

Go and Tell: Celebrating the Women Who Were Co-Workers with Paul
Prayer service for the celebration of the Feast of St. Mary of Magdala 2009
Notes from the writer, Joan Brausch

Materials Needed:

- Worship aid with music and responses
- Nametags and markers
- Pins
- Styrofoam Board
- Assorted Ribbons of varying widths and colors

The purpose of this prayer service is three-fold:

- 1.) to honor and celebrate St. Mary of Magdala as the “Apostle to the Apostles” on her feast day
- 2.) to inform those attending of the rich legacy of women who partnered with Paul in his ministry to “go and tell” all nations as Jesus commanded his followers
- 3.) to honor the strong women of our communities who have proclaimed the Good News in their every day lives
- 4.) to weave their work with our work of proclaiming the Good News so that we can draw inspiration and strength from their faithfulness to the mission

I envision the room being set up with chairs in a half circle. Near the entrance, a small table will be needed so people can put on nametags as they arrive. Two or three people will be needed to act as greeters for those who are attending--welcoming guests, helping them with nametags and helping them to their seats.

In the center of the space, the Styrofoam can either be propped on a table or chair or it could be placed on an easel. The board could be covered in cloth, if desired. The Styrofoam board will hold a “weaving” of ribbons, a weaving made up of women who proclaim the Good News, which will be completed by the end of the prayer service (from now on this Styrofoam board will be referred to as the “Weaving”). A title can be put at the top of the Weaving: “Go and Tell.” A box of pins will be needed near the Styrofoam board, along with the ribbons. Before the service begins, pin seven ribbons vertically on the board. Five signify the women highlighted in prayer today; two act as a border around the weaving. You can write their names on the ribbons, if you like. The other ribbons are in a basket where they can be easily accessed.

In the course of the prayer service, many women will be mentioned as having passed on the faith. You might want to have someone write down their names so that, when the tapestry is displayed in your church or parish hall, their names are listed.

A small table near the Weaving can act as an altar or center for your worship space. A lovely tablecloth, some candles and the Bible can be placed there along with seasonal flowers.

Plan, if you can, for a social after the prayer service, so people can get to know one another. It can be as simple or as elaborate as you like.

Roles for this prayer service:

- Prayer Leader
- Mary of Magdala
- Lector
- Prisca
- Phoebe
- Lydia
- Eunice and Lois
- Song Leader/Musicians

Suggested Music:

- *I am for You* (Rory Cooney, ©1993, GIA Publications, Inc.)
- *Send Down the Fire* (Marty Haugen, ©1989, GIA Publications, Inc.)
- *You Are Called to Tell the Story* (Ruth Duck, ©1992, GIA Publications, Inc.)
- *We are Called* (David Haas, ©1988, GIA Publications, Inc.)
- *Sing a New Church* (Delores Dufner, OSB, © 1991, Sisters of St. Benedict. Published by OCP Publications)
- *Song of Community* (Carolyn McDade, ©1984, from the album “Rain Upon Dry Land”
<http://www.carolynmcdademusic.com/resource.html>)
- *Go and Make of All Disciples* (Leon M. Adkins © 1955, 1964, Abingdon Press)
- *As a Fire is Meant for Burning* (Ruth Duck, b. 1947, © 1992, GIA Publications, Inc.)

About the writer, Joan Brausch - Newly retired from 20 years in parish work (Liturgy and Adult Formation), Joan is the planner and coordinator for her parish's annual Magdala celebration. Joan serves on FutureChurch's Women In Church Leadership Advisory Committee and has been part of a private online women's faith community for over 10 years. Joan's areas of expertise are Liturgy, Scripture and Catholic Social Justice.

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Order of Worship

Welcome

Prayer Leader: Good evening! My name is _____. Welcome to our celebration on this feast of St. Mary of Magdala. We are so glad you all could come.

Introductions

Prayer Leader: Before we begin our prayer, let us better form a community of faith by introducing ourselves to one another. Could you please give your name and what church community to which you belong?

(Introductions)

Gathering Ritual

Prayer Leader: I invite us to center ourselves for prayer. *(Wait for people to settle down.)* Let us open our hearts to the presence of our good God. *(silence for a moment)* God is our light and our salvation, binding us all together in love. May these candles remind us that God's love is always being showered down on us and rising up within us.

(the candles on the altar are lit)

Opening Song:

Prayer Leader: Let us praise our God in song!

Song: *You are Called to Tell the Story* (Ruth Duck, c. 1992, GIA Publications, Inc.) OR
We are Called (David Haas, c. 1988, GIA Publications, Inc.)

