Title of Class: “God the Weaver of Our Lives: Ruth/ Dios el Tejedor de Nuestras Vidas: Ruth”

Purpose of Class: This 5 week multi-lingual and multicultural Bible Study is based on Ruth. The book of Ruth was chosen to study and learn because this book seems to speak to the lives and the situations of the congregants, who are a multi-cultural mix of Latinos, Euro-Americans, Africans, African-Americans, Asians and Asian-Americans. (Though such a group does not yet exist here at the Storm Lake UMC, I am preparing this in anticipation of what is to come as our church focuses more on multi-ethnic ministries in 2010 and beyond).

We will talk about what it means to be a Christian, and what it means to put our lives in the hands of God who holds us and weaves our lives together to display a beautiful tapestry of God’s creation and God’s kin-dom, as we together do the mission of God in Storm Lake and the world, and as God works through us to weave God’s peace and justice into all parts of our lives and world.

Our overall focus for the 5 week class will be about what it means to be rooted in the redemption of God, a redemption that is available for all people; and to flourish as God’s diverse people so that God’s love will be known to all peoples and parts of creation. Also, how God breaks down the barriers of insider/outsider in our lives to weave together God’s purpose for the world. The class sessions will take place during ordinary time, before Lent. Before each Bible study session we will share a meal together and enjoy foods from a variety of cultures represented and spend time during the meal discussing the various ways in which we live and celebrate as diverse peoples.

Describe Class Members: The context of this Bible Study is Storm Lake United Methodist Church. The class includes members who speak English, Sudanese, Spanish, Thai or Lao, but many are bilingual members of the multicultural congregation. Within the Latino members we have heritages from El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Colombia, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, and the majority are 1st generation immigrants, though some are 2nd generation and fully bilingual. The majority of the Euro-American members claim to have a German, Swedish, Norwegian and/or an Irish backgrounds, but most are 3rd generation or more and have mixed ethnic heritages from a variety of Western European countries, a few of the Euro-Americans are bilingual, as well. The African members are from Sudan and Ethiopia and almost all are 1st generation who came to the United States as
refugees. Many of the Sudanese members are bilingual, but almost all the Ethiopian members are in the process of learning English. The African-American church members have almost all come to Storm Lake recently from Chicago, though a couple have come from Michigan. The Asian and Asian-American members are mostly Thai and Lao. The majority of the Thai and Lao came as refugees more 20 years ago to the United States, and most are bilingual. The Asian-Americans are their children and are fully bilingual. Recently Storm Lake has been home to growing number of Burmese refugees, the majority who speak Karen, and while some know Burmese, the majority are all learning English. The age range is from early twenties to mid-seventies, an adult education class/Bible Study. The members come with varying socio-political mindsets, ideas, and theologies.

Because the class is so diverse, the handouts (found below for each session) will be available in the preferred language, and will be ready ahead of time. When we read Bible verses aloud, they will be read aloud in at least two languages each time. Sufficient time with be allowed for translation and clarification at each session point of our session, and we will have assigned translators for each of our sessions, to guide and enhance our discussion. When we open in prayer, we will have a different volunteer each week, and when we close together in spoken prayer each person will be invited to pray aloud in the language of their choice.

Goals (General Statements concerning what the teacher wants to achieve and what the teacher wants the students to achieve.)

1 To refresh all of our understandings/connections with the Bible and gain new directions for our lives through the study of Ruth.
2 As the facilitator, to use Bible commentaries to find ideas to share about how - Ruth has affected other people, and offer a clearer understanding of Ruth in its socio-economic-historical context, and how it speaks to our present socio-economic context.
3 And to help participants recognize the ways God works through our lives, how God weaves together our lives and journeys and creates a beautiful community and world, and to help persons become active in the family of God by building relationships and working together to live as the body of Christ in Storm Lake and the world.

Objectives (Measurable, achievable and specific statements on how to achieve the goal)
1 Using primarily the teaching method of verbal-linguistic, we will dialogue about verses from each chapter of Ruth; some dialogue will be guided by questions prepared by me, but other dialogue will come for the organic readings of the participants.

2 There will be time for intra-personal and inter-personal reflection and dreaming, through silent reading of the text, and through questions that will guide us to understand our faith in the context of inter-personal relationships that are being built multi-culturally.

