

HARM REDUCTION JUSTICE SUNDAY

Toolkit for Worship Preparation



UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST



FAITH IN
HARM REDUCTION

For all those whom we have loved and lost.

And for all those who need to know that they are loved
and that they are not lost.

A toolkit for worship preparation on Harm Reduction Sunday
- the third Sunday in August (August 17th, 2025)
featuring the lectionary texts:
Hebrews 11:29-12:2 and Luke 12:49-56.

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and Overdose Prevention Ministries of the United Church of Christ.
Learn more at www.faithinharmreduction.org and UCC.org.

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Introduction to Harm Reduction Sunday

by Rev. Erica Poellot

Welcome to the Harm Reduction and Justice Sunday Service Toolkit, a collaboration between Harm Reduction and Overdose Prevention Ministries and Faith in Harm Reduction.

The prophetic and pastoral wisdom of Harm Reduction movement leaders and ministers, and the sacred stories of our faith traditions, offer us a model for building liberation with people impacted by the war on people who use drugs, and for building congregations and communities of care and compassion.

Eradicating drug related stigma, and the connected criminalization of people who use drugs, will be critical if we hope to achieve justice with our most marginalized neighbors and bring an end to the overdose crisis.

Faith communities are uniquely poised to lend their voice and influence to this work, in order to reshape moral narratives about substance use and people that use substances into ones that rehumanize people who use drugs, and which affirm our worth and dignity.

We pray these worship materials will bless you and your faith communities. Thank you for being part of the global movement to eradicate the stigma of substance use, celebrate the leadership of people with lived and living experience of substance use and overdose, and bring liberation to all people impacted by the war on people who use drugs.