Opening Prayer:

Prayer Leader:

Weaver God,

at the beginning of time,

you began a great tapestry of life,

woven in all the colors of the rainbow.

We, your daughters and sons,

gather here in awe of the gift of your salvation

through Jesus your Son.

He wove together a community of men and women

and commanded them to "go and tell" all nations

of your glory and saving grace.

We celebrate tonight all those who have proclaimed that Good News

especially the women of the early church.

May their example of perseverance and dedication

inspire us in this day and age to "go and tell"

in everything we say and do.

All praise to you, O God,

who holds together the tapestry of history,

weaving life and love into every age.

All: Amen.

Proclamation of the Word

The lector then goes to the altar and takes up the Bible for the proclamation of the Gospel. The prayer leader might have to signal the community to remain standing for the Gospel.

Lector: A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew. (Matthew 28:1-10)

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning,
Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb.
And behold, there was a great earthquake;
for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, approached,
rolled back the stone, and sat upon it.
His appearance was like lightning and his clothing was white as snow.
The guards were shaken with fear of him and became like dead men.
Then the angel said to the women in reply, "Do not be afraid!
I know that you are seeking Jesus the crucified.
He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said.
Come and see the place where he lay.
Then go quickly and tell his disciples,
'He has been raised from the dead, and he is going before you to Galilee;
there you will see him.' Behold, I have told you."
Then they went away quickly from the tomb, fearful yet overjoyed,
and ran to announce this to his disciples.
And behold, Jesus met them on their way and greeted them.
They approached, embraced his feet, and did him homage.
Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid.
Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."
The Gospel of the Lord.
All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Silent Reflection

Mary of Magdala speaks:

I ran to the Upper Room and told the others that Jesus was risen – he was RISEN! Glory to God – Jesus was with us still! Even then, we didn't fully understand what this meant – that came later, as we began to share the Good News ourselves and to ponder all that had happened in the years we had traveled with him, especially the meaning of Jesus' final days on this earth. All of us, men and women, went out into the countryside to share the Good News of the Kingdom, bringing healing and hope to so many. And so many believed – Jews and Gentiles both! Such a time we had, trying to discern God's will for this new entity, this Church – who could belong, what rituals would we celebrate, how to worship together – Jew and Gentile – people of such differing backgrounds and races. Oh, my! Inspiring times and difficult times – yet we persevered. Yes, I had a part but so did so many others – many of them women! Some are remembered but many are forgotten or their stories are garbled and twisted – like my story. You gather here to remember and celebrate and that is so good. Remember and be inspired – that you may do the same...

Sung Response: "Let us bring the gifts that differ and, in splendid, varied ways,
'weave' a new church into being, one in faith and love and praise.

(Words adapted from Sing a New Church by Delores Dufner, OSB, c. 1991, Sisters of St. Benedict. Published by OCP Publications)

Sharing Stories of Women Who Preach the Gospel in Word and Action

Prisca speaks:

My story begins in Rome, where after being emancipated from slavery in the household of Acillus, my husband Aquila and I made our living as tentmakers. We had become Christian when our mistress, Priscilla, secretly told us about Christ. She later donated land on her estate to bury deceased members of our community. Soon after being granted our freedom, the Emperor Claudius expelled us and many other Christians from Rome.

God led us to Corinth where we made a good living making tents for the Isthmaen games. Before we knew it Aquila and I had a thriving house church that attracted many new people to Christ. It was a special blessing when Paul arrived nine years later. He loved our house church community and it became an important anchor for his missionary activities. Paul, Aquila and I often brought people to Christ in the midst of our tent making work.

Paul soon convinced us to accompany him to Ephesus and create another house church center there. In Ephesus I met the famous preacher Apollos and helped him deepen his understanding of the Good News. Our mission was so successful that the local silversmiths lost a lot of business because so many new Christians meant they could sell only a few silver images of the Roman gods. They began to persecute us but we continued to preach the Good News anyway, though we were almost killed for it. Paul was so grateful that we shared the risks of the Gospel with him, that he spoke of it often. But how could we do otherwise?

Eventually, Aquila and I moved back to Rome to establish another house church in preparation for Paul's arrival and what turned out to be his lengthy imprisonment. What a diverse group of people were part of our community! These were challenging and exhilarating times – so many were sharing the Good News!

Now, you may take this for a fact – we preached together and led the house churches together – but this was very unusual for our times! Paul taught us that all are equal in Christ's eyes, all work for God's glory, all are the living stones that build up the Body of Christ. I praise God that I was alive to see this happen – that ALL, men AND women, were one in Christ.