3 To grow and learn together through prayer (both opening and closing), through theological/spiritual dialogue, and through study of Ruth, about what it means for us individually and collectively be in the hands of God who weaves our lives together.

4 To develop relationships multi-culturally and to learn the stories of people we do not know well and to learn more about cultures and foods that are new us as we recognize how God weaves our lives together.

**Bibliography** – I have used various Biblical commentaries and articles to aid me in the creation of this Bible Study.

- **Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church**: 2008, ©2008 The United Methodist Publish House, Nashville, TN
- **Law, Eric. The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in Multicultural Community.** Chalice Press, St. Louis, MO, 1993
- **McKenna, Megan. Not Counting Women and Children: Neglected Stories from the Bible.** Orbis Books, 1994
GUIDE FOR “GOD THE WEAVER OF OUR LIVES: RUTH”/
“DIOS EL TEJEDOR DE NUESTRAS VIDAS: RUTH”

1st Dinner Together: Central American Food--Papusas (Salvadorian Filled Tortillas), Tamales (Filled Corn Masa), Black Bean Soup & Fruit) and Caribbean Food –Cuban Shrimp Soup, Arroz y Habichuelas (Puerto Rican style rice and beans), plantains, stewed Dominican Beef, and Arroz con Coco (Rice with Coconut dessert)

1st Bible Study Lesson: Introduction and Ground Rules for Dialogue/Community Building

1) Opening Prayer

2) Summary of the Book of Ruth (Volunteers to read in English and Spanish and Sudanese)

   The book of Ruth has no certain date that can be attributed to it. And different versions of the Jewish and Christian Bibles place this book in different places. It is a narrative story that seems to be a parable for the readers of the time and for us today. Supposedly Ruth was written when there was no king in Israel, between the time when the judges judged and the beginning of the Davidic line of rule of Israel. Ruth is the outsider that God uses to bring redemption to Naomi and it seems to Israel as well. “If the story told in the book of Ruth is to be redemptive for the people of God, then the people of God must identify themselves with one who is redeemed. The story of Ruth becomes a story of redemption for Israel only if Israel can be persuaded to believe that the redemptive efforts made by God on Naomi’s behalf will be made by God on Israel’s behalf as well.” As we engage the story of Ruth we must remember that it is parable of God’s faithfulness to God’s people, rather than the faithfulness of God’s people. It is about grace rather than works, but the story of Ruth is also about how God works in and through all peoples to accomplish God’s purpose in the world, not just the “chosen people”. The word “redeemed” in Hebrew is used more than 23 times in this short book of the Bible, and we see the redemptive work of God taking place, and in turn are invited to see how God is working redemptively to accomplish God’s purpose in our lives and world today.

3) An opportunity to write down initial thoughts, reactions, questions, comments, etc. to be saved for later on in the Bible Study

In an effort to ensure that all are the same level and all are invited to participate equally we will practice “mutual invitation”, when we break the class into 3 groups of 8-10 people to have dialogue. We will have the same groups for all 5 weeks in order to strengthen relationships within the group. The groups will have a mix of people, in order to enhance the dialogue to be as multiculturally as possible.

“In order to ensure that everyone who wants to share has an opportunity to speak, we will proceed tonight and each Bible Study in the following way: The leader or a designated person will share first. After that person has spoken, he or she then invites another to share. Whom you invite does not need to be the person next to you. After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another person to share. If you don’t want to say anything, simple say “pass” or “pass for now” and proceed to invite another to share. We will do this until everyone has been invited.”

Because we are doing this Bible Study multi-lingually, after each person shares the assigned person will translate what has been shared, and the person who just shared will then proceed to invite another person to share. When asking someone to share we will first name the person and then say, “I invite you” in English or in another language. And if that person chooses to pass, they may respond “Pass” in English or in another language.

It is my hope that utilizing the process of mutual invitation that we will ensure as much as possible that everyone has the opportunity to speak who would like to, and that everyone will become aware they are a part of a dialogue as they invite someone to speak and be able to listen fully to those who are sharing.

5) Introductions (Name, Ethnic Background, Time in Storm Lake, Family, Why UMC, Biggest Hope and Biggest Fear in Life, Something we do not know about you)

For this opening session, we will focus our energy on building relationships and beginning to get to know each other in hopes that our dialogue for this Bible Study can be more open. Because we will be doing this Bible Study multi-lingually, we will allow time this session and each session for translation. Participants will be invited to share in whatever language they prefer, even if they are bilingual, and we will have assigned translators for each section (including myself).