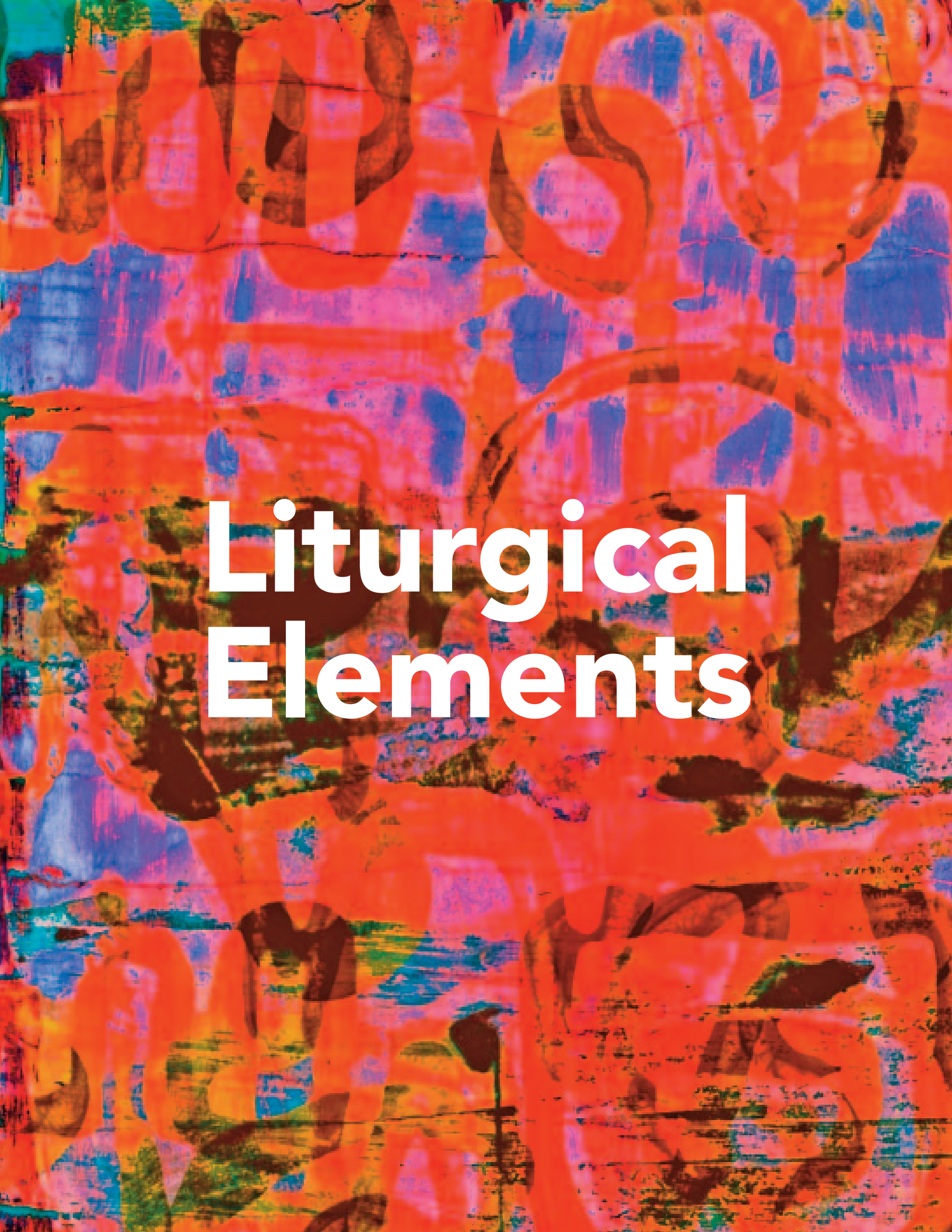
In faith,



Rev. Erica Poellot,

Minister of Harm Reduction and Overdose Prevention Ministries, UCC
and Executive Director, Faith in Harm Reduction

The United Church of Christ celebrates Harm Reduction Justice Sunday the third Sunday in August, before International Overdose Awareness Day which is August 31st.



Liturgical Elements

Call to Worship

by Rev. Elyse Berry

Inspired by the first reading from 1 Kings 2:10-12, 3:3-14

One: We came with our satchels of sorrow, our grains ground from grief, and God said,

All: "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

One: We came with our uncommon favor and celebration of second, third, and as-the-day-is-long chances, and God said,

All: "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

One: We came with the weight of uncertainty and with questions—perhaps—impossible to answer, and still God said,

All: "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

One: Some of us came having left behind the hope we thought was for forever, others let down the shame and stigma of yesterday, and some lost our way when silence was all we heard, and still God said,

All: "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

One: Today we have come here for worship, for communion, for an at-one-moment in time to proclaim a faith that says we are beloved in our wanting and are part of an abundant creation. So, we pause for a moment to hear God say to us, yet again,

All: "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

One: And so, my kin in Christ, what say you? On this Harm Reduction and Overdose Prevention Sunday, what might we ask of our God today?

All: How might we listen, search, and discern with an open heart for God's response?

One: How might we find the strength to trust what we find? The vulnerability to be in relationship?

All: How might we lean on the kindness of our ancestors and the wisdom from within us to turn imagining into reality?

One: O Spirit of the Resurrection, living and breathing among us now, surround us with your grace to call to worship all of our deepest longings,

All: that they may be consecrated by you. Amen.

Call to Worship

by Min. Blyth Barnow

One: We are called to be a resurrection people.

Many: It is not only a metaphor.

One: We are asked to come alive again.

Many: Everyday.

One: Everyday we are called to bring our heart,

Many: our spirit,

One: our community,

Many: our relationships,

One: back to life.

Many: Everyday we begin again.

One: Everyday we love someone back from
the tomb of oppression.

Many: Sometimes it is us.

One: Everyday we practice resurrection.

Many: We call it our resilience.



Opening Prayer

by Rev. Elyse Berry

O Creator of the Cosmos, in Christ you came to us in space and time, through the Spirit you collapse all things linear and linger with us in our past, present, and all that is yet to come. Bless us with the wisdom of your spiral galaxies, that each moment is another opportunity for return, for connection, for taking the next best step in our journey. As we enter more deeply into worship together, help us to really feel that next step, no matter where we are or where we're going exactly. May we sense that step's depth and width, allow its density to sink into this moment, and feel the rumble of the countless feet and mobility aids moving toward the kin-dom of God. For we are the Body of Christ, flesh of the flesh, bone and blood, right here and now, ready to say yes to the Good News. Amen.

