

Weaving Matthew 25 through Children's, Youth, Intergenerational, and Faith-at-Home Ministries

The invitation to be a [Matthew 25 church](#) moves us to see Jesus in others. It challenges our congregations to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ in our communities and the world as we work to build congregational vitality, dismantle structural racism, and eradicate systemic poverty.

How do we intentionally weave Matthew 25 into our ministries with children and youth? How do we address issues of justice and compassion in our intergenerational ministries and at home with our families? The desire to live Matthew 25 - to feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit the prisoner - is strong within children and youth who have a natural sense of fairness and justice. Children and youth can lead our congregations in this work if we give them the space, encouragement, and opportunities to lead. If your children and youth are engaged in this work, make sure there are opportunities in worship, education, and service where the congregation can hear from and be led by the youth.

Weaving a Matthew 25 emphasis throughout children's and youth ministry includes service project opportunities (for a critical hands-on approach) as well as focusing on deeper reflection on the "least of these" and how our faith calls and moves us to respond. Part of our response is not simply learning about the issues (though a deeper understanding of the issues is a critical part of determining a faithful response), but then moving ourselves and our congregations to address them in both charitable and structural ways.

Our faith is a living faith and it should inform all of the decisions we make, how we view the world and people, and how we respond to people. That's the root of studying Matthew 25 and living as Matthew 25 people. Our faith has something to say about those who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, and in prison and how we should respond in faithful ways that 1) do not exhibit a "white savior complex" and 2) isn't focused solely on charity in a way that ignores the systems and structures that created the needs in the first place.

How does our faith call us to move in the world and how can we most faithfully do that? Matthew 25 calls us to be bold and do this work. The ideas presented in this resource are a starting point for you to adapt to your own context as you live into being Matthew 25 people and as you invite children and youth into this important work. You will see the Matthew 25 initiative's themes of congregational vitality, dismantling structural racism, and eradicating systemic poverty woven through the ideas. These ideas are simply tools to learn more about justice issues and engage in justice work in our community, nation, and the world.

Note: links to the ideas mentioned below, as well as more resources on the topic, are included in the [Resource Roadmap: Engaging Matthew 25 as a Congregation](#).

Consider Your Context

- Are you coming from a place of privilege as a congregation or do you have people in your congregation experiencing these societal realities in a more personal way? What kind of learning and what experiences need to be offered to help people consider the realities present in your own community and the world?

- In what ways is your congregation already engaged in justice work and how can you invite children and youth into this work? What committees or groups in your congregation can you partner with to make this happen?
- How can you partner with community organizations who are already faithfully engaged in justice work?
- What experiences/field trips are available in your area? What local history and context in terms of racism, poverty, and justice issues do you need to learn in order to better understand your community? Research possibilities and plan opportunities to visit, listen, and learn.
- What existing programs/ministries are in place where you can weave in a Matthew 25 emphasis? Is a new program needed or are there ways to incorporate this Matthew 25 call into what your congregation currently offers? In all of the following programmatic contexts, consider when to offer peer-based learning (age-specific) and when it would be beneficial and appropriate to offer an intergenerational experience where all ages learn from and with one another. Consider:
 - Sunday School
 - Worship
 - Youth Group
 - Mid-week programming
 - Special series - perhaps a 3 or 6-week series on these topics - consider how you might open it up to be an intergenerational experience
 - Alternative mission trip experience
 - Faith-at-Home - equipping families to engage in these conversations and topics at home

Keep in Mind

- Undergird all Matthew 25 work with **faith practices and scripture**. Our justice work comes from our faith. We are moved by what God has done in scripture and in our lives. Our practices of faith move us to respond in ways that address justice. Our call to do this work comes from listening to the Spirit's leading from scripture and in our lives through practices that open us up to God's work and lead us to view the world the way that God views the world. What scriptures in addition to Matthew 25, in both the Old and New Testaments, will inform and inspire your work? What faith practices will you commit to as a congregation to open yourselves up to the Spirit's leading?
- **Ask why:** Keep the "why" question at the forefront of your conversations. Why are people hungry? Why are people thirsty? What do they thirst for? Why are people sick? Why are people in prison? Why do these conditions exist in our society?
- There is **no one answer** for how to engage your congregation and community in this work. Each congregation knows their own context. The ideas below will help educate and engage your congregation, but you will know which ones are most appropriate for your context. It's in the learning and listening to the realities in your community that your congregation can take the next appropriate, faithful steps to address the injustice in your community. It is critical that this next step be taken. It's not enough just to learn; our faith calls us to respond.

