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### FOR CONGREGATIONS

What does your congregation already do to spill out God's love and abundance on the world? Scan the list below for the things you already do as a church; keep doing them! Look for two or three things you might want to begin doing or do more often.

- \* Weekly worship, in which our burdens are lifted, our sins forgiven, and we are declared God's beloved.
- \* Fellowship opportunities, in which those who have been here for a long time expand the circle to include those here for a first time, unsure about whether there is room for them. Invite the new ones to join you again and again. Make them feel they belong and that they are needed.
- \* Learn together cross-generationally. Learn one another's stories about how they have met Jesus this week and where they find themselves in God's story and God in their story.
- \* Collect food or clothes or home

- supplies for families in need.
- \* Do a mission day in your area or go to an area facing a crisis or cross an ocean to serve God's family there.
- \* Tutor kids who are struggling academically.
- \* Scholarship needy kids for your camp or nursery school.
- \* Visit the lonely and shut in.
- \* Cook meals for families with a new baby.
- \* Shovel walks or rake leaves or ready gardens for those who cannot do it for themselves.
- \* Get to know people who live in your church's neighborhood but don't worship with you. Ask how you can pray for them. Invite them to an ice cream social this summer or an outdoor movie, appropriate for all ages.
- \* Welcome new refugees or immigrants to your area. Help them get oriented, find resources, get to doctor's appointments, and locate the parks in your area.
- \* Offer space for people with ideas and resources for those in need to provide those goods and services in your building.
- \* Model what it looks like to "Love one another as [Jesus has] loved you." Do this for those who aren't just like you. Show how broadly Jesus defined "neighbor," when he called us to "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Just as I was finishing this, a weekly email came from my congregation, reminding us all of a



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## FILLED TO SPILL

...my cup overflows.  
-Psalm 23:5d

I will bless you...  
so that you will be a blessing...  
in you all of the families of the earth shall be blessed.  
-Genesis 12:2-3

So, this is God's economy: God pours into us, so that we have enough to pour out on all of God's family. Filled to spill, indeed. This was the closing thought in Pastor Dennis Johnson's February 7th sermon. My husband and I talked about it all the way home and shared it with those we met that week ... and ever since. With thanks to Pastor Johnson for permission to use his idea for my e-news, here we go.

You know that we're going to ask Luther's great question, "What does this mean?" for our congregations and homes. Then, we'll struggle to answer his second great question, "How then shall we live?"

In a contentious political season, in a competitive economy, in jobs and classrooms with limited awards for high performance, in families with limited time and attention, we all yearn to grab as much as we can, fearing scarcity. If someone else gets it, I won't have enough.

Can we hear Jesus proclaim, "I came that you might have life and have it abundantly"? Let's turn to scripture to hear God's intention what we are filled to overflowing, that we have been blessed to be a blessing to all of the families of this earth, that there is always enough for all of us. Gifts, relationships, opportunities - we are all living in the midst of more than enough.

But it was never intended that all God has poured out on us was to prove our superiority and end up in a trophy case for others to admire and envy.

No, we have been filled to spill onto others, so that they are filled to overflow on others. That is how Jesus' abundance works, how "all of the families of the earth shall be blessed."

How will we do that in home and congregation? Read on.

### FOR HOMES

Yes, I do know how busy you already are. Your family, circle of friends, workplace, volunteer opportunities, and world already threaten to empty you, to drain you dry. So, how can you "spill" anything else on the world?

- \* First, take a very deep breath ... and give thanks for the gift of life. Today. This moment.
- \* Count all of the ways you are already poured out in love, in service, in blessing to God's world. Give thanks for those opportunities.
- \* Now, focus and prioritize. Which of those things give you life and joy and express your most important values? Keep doing those.
- \* What are the values you want to teach your children and the others who are watching? Name them. Be intentional about modeling them in your life.
- \* What are the commitments that feel onerous, that drain you dry, that really aren't your gift to give? Withdraw from some of those, so that you have time to "spill" on those endeavors which are your best blessings to share.
- \* Overwhelmed? Ask for help. It connects you with others and spreads the load.
- \* When someone requests that you begin doing something new, remember that a "no" is as holy as a "yes." The no's create time and space for the things you'd really like to do, that God is calling you to do.
- \* Care for yourself with enough food and exercise and sleep and nourishing relationships to fill you up, so that you have something to share.
- \* Slow down the pace of life together, so that you know

congregation, reminding us all of a BIG food drive this weekend. So, Pastor Johnson gets the final words here:

*Because God has so poured out his love for us regardless of our merit, let us pour out our love for our brothers and sisters and children in need. Don't ask if they are deserving, don't ask whether it will do any good, just pour out your heart in food for the hungry. This most delights the God who is prodigal in his love for us.*

#### NEED SOME HELP?

Do you need some help gaining perspective, evaluating your ministries, reestablishing your priorities, discerning where God is calling your congregation now, and engaging all to participate? This might be the time for coaching with Marilyn Sharpe, a ministry partner who will focus, inspire, and walk with you and your ministry team to follow where God is leading.

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one another, share real conversations, experience faith and love and peace together. Savor your life.

\* Light a candle. Name the presence of the One who said, "I am the light of the world." Let Christ's light shine in any darkness you are experiencing. Bear Jesus' light to the world.

\* Let "listening" and "empathy" and "presence" and "kindness" count, as you pour those out on a world in need of just those practices.

\* Pray. Rest in God's presence, knowing that God is listening and cares and loves you beyond your ability to imagine it!

\* Pass it on.

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