A Prayer for A Community Being Crushed

by Rev. Micah Bucey

When danger descends,
There is a ferocity that first feels like fear.
It may be quiet.
It may be small.
It might not shimmer with the glimmer of certainty,
But that doesn't mean it isn't there.

This fierceness grows,
Not through competition,
But through collaboration,
Not through the destructive draw of despair,
But through the co-creative care of connection.

The weight of the world is heavy,
And grief often feels greater than the strength of your spirit,
But have you stopped to see how many spirits surround you?
Have you stopped to realize how many revolutionaries are reaching for you?
Have you stopped to understand that you are not the only one breathing?

Stop, see, realize, understand, breathe.

See the potential of a people who will not leave wounds to simply fester.
Realize the charisma of a collective that heals harm through the heat of kinship.
Understand the power of a lineage that doesn't disappear into the inferno,

But instead allows it to soften them, to mold them, to reshape them into the free and flaming creatures we were all always meant to be.

Be the breath that fans these familial flames.

Don't burn by yourself.

Even a Phoenix needs friends.

Move out from underneath that load you think you're lifting alone.

Remember: Heat rises, but it also needs to rest.

So rest,

Rise,

Repeat,

And add your irritated energy to the unified force.

The heft is always horrifically humbling,

But there is also always a you-shaped hole in the united net.

Empire doesn't want you to accept the invitation,

But this is the only party that is worth your exertion.

Inhale and exhale.

When danger descends,

There is a ferocity that first feels like fear,

Don't fear it. Queer it.

This world might be threatening to make us martyrs.

But we are far more than mere memories to be dismissed after death.

This world might already have our names engraved on gravestones.

This world likes its saviors safely deceased,

Free of grit,

Free of glitter,

Neutered and obscured by innocuous gratitude.

But don't let them bury you in the grimy ground just yet.

As long as we're trying to overturn these tombs,

We are the livid grit

And we are the loving gratitude

And we are the living glitter we wish to see in the world.

Amen

Prayer of Confession

by Rev. Sonny Graves

One: God, before you we confess that when it comes to our own or our neighbors' use of drugs, we have allowed stigma, shame, judgment, and punishment to deny what you have taught us:

All: That you love us just as we are and in all that we struggle with. That all people are made in your image. That we are called to love our neighbor, and ourselves, as you love us.

[Time for silent reflection]

One: God, you know every part of our lives and our souls. You are a Creator of mercy and grace, love everlasting, and resurrection power.

All: We know a God who calls us as a community to help each other reduce harm and injustice. To comfort the afflicted, and afflict the comfortable. We claim this purpose with our Liberating Christ.

Assurance of Grace

Loving God, you bring healing and compassion to each and to all, blessing us with grace, as You sow liberation for the beloved community. Amen.

Sermon Seed - Year C

by M Jade Kaiser on Luke 12:49-56

Throughout chapter 12, one can sense Jesus' exasperation with all the barriers to integrating the gospel into collective life: greed, corruption, hypocrisy, fear, distraction, selfishness, vulnerability, hoarding resources, and more! So much of it, trickling down from the seats of the powerful in the Roman empire and into the lives and institutions of the people. By verse 50, we're hearing in some translations that Jesus is "stressed!" "I came to bring fire and how I wish it were already kindled," he says. It's as if, in this moment, he is struggling to perceive the people's readiness for the kind of transformation they are showing up in the thousands (vs 1) to hear. Crowds gather in mass, eager and seeking, but are they - are we - open to perceiving "the present times" for what they are? Potent with the possibility for intervention. For fires that refine. For forming new coalitions and building kinship in shared values. Are they - are we - open to prioritizing the practice of god with each other, even if it might divide what is precious to us? Families, churches, traditions, political parties, identities, etc.