Weaving Matthew 25 Through Children's, Youth, Intergenerational, and Faith @ Home Ministries

Intentionally weave Matthew 25 through ministries with children and youth, intergenerational, and faith at home by adapting the ideas below for your context. Note the color-coded designations below for age groups these ideas might work with best. Note that intergenerational ideas in some cases would be appropriate for youth and adults together, but not always for children.



Children



Youth









Intergenerational







Faith @ Home


What is Justice?

-  Watch [The Bible Project video on Justice](#) to explore a **biblical view of justice**.
-  Play a form of **Justice Monopoly** ([Intergroup Monopoly](#) or the [Social Justice Game](#)) to set the stage for a dialog on the rules in our society (and who sets the rules), as well as what structures and systems are in place in our society that create and perpetuate injustice today.
-  Form a relationship with a [PCUSA Mission Co-Worker](#). Find ways to support their work and hear from them on the justice issues they work with in their context. Consider becoming pen pals as you form a relationship and hear about their work and impact where they serve.
-  Commit to a 12-session **study on mission, poverty, and race** using Youth Mission Co's [Journey of Justice curriculum](#) with youth. Or consider using the [This and Faith](#) 9-session series to invigorate a discussion on justice and faith.
-  Invite the youth to do a **mission audit** of your congregation's mission work. As they learn about what faithful mission and justice work looks like, have them create an evaluation tool to use with your congregation's mission efforts. Encourage them to present their findings and recommendation to the Session or local church governing body.
-  Offer a [Pay It Forward Challenge](#) for children, youth and/or families. Invite participants to consider needs in the community and the world and then find ways to respond using seed money from the congregation.

Anti-Racism

-  Gather an intergenerational group of youth and adults to participate in the **Racial Wealth Gap Learning Simulation** (a [free resource](#) from Bread for the World). Participants will explore the connections between racial equity and hunger, poverty, and wealth. The simulation highlights the structural inequity in our nation and the impact of policies on today's hunger, income, and wealth divides.
-  Participate in a [21-Day Race Equity Challenge](#) (created by Eddie Moore, Jr. with resources compiled by Myers Park Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, NC). Invite adults and youth to spend 21 days watching, reading, listening, and noticing as they increase their understanding and move toward justice. Access children's resources on anti-racism and justice from [The Children's Community School](#) to create a similar challenge for children or use the [PCUSA's Children and Anti-Racism Toolkit](#) to put together your own materials.
-  Use the [Deep Blue Life: Faith and Culture Anti-Racism curriculum](#) (3 sessions) to talk with children about prejudice and stereotypes, empathy and curiosity, and colors and cultures.
-  Offer a [Raising White Kids book study](#) for parents/caregivers of children and youth.

Advocacy

-  Invite a **state or U.S. legislator** to come and speak about how their faith informs the political process for themselves and what individuals can do to advocate for more just legislation. Better yet, visit them at the state capital and learn more about the importance of just laws and our voice in the

process. Use the [Advocacy as Discipleship: A People Called to Witness](#) devotional to consider how God is calling you to action and reflection.



Participate in MLK marches, Black Lives Matter protests, and other community gatherings where you can **make your voice heard**. Get involved in the community planning efforts around these events.

EXPLORE MATTHEW 25

Opportunities to study Matthew 24:31-46 can help your congregation more clearly see how they can be part of building congregational vitality, dismantle structural racism, and eradicate systemic poverty. Use these hands-on, interactive activities and opportunities for service with your children and youth, as well as in intergenerational ministries and with households at home.

A full curriculum for both children and youth that incorporates the ideas below is available by emailing [Jenna Campbell](#).

I was Hungry

Consider the questions: What are the root causes of hunger? Who is hungry in our community? What obstacles do they encounter - access to food, affordability, food deserts? Lack of a job or transportation? What helps when it comes to addressing hunger?



Partner with your local food and resource center (regional food bank, food pantry, etc.).

- Invite someone to talk to your congregation about your community's particular needs and concerns when it comes to hunger. Or better yet, take a group to the organization and see how they're working to meet the needs of the food insecure in your area.
 - What percentage of the children in your community receive free and reduced meals? How many are food insecure? How accessible is food in your area?
 - Ask how your congregation can come alongside them in their work.
- Serve as a family, youth group, or an intergenerational group. Converse with and listen to the clients (if able). Make a new friend!