For the time of introductions I will invite people to share about themselves
within the categories I listed above, and allow a brief time for questions after each person introduces themselves. For the visual learners we will be putting the names, biggest hopes and fears, and what we do not know about each person up on the wall (written bilingually) as a way to keep learning each other’s names and stories throughout our Bible Study together. After each person has shared, there will be a brief translation, and then the person who shared will invite the next person to share by using the model of “mutual invitation”

6) Discussion of Topics for Four Weeks and Small Group Assignments for the Bible Study

- Chapter 1-The Turns in Life’s Journeys
- Chapter 2-The Knowns and Unknowns of Life
- Chapter 3-Uncovering and Recovering Actions
- Chapter 4-The Roots of our Redemption

Closing-Prayer of Thanksgiving for the opportunity to hear so many stories of so many amazing sisters and brothers in Christ and for all of the God-given dreams we each have, Prayer of Supplication for all of the fears and concerns of our hearts and community, and Prayer for Openness to continue to learn more about each other through this Bible study and through creating friendships with those who do not yet know well.
2nd Dinner Together: Scandinavian Food (Köttbullar (Swedish Meatballs), Plättar (Swedish Pancakes), Norwegian Lutefisk and Lefse (Fish and Potato Pancakes), and Sandbakkel (Almond Cookies) and German Food—Bratwurst, Sauerkraut, Potato Dumplings and Rote Grütze (red fruit pudding)

2nd Bible Study Lesson: Ruth, Chapter 1-The Turns in Life’s Journey/Las Vueltas en el Camino de la Vida

1) Opening Prayer
2) Silent Reading of Chapter 1
3) An opportunity to write down initial thoughts, reactions, questions, comments, etc. to be saved for later on in the Bible Study
4) Opening Scene-Volunteers to read aloud verses 1:1-5

Discussion of the word and significance Moabite/Moab-Moab is the land where Naomi and Elimalech had fled to in order to escape the famine in Bethlehem. The Moabites were people who did not worship the God of Israel. “It has been suggested that Ruth is a subversive parable that was written specifically to undermine the authority of priests who were trying to “purify” Israel by ostracizing foreign women. Though there are xenophobic attitudes expressed by Biblical authors (Ezra and Nehemiah) not all biblical authorities expressed the same sentiments.

Questions-Do you harbor xenophobic or racist feelings towards those who are different than you? Why? Do you feel comfortable listening to the story of Ruth in a way that can be applied to our current socio-cultural context here in Storm Lake and here in the US? Who do you feel should be accepted in our community and church? For everyone, what reasons did your family immigrate to the US or have to come to the US?

2 Volunteers to read aloud verses 8-9. Discussion of the word hesed (v8) Hesed is considered an essential part of the nature of God and is frequently used to describe God’s acts of unmerited mercy and grace. But v.8 also implies that human beings are also able to do or show hesed to one another.

Questions-Do you feel like you are capable for showing” hesed” to those whom you may not think deserve loving kindness and mercy? Do you feel you are capable of receiving “hesed” from God and neighbor? What practices of “hesed” are a part of your cultural and/or familial practices?

3 Discussion of the word turn (found in v 1:6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12 and more), a version of the word “turn” is found 15 times in the book of Ruth and 12 of
those times in the first chapter. It is translated as turn, return, go back, and brought back. The Hebrew word for “turn” can be used figuratively to describe mental, emotional or spiritual reversals. It can refer to apostasy (turning away from God) and also repentance.

0 Questions- What turns do you see in this 1st chapter of Ruth? What turns have you had your life geographically (moves, migrations, etc)? What turns have you had in your life emotionally/mentally? What turns have you had your life spiritually? What different people were there for you during those turns?

4 Volunteers to read aloud 1:14-15: Orpah and Ruth make two very different decisions even though Naomi pleaded with both of them to remain in Moab. Women in our society today still choose different lifestyles, regardless of what society, culture or even religion dictate; some choose to be a homemaker and often a full-time parent, while others choose to have a full time career outside while caring for a family and household. The Biblical author of Ruth does not view Orpah poorly and neither should we. “Orpah’s journey home helps us to reconsider the silent and silenced among us, the women who stand both on the threshold of the women’s movement and the threshold of traditional practices and beliefs”

1 Questions- What has your culture/family raised you to believe about the role of women? Have you “turned” from those beliefs or made them your own? How can we as the church do a better job of respecting women who live diverse lifestyles?