This Harm Reduction Justice Sunday invites a word from exasperated Jesus, inviting us to dig deeper and honestly "interpret the present time." Who is benefitting from the war on people who use drugs? Who is capitalizing off of histories and lineages of shame and stigma and racism? How are we recruited to turn against each other - to turn against care and companionship and toward punishment, isolation, and control? These and other anti-drug and anti-sex work policies, cultures, and theologies steal lives away from us everyday. And the heart of God is stressed.

Whether we show up in droves to hear the Word of Christ in Sunday morning sanctuaries or at Harm Reduction conferences, are we open and ready to confront and be confronted by what actually keeps the gospel from being practiced among us? Are we ready to navigate division and prioritize the most targeted and impacted for the sake of their lives, our lives, all life? The moment is now. The present time is calling on all of us. And may the church follow Christ enfleshed among people who use drugs and people who do sex work toward a future of flourishing.

Invitation to Offering

by Rev. Erica Poellot

We believe in the God of justice and love and give of our talents, treasure, and time to this sacred work of Harm Reduction. We have the tools and the leadership we need to build congregations and communities of care and compassion for all who have touched by the stigma of substance use. Our gifts, no matter the size – will proudly proclaim that people who use drugs are beloved by God and by us.

Prayer of Dedication

by Sue Kaiser

We offer these gifts to the God of all people. We cheerfully give our treasures to bring love, hope, peace, joy, justice and healing to those who are hurting. May these gifts be blessed and used to provide ministry for those who are too often forgotten in our society. Let the generosity represented here be magnified and amplified to stretch beyond our mortal thought and imagination.

(Acknowledgment to Rev. Daniel Schultz)



Benediction

by Hill Brown

God, as you journey with us in the coming week help us to see one another as you see us, beloved children who can do nothing to be separated from your affection. Mold our imaginations so that we might envision and then create a world where people who use drugs live full lives free of oppression, incarceration, and the fear of overdose. We know you want to give us a kinder, more just world and we are ready to receive it!





Music

BE LOVED, BELOVED

words by Micah Bucey

music by Henco Espag

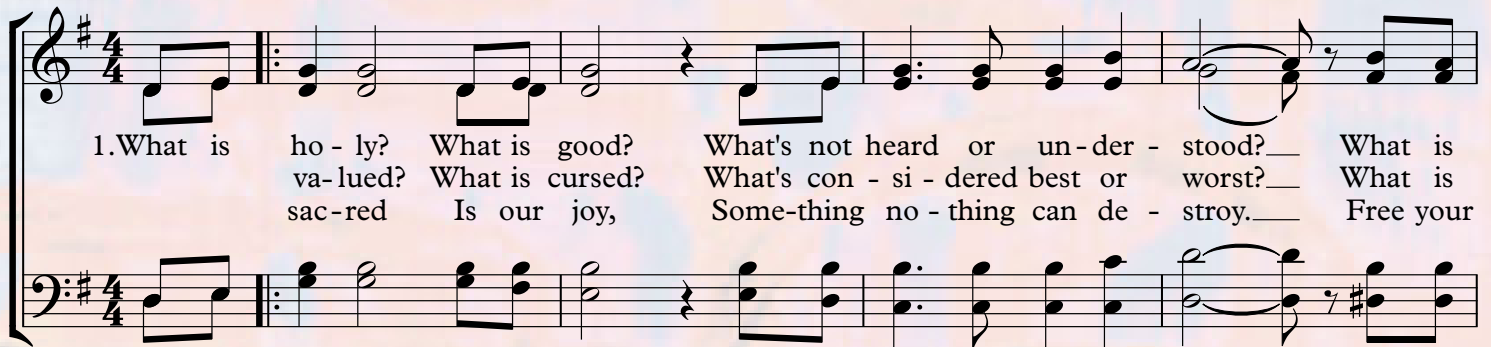
1. Be loved, Be-lo - ved. Be hope - ful and held. Be cu - ri - ous. Be o - pen. Be
2. Be loved, Be-lo - ved. Be ten - der and true. Be spi - rit. Be vi - sion. Be
3. Be loved, Be-lo - ved. Be won - drous and weird. Be cer - tain. Be sha - ky. Be

strong. _____ Be loved, Be - lo - ved. Be joy - ful and
song. _____ Be loved, Be - lo - ved. Be ra - diant and
wrong. _____ Be loved, Be - lo - ved. Be fi - 'ry and

