Introducing the Seasons

To orientate leaders to the focus scriptures, art images, and music offered by *Seasons of the Spirit* for Lent and Easter 2019.

**Before the session**

- Remind leaders of the meeting and ask them to review their Lent, Easter 2019 materials and bring them to this session.
- Bring newsprint, markers, and refreshments.

**Gather**

Bring name tags (optional), matches, and taper.

- Set a worship space with two lengths of fabric: purple (for Lent), and gold, yellow, or white (for Easter) and two pillar candles (one purple and one white).
- Bring purple ribbon, bowl of sand, stone, tealight, stick of incense, and Bible.
- Bring copies of the resource sheet “Gathering and Blessing” (p. 5).

**Engage**

- **Setting the scene:** copies of the chart “Season at a Glance” (from “Planning” section of website), some copies of “About this Lent Easter” (p. 1) and the shared article “Acts Alive!” (included in the resources/articles at the back of all age-level materials).
- **Engaging the scriptures:** Bibles and copies of the resource sheet “Bible Discussion” (p. 6)
- **Engaging the art:** copies of the resource sheet “Art Reflection” (p. 7); variety of art supplies (such as charcoals, oil pastels, markers, crayons); display the two seasonal posters, arranged according to the order in article, “Connecting with the Art” (the final two pages of each age-level resource); hang multiple sets if available.

**Prepare**

- **Engaging the music:** if available, bring Volumes 2, 5, and 8 of the *Seasons Songbooks* and *Music CDs; Seasons Growing Faith Songbook* and *Music CD*, and CD player or other digital media player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca. Option: invite a music leader to teach and lead the songs.

**Respond**

- Bring copies of “Introducing Seasons of the Spirit” and “Seasons Session Flow” (from “Planning” section of website) for new leaders.
- Bring copies of articles as needed from the booklet *From Start to Finish* (in Library on website) such as, stages of faith development, multiple intelligences, creating a respectful learning environment, building community.
- Bring information about planned congregational service and outreach projects for these seasons.
- Bring copies of Registration Form and Leader Record (from “Planning” section of website) if needed.
- Bring copies of several recent postings to *Lection Connection* (on website).

**Bless**

- Bring, if possible, a recording of the song “Hebrew Benediction” (p. 20 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 2; #32 on the *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 2).
- Bring copies of Lectionary Bookmarks (from “Planning” section of website).
ENGAGE
(45 minutes)

Setting the scene
During Lent this year, the resources will explore some foundational stories from the Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament, exploring themes of gratitude, trust, forgiveness, and compassion. During the Easter season, all of the focus passages come from the book of Acts, helping us to explore the community of the early church and our call to be followers of the risen Christ.

Introducing the season
Invite participants to review together the introductory material from the article, “About this Lent and Easter” (p. 1). Then distribute copies of the chart “This Season at a Glance” (from the “Planning” section of the Library) and review the information together, noting the focus passages and titles for each week. Invite participants to look at p. 2 in their resources, noting specific rituals and other information offered for their age group.

Reviewing the articles
Review the shared article “Acts Alive!” providing copies as needed. Invite participants to find the extra resource sheets and articles at the back of their age-level resources. These articles provide helpful background and inspirational stories for these seasons. Note which ones will be used in specific seasons and sessions, and which ones provide material for leadership support and development. Share information about articles across the age levels: for example, resources for younger age levels include articles on creating quiet spaces and “holy listening”; youth materials include an exploration of the prayer that Jesus taught and information about spiritual practices.

GATHER
(10 minutes)

Option: play Seasons music in the background as people are arriving and distribute name tags, if appropriate.

Welcome participants and invite them to gather in the worship space. Point out the different colours of fabric representing the liturgical colours of the two seasons of the church year that will be observed in the coming months: the purple of Season of Lent, representing this ancient season of penitence and reflection in the church, and the gold or yellow colour of celebration for Easter Sunday and the 50-day Season of Easter.

Opening ritual
Invite a volunteer to light the two candles. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “Gathering and Blessing” and ask two volunteers to lead group in the gathering ritual for Lent.