Make Stone Soup - each of us can identify the resources and gifts we possess and share them with others. Read Stone Soup and then prepare a compassionate meal to give to a family/person in need of food or compassionate care. If you have a compassionate meals ministry, freeze the soup to use when a compassionate meal is needed (birth of baby, death in the family, etc.). Make cards to be delivered with the meals.







Play [Freerice.com](#) - learn about the UN World Food Programme by playing the free rice game. For each correct trivia answer, grains of rice are donated to the UN World Food Programme. You can choose the level of difficulty and the categories of the game. Explore the website together!



Take a tour of a **Little Free Pantry** in your community. Ask participants to bring something to contribute. Use the time to talk about food access in your community. Consider if your church location lends itself to host a Little Free Pantry. Engage all ages in the process - building the pantry, creating signs, etc.






I was Thirsty

Consider the questions: Why is water important? Why are people thirsty? What are they thirsty for? Why do people not have access to clean water? What water issues does your community in particular need to engage?

-  Consider people's access to clean water and talk about water justice around the world. Is there someone in your area who works on **water justice issues** that you could invite to speak?
-  Play a **relay** with 5 lb buckets of water to understand more of what people around the world go through just to get water for their families.
-  **Use the [Jerry Can curriculum](#)** from the PCUSA to supplement a VBS curriculum or do a 1 or 5 session focus with children on the importance of access to clean water, as well as disaster response.
-  Focus on **stewardship of God's creation** and understanding our water systems. Contact your local water resources office to get an in-person **Enviroscape demonstration** (or watch an [Enviroscape demonstration video](#) if you don't have access to a local one) to consider water waste and water pollution.

I was a Stranger


Consider the questions: What does it feel like to be welcomed? What does it feel like to be unwelcomed? Who needs welcome in your context? What does it mean and look like to faithfully welcome others?

-  Educate on **how to best welcome others** (especially those who often do not feel welcome). Consider: how are people in our church welcomed? In our schools? In our community? What cultures/ethnicities are represented in your community? Spend time together learning about other cultures and best practices for hospitality and welcome.
-  Talk with your local homeless shelter or Habitat for Humanity group about specific needs for newly housed families. Create **Welcome Home baskets** with basic supplies for a family in a new housing situation.
-  Read the book [Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family's Journey](#) and make your own rock pictures depicting a way you can welcome others. Paint your own kindness rocks with messages of welcome that can be placed around your community.
-  Read or watch a [video](#) of the book [Four Feet, Two Sandals](#) about two girls in a refugee camp and learn about refugees in your own community and state (and organizations you can connect with that are supporting refugees).
-  **Refugee Simulation** - choose your own adventure based on decisions a Syrian refugee might have to face. Gain a better understanding of what families go through, why they're leaving, the difficult decisions they have to make, and the ways we can welcome them in our country and communities.

I was Naked (poverty)

Consider the questions: Why would someone not have enough clothes to wear? What does the word "poverty" mean? Why would cause a person to be living in poverty? What difficult choices would a person living in poverty have to make?

Explore how **small gifts** can combine to **make a difference** using these two activities:

-  Learn about and contribute to the [Fellowship of the Least Coin](#). Perhaps your Presbyterian Women's group contributes to this offering yearly - invite a member of PW to share about the

Fellowship of the Least Coin or learn more by watching this [video](#). Children might want to create coin boxes to collect coins to be donated to the Fellowship of the Least Coin or another organization.



Give to [Kiva.org](#) - Explore this site together, learning about small businesses around the world and how microlending can impact individuals, families, and communities. As a group or as a family, choose a small business to lend money to and follow the small business owner's journey. Once your loan has been repaid, start the process again and choose another small business.



Use the [Young Justice Builders Curriculum Intro to Poverty](#) (4 sessions) to introduce children to concepts of poverty, justice/injustice, empathy, and the difference between charity and justice.



Play Jenga - Label each Jenga block with a number and have a corresponding numbered list of situations people find themselves in (car breaks down, laid off from job, child is sick and you miss a day of work, washing machine breaks, paid rent late and now you owe more, etc.). Pull a Jenga piece from the structure and place it on the top. The goal is to see how many decisions you can make until the structure topples over. Have a conversation about little decisions or smaller experiences that combine to create additional hardship for people living in poverty.



Play the Spent Game at [www.playspent.org](#) - Spent is an online game about poverty and the challenges and difficult decisions those in poverty face. See if you can make it to the end of the month with money in the bank as you make decisions on employment, housing, health care, food, and other expenses.