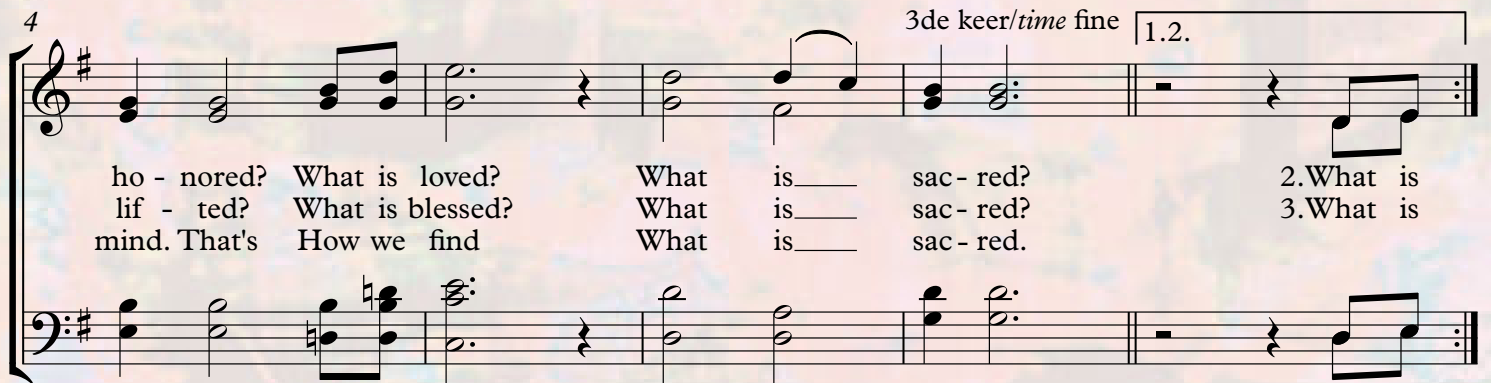
just. Be lo - ving be - cause you be - long. _____
rare. Be lo - ving be - cause you be - long. _____
found. Be lo - ving be - cause you be - long. _____

WHAT IS SACRED?

words by Micah Bucey
music by Henco Espag



1. What is ho - ly? What is good? What's not heard or un - der - stood? What is
va - lued? What is cursed? What's con - si - dered best or worst? What is
sac - red Is our joy, Some - thing no - thing can de - stroy. Free your



4

3de keer/time fine 1.2.

ho - nored? What is loved? What is sac - red? 2. What is
lif - ted? What is blessed? What is sac - red?
mind. That's How we find What is sac - red.

Kopiereg Voorbehou © Henco Espag (ASCAP) & Micah Bucey 2024

Musical Resources

I Need You to Survive	David Frazier	Lead Me, Guide Me (2nd ed.) #668; Zion Still Sings #214
Beautiful Things	Michael Gungor & Lisa Gungor	worshiptogether.com Songs
Now the Green Blade Rises	John M. C. Crum	Evangelical Lutheran Worship #379, Glory to God #247, etc.
Lord, Whose Love Through Humble Service	Albert F. Bayly	Gather #681, The Presbyterian Hymnal #427, etc.
Brokenness Aside	David Leonard & Leslie Leonard	All Sons and Daughters
I'm Gonna Live so God Can Use Me	African-American Spiritual	Glory to God #700, The Faith We Sing #2153, etc.
Make Me a Channel of Your Peace	Sebastian Temple	A Catholic Christian prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, set to music by Sebastian Temple - could also be used as a sung response
All Belong Here	The Many	https://shop.themanyarehere.com/collections/digital-albums/products/all-belong-here-digital-album-download
Fear is a Liar	Zach Williams	