(1 Corinthians 16:18-20, 2 Tim. 4:19, Acts 18:1-8, Acts 18:23-28 and Romans 16:3-4)

Sung Response: “Let us bring the gifts that differ and, in splendid, varied ways,
‘weave’ a new church into being, one in faith and love and praise.

Prayer Leader: Prisca preached the Gospel in every way she knew how. We all know women who preach the Gospel in word and in action – sharing the Good News of God's love, mercy, justice and healing every day, in ways large and small.

Please share briefly the stories of one of these women. After you share the story, we'll weave a ribbon into our tapestry to celebrate her witness. Please begin your story with her name...

Sharing...

If you expect the group to be too large for group sharing, designate ahead of time one person to share their story.

Sharing Stories of Women Who Serve

Phoebe speaks:

I live in Cenchrae, a village not far from Corinth. I am Paul's sister in Christ and like him, a diakonos in the service of the Gospel. Because of my leadership in preaching, teaching and serving the church at Cenchrae, Paul asked me to take his letter to the Christian community of Rome. That was a long voyage, but I didn't mind. I have been blessed with an abundance of resources and am glad to financially support Paul's missionary work. Did I do this to make a name for myself? No, I did it because I love Christ and I work to help others experience that love too. There is nothing more dear to me than gathering with my community to reflect on the Good News and break bread and share wine in memory of Jesus. What a sense of unity! What a sense of belonging and acceptance! I wanted to do everything I can to make sure as many people as possible experience this sense of oneness in Christ.

(Romans 16:1-2)

Sung Response: "Let us bring the gifts that differ and, in splendid, varied ways,
'weave' a new church into being, one in faith and love and praise.

Prayer Leader: Phoebe served the Church with every resource at hand – her time, her money, her strength and courage. We all know women who serve the Church – whether in the church community or out in the world – in ways large and small, they bring God's love, mercy, justice and healing to a broken world.

Please share briefly the stories of one of these women. After you share the story, we'll weave a ribbon into our tapestry to celebrate her witness. Please begin your story with her name...

Sharing...

If you expect the group to be too large for group sharing, designate ahead of time one person to share their story.

Sharing Stories of Women Who Lead in the Community

Lydia Speaks:

There we all were, the women of the synagogue at Philippi, taking a few moments to gather for prayer and support, and up walk these men from out of town – strangers. We wondered who they were, but we were also a bit frustrated, for we didn't want to interrupt these special quiet times of prayer and reflection on the Torah. The men seemed surprised to discover that we were all women, for they had been expecting to find a synagogue of Jewish men. But then they asked to pray with us and (reluctantly, I admit!), we allowed them to stay. That was the beginning of my new life in Christ. After hearing Paul and Timothy preach the Good News, I knew that here was an answer to my many questions and the emptiness I sometimes felt within my heart. I asked Paul to baptize me – and my whole household as well!

I invited Paul and Timothy to make my home their home while they were in Philippi. I didn't think that they would mind staying above a busy shop that dyed and sold purple cloth. From that day, my home was the home of the Philippian Christian community. What a joy it was to be able to give Christ's Body, the Church, a home in my house! This was not the way society functioned – to have people in one's home and to lead them in worship – but in Christ, we were all one; no, we ARE all one, all equals in God's sight. Oh, what joy to be part of such an experience!

(Acts 16:11-15, Acts 16:40)

Sung Response: "Let us bring the gifts that differ and, in splendid, varied ways,
'weave' a new church into being, one in faith and love and praise.

Prayer Leader: Lydia was open to the movement of the Spirit when she listened to Paul's preaching. She, in turn, preached the Good News to others in her home and in her community. We all know faith-filled women who are leaders in the community. It might be the community of the church, a governmental organization or in a business setting. Each day, they preach God's saving love in their word and actions, in ways large and small.

Please share briefly the stories of one of these women. After you share the story, we'll weave a ribbon into our tapestry to celebrate her witness. Please begin your story with her name...

Sharing...

If you expect the group to be too large for group sharing, designate ahead of time one person to share their story.

Sharing Stories of Mothers Who Pass on Their Faith

Eunice speaks:

I am one of the most blessed women who ever lived. Maybe you'd say the same, if you had a mother like mine! My name is Eunice and my mother, Lois, was one of the first Christian believers in Lystra. She asked Paul to baptize her on his first missionary trip. After Paul healed a paralyzed man, there was a big upset and some of the leaders of our city tried to stone Paul and Barnabas. They had to quickly escape.

After they left, my mother and several other believers began to preach and teach everyone as Paul had done. My son Timothy and I were so impressed by my mother's witness and by Paul and Barnabas' courage that we both asked to be baptized too. Timothy then became a wonderful teacher of the Word.

