NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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JUSTICE ISSUE: YOUTH HOMELESSNESS- ESPECIALLY AFFECTING LGBTQI YOUTH AND YOUTH OF COLOR

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE/ LECTIONARY WEEK:	Romans 8:26-39
SOCIAL PRINCIPLES/ BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS REFERENCES:	
OBJECTIVE:	To help youth understand that we embody God's love through our words and we can shape the world we live in by taking action.
SUPPLIES NEEDED:	10 pre-cut images (see notes section), posterboard, Station 1 (books, bookbag, labels, chair and 2 volunteers), Station 2 (picket signs, a caution sign, and 2 volunteers), Station 3 (carboard sign saying 'need food', bottled water, bag lunch, 3 volunteers

LESSON PLAN STRUCTURE (1 HOUR)

CENTERING MOMENT (5 MINUTES)

(Place the 10 images around a table before the youth arrive.)

Say: As we begin, I've placed images around the table. Today we'll use a practice called Visio Divina. This is a way of praying and reflecting using images. Images can be powerful. They help us slow down, notice, and understand the experiences of others. We believe God can speak to us through what we see.

Say: I invite you to quietly walk around the table. Take your time. Look closely at each image. Lean in. Look again. Notice what draws your attention.

(Allow 2-3 minutes of quiet movement.)

Reflection Questions:

- Which image caught your attention?

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- What emotion did you feel?
- What do you think the person in the image is feeling?

SCRIPTURE STUDY (25 MIN.)

Say: Our denomination teaches through the Social Principles and the Book of Resolutions that children and youth have the right to shelter, food, emotional well-being, and safety. So, what does Scripture say about belonging when those things are missing? Our passage for today is Romans 8:2639, does anyone want to volunteer to read the passage?

(Pause for reading.)

Say: In Romans 8, we are reminded that nothing separates us from God's love, not where we are born, what we have, how we look, or who we are. This is a radical kind of love. A justicecentered love.

Say: In this passage, Paul says that creation is 'groaning.' That means people are hurting, struggling, and longing for something better. And God is not distant from that. God is present. Walking alongside those who are hurting, grieving, and overwhelmed. And we are called to do the same.

Say: In the Social Principles, we read that children have the right to food, shelter, clothing, health care, and emotional wellbeing. And in the Book of Resolutions, the church is called to address homelessness, advocate for housing, and build inclusive communities.

Reflection Questions:

- If nothing can separate us from God's love, why do people sometimes feel separated from God or the church?
- Who decides who belongs and who doesn't?
- What systems benefit from people being excluded or divided?
- Who in our community might feel left out, forgotten, or invisible?

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- How can we listen to their voices?
- How can our church live this our better?

(Pause for discussion. Keep tone open and nonjudgmental.)

GROUP ACTIVITY (25 MIN.)

Say: We are now going to experience three real-life situations. These are meant to help us feel not just think about what others go through. Please be respectful. This is about empathy, not acting skill.

Station 1: Bullying and Mental Health

Say: This is Malik, a 15 year old being bullied after rumors spread.

(Have a youth carry books labeled with the following: shame, anxiety, depression and place them in the backpack.)

Say: Now sit down and carry that weight.

(Pause for 1 minute.)

Prompt a second youth to go and kneel beside them, make eye contact, and say: 'I noticed you looked down and came over to check on you. I have time to listen if you'd like to share.'

Station 2: Belonging and Identity

Say: This youth has just come out and arrives at church but sees people protesting.

(Pause.)

Prompt a second youth to approach the youth and say, 'You are welcome here. Come with me.'

Station 3: Homelessness

This is Jordan, 16, who has been kicked out and had to sleep outside.

Have volunteers walk past and say quietly the following:

NOTES

Set up 3 theme stations to help youth embody what it looks like to create safe spaces for others to belong.

Station Materials Needed:

Station 1: Books, bookbag, labels, chair and 2 volunteers

Station 2: Picket signs, a caution sign, and 2 volunteers

Station 3: cardboard sign saying need food, bottled water and bag lunch. 3 volunteers

Divide youth into 3 groups and have them each spend 5 minutes at each station.

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How did he get here?

He should get a job.

What if he doesn't use the money for food?)

Prompt a youth to go next to 'Jordan' make eye contact and offer food.

Say: Let's come back together and talk about what we experienced.

Reflection Questions:

- Where do you see these situations in our community?
- Why do people sometimes look away when others are suffering?
- What is one thing we could do to help?
- How can we help someone feel like they belong?

Say: These issues are real. Mental health struggles, questions of identity, and homelessness are present in our communities right now.

CLOSING MOMENT (5 MIN.)

Say: Close your eyes. As you breathe in, silently say, ' I see you.' As you breathe out, say, 'God sees you.'

(Repeat for several breaths.)

Say: As we leave this place, may our eyes be open to see those who feel invisible: the lonely, overwhelmed, and hurting. Look for them. Listen to them. Love them.

Say with your life:
I see you
God sees you
You are loved.

To the classmate that is bullied...
To the person without a home...

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To the neighbor who feels like they don't belong...

I see you
God sees you
You are loved.

And may you always remember:
I see you
God sees you
You are loved.

Go in peace to embody God's love. Amen.