Additional Litanies

Rahab's Cloud of Witnesses: A Found Poem based on Hebrews 11:29-12:2

by Rev. Elyse Berry

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned. 30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the army had marched around them for seven days. By faith **the [sex worker] Rahab,** because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient. And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, **welcomed justice, and gained what was promised;** who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; **whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful.** in battle and routed foreign armies. **Women received back their dead, raised to life again.** There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some **faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.** They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, **destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them.** They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since **God had planned something better** for us so **that only together**

with us would **they** be **made** perfect. Therefore, since we are surrounded by such **a great cloud of witnesses**, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run **with perseverance** the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of **faith**. For the **joy** set **before** him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of **God**.

Final text:

By faith the sex worker Rahab, welcomed justice, and gained what was promised; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. there were others who faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. God had planned something better, that together they made a great cloud of witnesses with perseverance, faith, and joy before God.

Remembrance Litany

by Rev. Erica Poellot

Gracious God, Loving Creator,
We listen for your voice which calls us here, together.
This place, made holy by our shared presence.

We listen for your voice
which calls us to remember we belong to each other -
Inextricably and lovingly bound together.

For your voice which call us to our sacred charge –
to presence, to hope, to persistence for liberation.
Refusing to be silenced.

And just as we are called to listen,
we are called to act as the voice—the heart—the hands of your call:

To meet each other, exactly where and as we are.
To celebrate the gift of second, third, and more chances, because we all
need them.
To revel in radical welcome, no matter our paths.
To honor the memory of those no longer with us.

We gather to imagine a collective way forward
of truth telling and life affirming connection.

We gather to honor and learn from people who use drugs -
those who have been saving one another, loving one another back to
life.

We gather to honor life and the living -
and also, to remember those who are no longer bodily among us,
that their remembrance may inspire a way forward.
To them, we are present now.

[moment of remembrance in silence]

Please join me in keeping alive the spirit of the beloveds we have lost
to overdose,
calling them each by name:

[Saying of the names]

We love you.

We are witnesses to the sacredness of your lives:
Your names and memories pave our way forward,
igniting, again and again, your lives through our love for you and all.



Blessing of the Naloxone

by Dr. Sharon Fennema

One: New life is before us. I invite you to extend your hands toward these kits as we offer this blessing.

All: Creator of resurrection and light, we come to you with grateful hearts for all the ways your love continues to rise up in our midst. We give you thanks and praise for the Holy drug, naloxone, and the new life that it can bring.

One: We know that we need each other to survive, so we ask you to bless these kits, and all those who will use them, and all those who will be in need of them.

All: Make them and us instruments of resurrection, that suffering will be released, that injury will be transformed, that joy will arise, that strength will take hold, that hope will take wing, and that death will yield to new life.

One: Empower us to live into our vocations as people of resurrection, bringers of new life, proclaimers in word and deed of a new day rising. In the name of all that unfurls hope in our midst every moment, we pray. Amen.



By Minister Blyth Barnow of Feminary

The background is a vibrant, abstract composition of thick, expressive brushstrokes. The color palette is dominated by bright orange, which is layered over a base of pink and magenta. Interspersed throughout are strokes of deep blue and hints of green and brown, creating a complex, textured effect. The word "Resources" is centered in the middle of the image in a clean, white, sans-serif font, providing a sharp contrast to the busy, colorful background.

Resources

Language Matters: Reducing Stigma

“And God said, ‘Let there be...’”

This is how creation happens in the Abrahamic faiths: not as a meticulous engineering project, nor a work of magic, but entirely spoken into being. The Word not only communicates the divine intention, it actively accomplishes it. A Word created the world.

Our words, too, create worlds. Words spoken harshly or carelessly may create a world that is unsafe for someone who is sensitive or struggling. Derogatory language, whether used intentionally or unintentionally, can construct a space that may be unwelcoming.