5 Volunteers to read aloud v 19-20- When Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem, Naomi instructs the people she knows there to call her Mara (meaning bitter) rather than Naomi (meaning pleasant).

2 Questions- What in life has made you want to feel bitter? To whom do you feel bitter? How do you cope and/or let go of the bitterness?

Closing-Prayer of Thanksgiving to the God has been with each of us through all of the different kinds of turns in our life, Prayer of Supplication offering to God all that we are bitter about, and Prayer for Openness that we can continue our journeys of always becoming who God wants us to be, no matter what the world wants us to be.
**3rd Dinner Together:** Asian Cuisine—from Thailand: Pad Thai, Tofu Curry Squash, Tom Yang Gung (*Seafood Soup*); from Laos: Larp beef (*minced beef salad*), Mork pa Noy (*stuffed small fish*), Banana Sweet; from Burma: Pumpkin Soup with Basil and Mandalay Meeshay Noodles

**3rd Bible Study Lesson:** Ruth, Chapter 2- The Knowns and Unknowns of Life/Los Conocidos y Desconocidos de la Vida

1) Opening Prayer

2) Silent Reading of Chapter 2

3) An opportunity to write down initial thoughts, reactions, questions, comments, etc. to be saved for later on in the Bible Study

4) Volunteers to read aloud 2:2-3: This text reveals to us a practice of Hebrew people that Ruth (as a “foreigner”) knew about, that the Israelite landowners were forbidden to strip their fields completely for a harvest. Harvesters were supposed to miss some of the harvest to be saved for the use by the “poor” and the “resident alien” who had no land of their own to cultivate. This is one of the practices of the Hebrew people (still used today) to help create the shalom community. Do our current economic practices honor the disposed and powerless in our society, or do our current economic practices honor the rich and powerful? This text seems to remind us of our Biblical roots!

3 Questions—What kind of practices exist in the US/Storm Lake today that reflect this Biblical practice of caring for the “poor” and the “resident alien”? What could change in our social practices to make this Biblical practice more widespread? How would such a practice affect the way you are currently living (better your current life situation, cause you to not keep so much for yourself or business, etc.)

6 Volunteers to read aloud 2: 10-11—“Why have I found such favor in your sight as a foreigner?” is actually a pun in the originally Hebrew, “Why did you recognize me when I am who is not recognized (a foreigner)?” Boaz reveals that he knows/has been told, and understands that Ruth had to forsake the people and places she knew so well in order to come and live with a people and place she did not know.

4 Questions—What does our Christian tradition teach us about recognizing people who society chooses not to recognize? What
New Testament scripture verses do we find these teachings in?
For those who have called the US/Storm Lake home for while
how do you see Christ in newcomers?  For those who have just
begun to call the US/Storm Lake home, how do you see Christ in
the old-timers?

Volunteers to read aloud 2:12-13-I once heard a speaker say about the
book of Ruth, that the greatest lesson he learned was that you have to be
careful to whom you say “May God bless you”, for you be may the person
God uses to bless that person whom you blessed”.  Though this section of
the story of Ruth reveals some of it hierarchal and patriarchal undertones,
on a broader level these verses reveal that Boaz assumes that Ruth’s
future is in the hands of the Lord.  And Ruth’s reply subtly suggests that
the Lord may be waiting for Boaz to act!  So sometimes when we simply
say in passing to someone, “May God bless you”, we had better be open
to be conduits for God’s blessing.

Questions-How do you allow yourself to be a conduit for God to
bless others?  On a personal level?  As a part of our church?
On a systemic level?

Volunteer to read aloud 2:19-20-“While the narrator does not explicitly
say that Ruth’s” happening” to find Boaz’s field was a part of God’s plan,
members of audience may conclude that such happenings only seem
accidental to human eyes.  For Ruth and Boaz it was an accident, but not
for God.  Naomi’s exclamation in 2:20 can also be taken as the perception
of God’s providence at work.  God the weaver of our lives, is it both a
part of the divine plan and human agency.  As United Methodist we
believe, “the outreach of the church springs from the working of the
Spirit.  As United Methodists, we respond to that working through a
connectional polity based upon mutual responsiveness and accountability.
Connectional ties bind us together in faith and service in our global
witness, enabling faith to become active in love and intensifying our
desire for peace and just in the world”

Questions-How have you seen God at work in your life, in our
community, and in our world?  How have you been the hands
and feet of God to others in our community and world? How do
you feel you do in participating in our connectional system in
faith and service as we together are global witnesses?