Sing, or listen to, if possible, the song “Come, O Holy Spirit, Come/Wa, Wa, Wa Emimimo” (p. 12 in Seasons Songbook, Vol. 5; #10 on Seasons Music CD, Vol. 5).

Making connections
One of the focus passages for this Season of Lent comes from the book of Psalms and speaks of a longing for God and an experience of God’s presence. We often long for deeper relationships with those who are important to our lives. Invite group members to name some of the things that help them form deeper relationships with others. Form partners to discuss the following question:

- What are some of the things you do to deepen your relationship with God?
Engaging the scriptures
Distribute copies of the resource sheet “Bible Discussion” (p. 6). Form two groups and give each group one of the sections (Lent or Easter). Invite participants to use the questions to help explore the scripture passages in their section. Ask each group to record some responses and then gather as a whole group to review and reflect on these responses.

Engaging the art
The seasons of Lent and Easter invite us to reflect on what God has done through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. Through visual arts, we are offered new ways of experiencing this journey and inspired to new ways of describing the life to which we have been called. Display the two fine art posters so everyone can see them. (Hang multiple copies, if available.)

Introduction Invite participants to find the article, “Connecting with the Art – Lent, Easter 2019” in the last section of their materials. In addition to the two fine art posters, note that the materials for Ages 3–5 and Ages 6–8 also include story posters.

Personal reflection Invite participants to find the set of posters in their packages or to sit where they can see the displayed posters. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “Art Reflection” (p. 7) and invite participants to use the questions to guide their reflections. (Option: gather as a large group afterwards to share insights.)

Artistic response If time permits, invite participants to respond to the art image they have chosen by using the art supplies provided to write prayer or a poem, or to create a drawing or painting that captures their feelings or insights.

Engaging the music
(Use this section if the Seasons of the Spirit music resources have been purchased for use in your congregation.)

The music for these seasons of Lent and Easter comes from Volumes 2, 5, and 8 of the Seasons Songbooks and the Seasons Music CDs. Point out that the resources for Ages 3–5 and Ages 6–8 include pages of additional songs and finger-plays to augment the Seasons music resources. Ages 3–5 resources also refer to the Growing Faith Music CD and Songbook which contain music for young children. If you have not already purchased these songbooks or music CDs, but would like access to the music, you can purchase downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings at the Seasons website.

Review music Invite participants to look through the Seasons Songbooks, noting the types of music included. Point out the songs that could be used for gathering and blessing during these seasons (“All Is Wonder,” “Come, O Holy Spirit, Come/Wa, Wa, Wa, Eminimo,” “May Peace Be with You,” “Spirit Come,” and “Hebrew Benediction”) and the songs that help explore the seasons’ themes (“Listen, God Is Calling,” “Guide My Feet,” “You Are Holy/Hamba Nathi,” “Stand Firm,” and “Alleluia”). Draw attention to the margin notes with tips for leading the music in groups. Discuss together the ways you might include music in church school, youth group, and adult study groups.

Sing or listen Invite a music leader to lead the group in singing through selected pieces or listen to some of the recordings on Volumes 2, 5, and 8 of the Season Music CDs. Note that these music CDs also include recordings of meditative music, such as, “Voice Tones” (#35, Vol. 5) or “Autumn Harp” (#29, Vol. 8) for use during times of meditation and reflection.

Moving into Respond
Invite participants to spend a few moments in silent reflection on the ways in which the scriptures, art, and music for these seasons have spoken into their lives.

• What are some words, images, or songs that you will carry with you into the coming months?
RESPOND  
(20 minutes)

- **Review materials** Provide time for leaders to review and become familiar with their *Seasons* age-level materials. If some leaders are new, review the session flow, either as a group or by pairing off new and experienced leaders. Pay particular attention to any suggestions in the session materials for working with other groups or sharing in worship.

- **All ages materials** Point out that the resources for Palm/Passion Sunday (April 14), Easter Sunday (April 21), and Pentecost Sunday (June 9) are designed in a different format, with the expectation that all ages, from three-year-olds to Adults, will come together to explore the events of Holy Week, Easter, and Pentecost. Discuss arrangements for team leadership for these Sundays.