Many common phrases used to talk about people who use drugs and people who do sex work imply stigma, judgment, and shame. This is easy to understand in overtly derogatory instances like the use of terms such as “junkie,” “crackhead,” etc., but language matters in much more subtle ways and can reveal assumptions about a person or their substance use that may be unfair, inaccurate, and harmful.

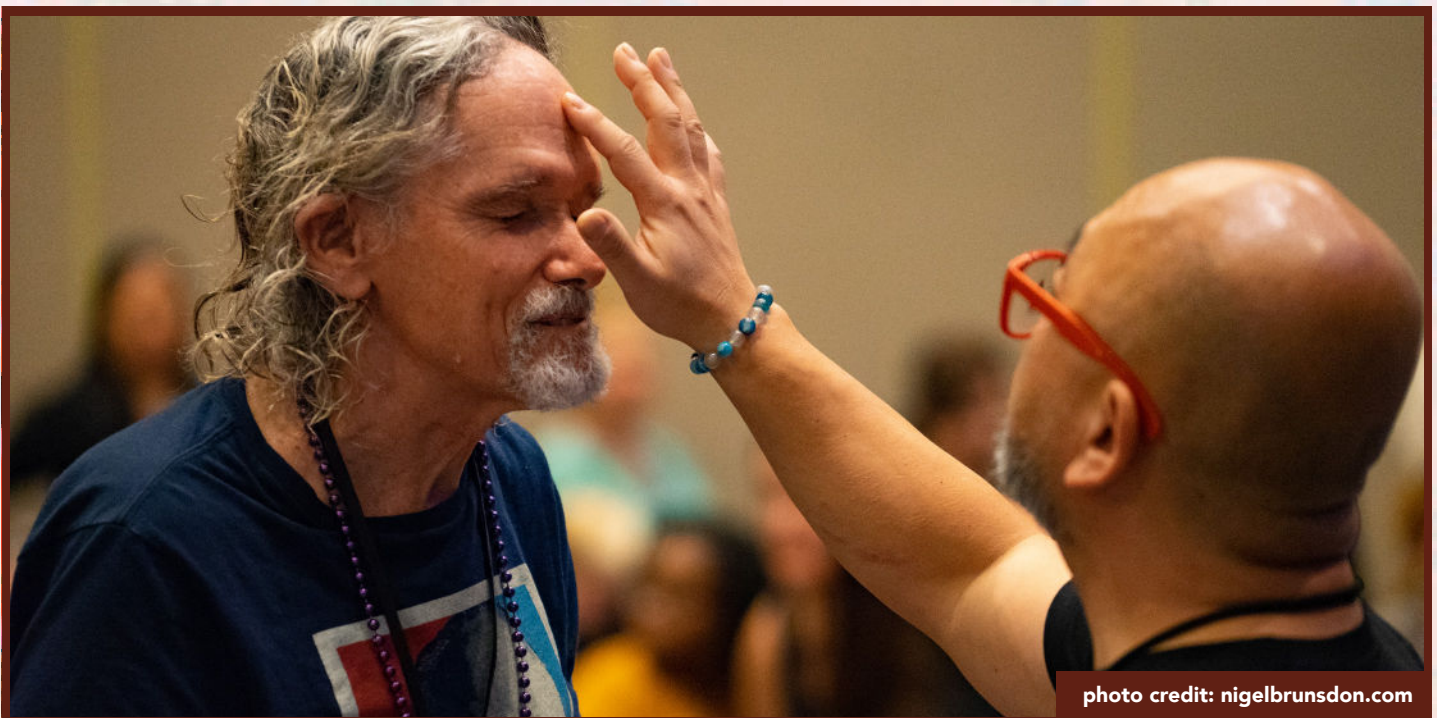


photo credit: nigelbrunsdon.com

We at Faith in Harm Reduction encourage the use of person-centered language—language that refuses to reduce a person to their substance use but keeps their humanity at the forefront—to affirm that people who use drugs are sacred, worthy, and beloved. We offer these examples of how to consider words to create a more hospitable world for people who use drugs and people who do sex work.