The overall theme of Chapter 2 raises questions for us as readers to what
the dynamics were of insider vs. outsider in Israel, as well as in our
community today.  Who is foreign and who is not?  How do outsiders
become insiders? In our Biblical story “Naomi comes from and Ruth immigrates to a community in which foreigners traditionally were viewed with suspicion, as a potential source of temptation to sin. If Israel had an official “immigration policy” in the time of the judges, undoubtedly the Moabites would have been listed as undesirable.”

In modern times, we are in the midst of ongoing immigration debates and many US people say that feel burdened by the coming of immigrants, even if these immigrants profess undying belief to the same God we do (like Ruth did for Naomi). We also hear the stories of many immigrants and refugees here in our congregation and community, many who have struggled because of our unjust immigration system, and some whose families have been torn about because of how the immigration laws stand now. In this very room people have been impacted differently by our immigration system and we have a variety of opinions on what to do about immigration.

Ruth “assimilates” for the most part into Israeli culture, which we call the idea of the “melting pot” today. But I do not believe God ever calls us to give up who we are, even when we migrate to a different place, and that we are all called to live multi-culturally, rather than lose ourselves to the dominant culture. Perhaps this “parable of Ruth” speaks to the dominant majority in our church and in Storm Lake today. The “dominant” or “insider” group needs to be reminded that they cannot survive nor accomplish the mission to which they are called without the active assistance of the “foreigners” in their midst.

Questions-Where do you feel you stand in our culture/community today? Are you an outsider/insider? Where do you feel you stand in our church today? What changes (if any) do you need to make to be more inclusive? What changes do you believe our community and our church need to make to be more inclusive, to live as the people of Pentecost?

Closing-Prayer of Thanksgiving for the many amazing ways we see God at work in our church, community and in the lives of individual church members, Prayer of Supplication for all those who suffering in our community and country because of immigration laws that are oppressive, and for all those world-wide who suffer unjust at the hands of oppressive systems and Prayer for Openness to be agents of God in the ways that God is calling each of us to bless God and bless the world
4th Dinner Together: African Cuisine—from Sudan: Fool Meddemas (Fava Beans), Lamb Khartoum Soup, Maschi (Stuffed Tomato with Beef) and Crème Carmela; from Ethiopia: Injera (Bread), Vegetable Alecha (Stew), Doro Wat (Chicken with Hard-Boiled Eggs)

4th Bible Study Lesson: Ruth, Chapter 3- Uncovering and Recovering Actions/Los Acciones Que Descubrir Y Recuperar

1) Opening Prayer

2) Silent Reading of Chapter 3

3) An opportunity to write down initial thoughts, reactions, questions, comments, etc. to be saved for later on in the Bible Study

4) Volunteers to read aloud 3:10-13. The term a “worthy woman” in Hebrew hayil is the feminine equivalent of what Boaz was called in was called in 2:1. Boaz might be saying that Ruth’s first marriage (to Mahlon) had given her enough credentials to marry a worthy man. But the term “worthy woman” can also be used because she has already earned a reputation for good works. The term “worthy woman”/hayil in Hebrew can also mean one who has procreative power, so since Ruth is packed with so many puns, it is possible, that Boaz was also telling her that he believes she is worthy because she can give him a large family.

7 Questions-Who do we consider to be worthy and why? What do you think the impact that Boaz publicly pronouncing that Ruth is a worthy woman had on the Israelite community? How can we speak up/act out today for those we know are worthy in God’s eyes?

10 Volunteers to read aloud 3:1-In many ways Naomi’s future is tied up with the future of Ruth’s, and vice versa. The book of Ruth tells the story of how these two women conspired (which means breath together) for their lives. Ruth and Naomi conspire together for their future hope. Boaz takes care of the widow, of the “foreigner” in his midst, and in so doing shows his faithfulness to the God of Israel., and is the faithful acknowledgement that Boaz knows his future is tied up with those who are outcast in society, and he choose to “conspire/breath together” for the future hope of all involved. If we “conspire/breath together” for the future hope, of not only our personal selves, but for the world, wouldn’t we be kingdom-bringers?
Questions-Do you have a faithful friend or family member that has conspired with you the way Ruth and Naomi did for each other? How do you show your faithfulness to God today? In what ways do you feel called to make the kingdom of God a reality in this world?