Invite (or better yet, go to them!) local community partners who are working with those **experiencing homelessness**. Explore common issues and needs in your community and how your church can partner with them in their work.

I was Sick

Consider the questions:

What do you need when you are sick? What keeps you from being sick? What would happen if you didn't have money for medication, time off from your job to go to the doctor, or health insurance?




Create **health care kits** for a Little Free Pantry in your area - Gather supplies (or ask people to donate items) of small health care items. Place the items in small bags and place them in a Little Free pantry or have them available at a community meal. Possible items to include: band aids, sunscreen, lotion, lip balm, socks, toothbrush/toothpaste, dental floss, washcloth, soap, list of helping agencies/organizations in your community.







Do you have **health care workers** in your congregation? Invite one or two (or a panel from health care workers in various parts of the industry) to talk about the health care issues people in your community face and brainstorm possible ways your congregation can contribute to a healthy community with access to the needed health care resources.



Start a campaign at [RIP Medical Debt](#). Learn about the debilitating impact medical debt has on individuals and families in our country. Involve the whole congregation in the campaign and encourage generosity to **alleviate medical debt** at pennies on the dollar in your state. Children and youth could make a thermometer or other image that marks your campaign's goal and progress.



 Read or watch a [video](#) of [Mimi's Village: And How Basic Health Care Transformed It](#). Consider the **basic health care needs** of people everywhere.

    Consider the importance of **health care access** and barriers to health care by playing a game of **Kerplunk** or **Yeti in my Spaghetti**. Use the sticks/spaghetti to talk about access to healthcare (healthy food, medical facilities in your area, health insurance, transportation, etc.). As you take the sticks out, talk about what happens when someone doesn't have access to one or more of those things. Why is having access to health care important? What do people need to be healthy? Research what health care access looks like in your community. What barriers exist and how can the church advocate for change?



I was in Prison

Consider the questions:



What are some reasons people are in prison? Is prison always the best place for a person who has made bad decisions? What other options would help restore the person to society? What does it feel like and look like to be free?


  **Explore Restorative vs. Retributive Justice** - how does our society view justice? How does the Bible view justice?

- Introduce the concept of restorative justice as it relates to our criminal justice system through this [video](#).
- Use the [study notes](#) for The Bible Project's exploration of the theme of justice to consider the mode of restorative justice in the Exodus story (and check out their [Justice video](#) too).
- Explore the concept of restorative justice and examples of people and organizations who exhibit restorative justice in their work by watching [Flourish OKC's digital event](#) on Restorative Justice (link includes a video and a study guide/digital program).

  Enhance your understanding and awareness of **human trafficking** as modern day slavery by using the [Toolkit for Action: Modern Day Slavery](#) resource from the PCUSA's Compassion, Peace, and Justice ministry. Learn about and shop fair trade (or consider creating a fair-trade store in your community or church or create a holiday fair-trade pop-up for a season). Many fair-trade artisans are survivors of human trafficking. Shopping fair trade is one way to support survivors.

Is there a **prison ministry** in your area you can support? Contact them to find out how your congregation can support their work. Explore these two ideas:

  What opportunities for ministry/education are available for the justice-involved in your community? Does your local prison or jail have a program for inmates to complete their GED and earn their high school diploma? Create an intergenerational group of adults and high school youth to talk with community leaders about the **education needs** in your local area's prison/jail and how your congregation can partner with them.

 **Make cards** for a prison ministry in your area. Give an encouraging word to the justice-involved and let them know they are thought of and loved.

FAITH AT HOME

Many of the ideas above will translate well to conversations/activities at home with your household. In addition, consider:

As a family, **don't avoid talking about difficult issues**. Children and youth are very observant and have a very strong sense of right and wrong which makes them very naturally interested in issues of justice. The household can model talking about difficult issues by not ignoring them. Wrestle with them together as a family, even when you as the caregiver don't have the answers. Thoughtfully and authentically discuss what they are noticing together. Often this happens not in a planned "justice night" at home, but in everyday life as you pass someone with a sign on the street or volunteer together at a food bank. Use these opportunities to be in dialogue about what they're noticing, thinking, and feeling.

Model service and generosity with your family. Let your household see you caring for others and invite them along with you in that work. Make serving in the community a regular part of your family life.

Speak out - MLK marches, Black Lives Matter protests, peace vigils...wherever your community is gathering to voice peace and justice, bring your family along to participate together in a way that feels safe to you. Engage in dialog about what your children saw, experienced, and wondered about.

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