 - Story of the lobster.
- *Pass it on.*
 - What?
 - How?
 - To whom?
- *It’s spiritual work.*
 - What does it mean to live your baptism daily?

Move to the circle and light the candles.

- What is something you have learned in this class?
- What will you do differently?
- What difference will that make in your life?
- What will you do next?

CLOSING BLESSING

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your father in heaven.



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This LSS of MN small group study joins our other free resources available at <http://www.lssmn.org/Support-LSS/Congregational-Relations/Resources-for-Congregations/>. LSS of MN will continue to serve as a resource for our church and community, offering materials that come from our experience in supporting and serving our neighbors on behalf of the 1,200 Lutheran congregations in Minnesota.

LSS staff and volunteers are always available to preach or speak in your congregation or community group. Please let us know how else we might be helpful by contacting Congregations@lssmn.org.

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