- **Resources for leadership** Distribute additional articles from the booklet *From Start to Finish* (in the Library on the website), if desired, and review together. Point out that there is a *Virtual Resources Booklet* in the Library. Distribute copies of the Registration form and the current Leader Record chart, if these are used in your program.

- **Service and outreach projects** Share information about service and outreach projects planned by the congregation during these seasons. How might age-level groups participate? Identify church committees or other groups who might need to follow up on ideas that go beyond the responsibilities of this group or individual leaders.

- **Lection Connection** Distribute copies of recent *Lection Connection* postings and review together. Encourage leaders to read these each week (information for accessing is included on each week’s biblical background page).

BLESS  
(10 minutes)

**Gather** in the worship space and light the candles again.

**Sing, or listen to** if possible, the song “Hebrew Benediction” (p. 20 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 2; #32 on the *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 2).

**Pray** Lead the group in the “Blessing prayer for the Season of Easter” on the resource sheet “Gathering and Blessing” (p. 5).

Distribute copies of the Lectionary Bookmarks for participants to use at home.
Lenten gathering ritual

**ONE:** The colour of Lent is purple, the colour of deep reflection on our lives.
*(Place the length of purple ribbon forming a circle in the worship space.)*

**TWO:** Lent is a journey through wilderness, a place where the Spirit can teach and renew us.
*(Place the bowl of sand inside the circle of purple ribbon.)*

**ONE:** Lent is a journey of sadness and joy, of hurt and healing.
*(Place a stone in the bowl of sand.)*

**TWO:** Lent is a time to explore the stories of our faith.
*(Place an open Bible beside the bowl of sand.)*

**ONE:** Lent is a time of discovery, accompanied by the light of God’s presence.
*(Light a tealight and place beside the stone in the bowl of sand.)*

**TWO:** Lent is a time of meditation, accompanied by the fragrance of God’s presence.
*(Light a stick of incense from the tealight and place it beside the stone in the bowl of sand.)*

**All:** Amen.
*(From the Ages 15–18 resources.)*

Blessing prayer for the Season of Easter

Alleluia! Christ is risen.
Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!

May our minds and hearts be opened,
to God’s ways of love and justice,
which empower us to speak out,
to reach beyond boundaries,
to offer welcome and hospitality,
to practice liberating love.

Alleluia! Christ is risen.
Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.
*(From the Adult resources.)*
Bible Discussion

Season of Lent Scriptures group
Read the following focus passages and discuss the questions; record some thoughts in the spaces provided.

Deuteronomy 26:1–11
Genesis 15:1–12, 17–18
Isaiah 55:1–9

John 12:1–8

This Season of Lent invites us on a journey of discovery as we explore key stories of our faith.

■ Where do you see your own journey of faith and discovery reflected in these readings or stories?

Lent is a traditional time of reflection and meditation on our relationship with God.

■ What blessings and promise do you hear in these readings?

Season of Easter Scriptures group
Read the following focus passages and discuss the questions; record some thoughts in the spaces provided.

Speak Out: Acts 5:27–32
Going Global: Acts 9:1–6, (7–20)

Beyond Boundaries: Acts 11:1–18
Liberating Love: Acts 16:16–34

The life-giving, liberating stories of Peter, Paul, Silas, Tabitha, Lydia, and a jailer can inspire us.

■ What do these stories from the book of Acts encourage you to do as a follower of the Risen Christ?

The call of the Easter season is to live in the power of the Risen Christ. Look at the titles of each week.

■ How are you, or your congregation, speaking out, reaching out beyond boundaries, offering love and hospitality, working for liberation?
Choose one poster image on which to focus...enter into the art; its colour, shape, and movement.

- Where do you see parts of your own life's journey in this image?

Look at the other poster image:

- When have you experienced complex decisions in your life of faith?

- Where do you receive sustaining energy for your journey through Lent?

- In what ways are you prepared for the life of discipleship?