When Paul returned a few years later he was delighted to find a much larger Christian community in Lystra, thanks to the leadership of my mother, Lois!

Paul also asked Timothy to journey with him and Silas to Antioch and Greece. It was so hard to let Timothy go, but we wanted to do what we could to spread the Good News to everyone. It had changed our lives and had given us a community of faith that was more like a family, who cared for each person within it. We wanted others to have that sense of belonging and hope!

(Acts 16:1-5, 2 Timothy 1:4-6)

Sung Response: "Let us bring the gifts that differ and, in splendid, varied ways,
'weave' a new church into being, one in faith and love and praise.

Prayer Leader: Eunice didn't travel far from home or have great wealth to give, but she shared something perhaps even more precious – her own self and her own child. Lois and Eunice preached the Gospel within their home, with their neighbors and their faith community. They knew the trials of division within the community – they saw that with the stoning of Paul and Barnabas. Yet, they were determined to be faithful and to give everything they had for the Gospel. We all know women: mothers, grandmothers, aunts, mentors, friends, who have passed on their faith to us and to others – out of their joy in living in God's love.

Sharing... *For a small group: Please share briefly the stories of one of these women. After you share the story, we'll weave a ribbon into our tapestry to celebrate her witness. Please begin your story with her name...*

For a large group: designate ahead of time one person to share their story.

Honoring the millions of women who have passed on their faith but are not remembered

Prayer Leader: Over the past 50 years, women in the western Church have worked tirelessly to recover the stories of the women of the Church's history. Yet, so many women who had a profound impact on the life of the Church have been forgotten. We would not be here today without their faithful passing on of the Good News in whatever small way they could. Our mothers, grandmothers, great-great-grandmothers made it possible for us to be the women and men of faith who we are.

We weave a ribbon into our tapestry in honor of these women of faith...
(silence or soft music while the ribbon is woven through...)

Weaving the stories/ Weaving our stories

Prayer Leader: Our tapestry is becoming more complete, yet your ribbons, your witness, are not yet woven into it! For all of us here are witnesses of God's love just as Phoebe, Prisca, Eunice and Lois, Lydia and Mary of Magdala. Every day, we too share the Good News in everything we say and do.

Let us join in song and, as we sing, I invite you to come and weave your ribbon, your witness, into the tapestry. After our song, we'll close with a blessing.

For a large group: Ask each person to bring their ribbon forward and place it in a basket to be woven in later by designated weavers...Then they could receive a special blessing (such as, "Name, Go and Tell the Good News") by the person ahead of them or the prayer leader and then return to their seats. (instrumental music or soloist in the background)

Song: Song of Community (or other song of your choice)

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We'll weave a love that greens sure as spring
Then deepens in summer to the fall autumn brings.
Resting still in winter to spiral again,
Together, my friends, we'll weave on, we'll weave on. *(Refrain)*

Refrain: A love that heals friend, that bends, friend
That rising and turning then yields, friend
Like the mountain to rain or frost in the spring
Or darkness that turns with the dawn
It's by turning, turning, turning, my friend
By turning that love moves on.

We'll weave a love that opens our eyes
To see one another beyond all disguise
Where our trust like water will wash away lies
Together my friends we'll weave on, we'll weave on. *(Refrain)*

We'll weave a love that holds the despised,
the stranger who wanders, the focus of lies.
We'll stand sure as mountains with earth's victimized,
Together, my friends, we'll weave on, we'll weave on. *(Refrain)*

--Carolyn McDade 1984, from the album "Rain Upon Dry Land" <http://www.carolynmcdademusic.com/resource.html>

Blessing: Weaving Prayer

All: Weaver God, we come as separate strands of colorful threads to be woven in and out, over and through each others' lives into a marvelous tapestry of your mysterious beautiful design.

We weave our lives into the lives and witness of so many women in our church's history, women who lived your love, women who died for their belief in you.

Today, we celebrate the beauty of the tapestry we are together. We celebrate the women who have gone before us; we honor and remember their faithfulness to your Word.

Bless us as we leave this holy place.
May our words and actions
proclaim your love and mercy,
your justice and peace,
weaver God, saving Lord, inspiring Spirit,
one God, who holds the universe in your hands.
Amen.

Sign of Peace

Closing Song

See suggested included in writer's notes.

Prayer Service created by Joan Brausch for the 2009 Celebration of the Feast of St. Mary of Magdala.

Developed by FutureChurch

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If you are sponsoring a prayer service please let us know at magdala@futurechurch.org.