Instead of...	Try this...
Addict, Junkie, Drug User	Person Who Uses Drugs, Person Who Injects Drugs
Drug problem, Drug abuse	Drug use, Substance use, non-prescribed use
Needle-sharing program	Syringe service program, Syringe exchange programs
Clean	Not actively using, abstinent; (re: supplies) sterile, unused
Opioid Replacement Therapy	Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD)
Prostitute, whore, hooker	Person who does sex work
Relapse, On a bender	Return to use, Currently using drugs
Enabling	Supporting, helping, overdose prevention
Dirty/clean urine	Positive/negative drug screen

Resource Lists

Books

- *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander
- *Beyond Addiction* by Jeffrey Foote et al
- *Chasing the Scream* by Johann Hari
- *High Price* by Carl Hart
- *Memoirs of an Addicted Brain* by Marc Lewis
- *The Biology of Desire* by Marc Lewis
- *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts* by Gabor Mate
- *The Big Fix* by Tracey Helton Mitchell
- *Getting Wrecked* by Kimberly Sue
- *Unbroken Brain and Undoing Drugs* by Maia Szalavitz
- *The Body Keeps the Score* by Bessel Van Der Kolk
- *Coming to Harm Reduction Kicking and Screaming: Looking for Harm Reduction in a Twelve Step World* by DeeDee Stout
- *Saving Our Own Lives : A Liberatory Practice of Harm Reduction* by Shira Hassan
- *The Harm Reduction Gap* by Sheila P. Vakharia
- *Prison By Any Other Name: The Harmful Consequences of Popular Reforms* by Maya Schenwar and Victoria Law
- *Abolition and Spirituality* edited by Ashon Crawley and Roberto Sirvent
- *Healing Justice Lineages: Dreaming at the Crossroads of Liberation, Collective Care, and Safety* by Cara Page and Erica Woodland
- *Practicing New Worlds: Abolition and Emergent Strategies* by Andrea Ritchie

Podcasts

- American Diagnosis – Season 2
- Blindspot: The Plague in the Shadows
- Crackdown
- Drugs and Stuff
- Narcotica
- Prohibited

Websites

- www.faithinharmreduction.org
- www.naloxoneforall.org
- www.harmreduction.org
- www.drugpolicy.org
- www.samhsa.gov

Events

- The National Harm Reduction Conference (Harm Reduction Coalition)
- International Drug Policy Reform Conference (Drug Policy Alliance)
- International Overdose Awareness Day (overdoseday.com)
- Other state, regional, and virtual conferences by area/topic

Videos

- "The War on Drugs: From Prohibition to Gold Rush" Jay Z:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=el5mE5PBGJg>
- "Everything you think you know about addiction is wrong" Johann Hari:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PY9DcIMGxMs>
- "Harm Reduction 101" Harm Reduction Action Center, Denver:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W7epsLmN604>



Find a Harm Reduction Resource Near You:
<https://harmreduction.org/connect-locally>

Spirit of Harm Reduction

An Abridged Toolkit
for Faith Leaders



**Access the
Spirit of Harm
Reduction Toolkit
by visiting
[faithinharmreduction.org/
spirit-of-harm-
reduction-toolkits](https://faithinharmreduction.org/spirit-of-harm-reduction-toolkits)
or click here.**

**Access Virtual Narcan
trainings and other
overdose prevention
resources from
NEXT Distro**

[https://nextdistro.org/
overdose](https://nextdistro.org/overdose)

**Read the
FAITHFUL
ADVOCACY FOR
INTERSECTIONAL AND
TRANSFORMATIONAL
HEALING IN HARM
REDUCTION
A RESOLUTION OF
WITNESS**

Submitted by the Metropolitan Association of
the New York Conference

[https://www.faithinharmreduction.org/s/
Faith-in-Harm-Reduction-Resolution-1.pdf](https://www.faithinharmreduction.org/s/Faith-in-Harm-Reduction-Resolution-1.pdf)



