

## **How to Cover Worship for 12 Weeks of Family Leave** **Ideas from the Advocacy Committee for Women and Gender Justice**

Yes, covering 12 weeks can be hard on a congregation, especially a small congregation. Yet within your community you have resources to tap into. It involves reaching outside your walls and being open to the Spirit.

Here is a sample of what 12 weeks might look like.

Sunday 1...Ruling elder proclaims the Word.\*

Sunday 2...Invite a community partner to come in and share the mission of their organization.

Sunday 3...Music Sunday: select a passage of scripture and have music that reflects that passage.

Sunday 4...Youth Sunday.

Sunday 5...Invite a mission co-worker to share their work. This takes advance planning and can happen in person or virtually. Yes, this will involve an honorarium.

Sunday 6...Ruling elder proclaims the Word.\*

Sunday 7...Men's Sunday.

Sunday 8...Do you have a retired minister of the Word and Sacrament or retired educator in your congregation? Ask them for one Sunday as a gift to the church.

Sunday 9...Women's Sunday.

Sunday 10...Invite another community partner to come in and share the mission of their organization.

Sunday 11...Is there someone in your congregation who has a story of faith to share (or several people)? Give them a prompt to help shape their comments.

Sunday 12...You made it; celebrate with a hymn sing and prepare to welcome your pastor back!

*The Presbyterian Outlook* publishes [liturgy for each Sunday of the year](#), typically two weeks out, so that is one element of worship you can use without cost; you do need to credit them.

[Holy Humor Sunday](#) is typically Bright Sunday (the Sunday after Easter), but you can celebrate it anytime.

Invite a candidate under care of your presbytery to fill the pulpit one Sunday. Your presbytery can help you with this.

Is there a PC(USA) seminary, or one of our full communion partners, less than an hour away? They often have students who are approved to fill the pulpit. Reach out.

Is there someone within your presbytery who serves on a PC(USA) national committee? Invite them to share about their work.

We suggested the retired educator, but an educator from another congregation may be willing to come share a message or new ideas around Christian formation.

Remember, worship doesn't have to happen just in the sanctuary; worship around the tables in the social hall, with food and hands-on activities as prayers are prayed, scriptures are shared, and hymns are sung – the Word is proclaimed in actions.

We encourage the Committee/Commission on Ministry to assist congregations in planning for the 12 weeks.

We encourage sessions to be proactive in preparing for these 12 weeks by setting aside the current honorarium for a pulpit supply into a separate line item in their budget monthly. We acknowledge that some presbyteries require congregations to set aside for sabbatical leave, but with creative worship ideas the congregation is not covering the whole 12 weeks so maybe they set aside half of the rate monthly instead of the whole amount.

We encourage sessions to be creative if they feel they can't include the funds in their budget to pay any honorarium. We also encourage sessions to reach out to their presbyteries. In that vein, does the presbytery have funds that could help offset the expense of honoraria?

Don't forget your synod; do they have funds or resources that could help you? We are a connectional church.

\*We encourage presbyteries to provide training to their ruling elders to be able to proclaim the Word. Ruling elders are the spiritual leaders of the congregation; we encourage them to step up during this time.