11 Volunteers to read aloud 3:4-7-The storyteller uses “uncover”, “feet” and “lie down” both in Naomi’s instructions and in the description of Ruth’s action (vv. 4-7). As you may have already noticed in Hebrew the words usually have multiple meanings. The word “lie down” can have an innocent manner, but it also has sexual overtones. The word feet most likely means lower body and also has sexual overtones. The word “uncover” has both sexual overtones, but also can have the religious understanding of revelation. The word remove or uncover, is often used to juxtapose with the actions of redeeming or recovering. The physical aspects of life are intertwined with the spiritual in this story and in many Biblical stories.

Questions- How do you feel about dealing with this story, other Biblical stories, and your own life, on multiple levels? How have spiritual experiences been tied up with physical experiences with you (sickness, healing, etc)? Do you feel we need to spend more time talking about the different sexual practices found in the Bible?

12 Volunteers to read aloud 3:16-18-There is no direct talk of God or divine agency in this chapter, but looking through the eyes of faith we may see God at work through this action. On the threshing floor at midnight, Ruth repeats Boaz’s words back to him, as she did in the gleaning scene. She hints the shelter under Boaz’s wings might be the shelter under the Lord’s wings. In other words, Ruth “challenges” Boaz to be the occasion of divine blessing in her life. It seems that sometime in our own lives we need more than one reminder that we are invited to take an active role in making the dreams God has given us for life a reality. And sometimes like Boaz we need to be reminded of how to practice hesed. The loving kindness (hesed) of Ruth, and the loving kindness of Boaz towards Ruth, transforms Naomi’s life from being empty to full, and the hesed practiced in this Biblical story provides room for hope becoming a reality for all involved. We also learn from the Biblical story in Ruth that “hesed” alone allows us to become servants of God, and that people like Ruth (a foreigner and widow from Moabite) can do the work of the God of Israel, regardless of her ethnicity or background.

10 Questions-How do you explicitly and implicitly see God at work in your own life? How have you challenged someone or been challenged to be the occasion of divine blessing in this life? How
do we each do better at recognizing those who are different from
as servants of our God, as practitioners of “hesed”, as bringers of
the kingdom of God?

Closing-Prayer of Thanksgiving for the faithful friends and family members who have been with us through the difficult times of life, Prayer of Supplication for those who are not being treated as they worthy children of God that they are, and Prayer for Openness to be bringers of the Kingdom of God/practitioners of hesed.
5th Dinner Together: Potluck, United Methodist Style

5th Bible Study Lesson: Ruth, Chapter 4-The Roots of our Redemption/Las Raíces de Nuestra Redención

1) Opening Prayer

2) Silent Reading of Chapter 1

3) An opportunity to write down initial thoughts, reactions, questions, comments, etc. to be saved for later on in the Bible Study

4) Volunteers to read aloud 4:9-11a- Boaz acquires the sandal as symbol that he has purchased the property of what used to belong to Naomi’s now deceased husband. This passage may make us angry in that it appears that Ruth is being bought like she was a piece of land, because we are a part of a denomination that believes in the full rights of women in all parts of our world and church. The Hebrew word here used to describe how Boaz “acquired” Ruth, is also a Hebrew word that means redemption. But for the point of this passage it is probably the reality that Boaz did acquire Ruth, because that was part of the patriarchal and hierarchal ways of the Israelite community. The passage we just read aloud states that the people declared that “we are witnesses” which made Boaz’s acquiring of Ruth and the land legal.

11 Questions- Why does our denomination stand for the full rights of women in the church and in the world? What legalities do we have to go through when we are acquiring land and other material possessions today? Why do you think the word acquire and redemption have similar meanings in the Hebrew?

13 Volunteers to read aloud 4:11b-12- The same collective group of people that made Boaz’s acquirement of the land and Ruth legal, immediately bless their marriage in a threefold way. First, they bless Ruth as Boaz’s bride. Second, the bless Boaz as a giver of offspring. Third, they bless the “house” of Ruth and Boaz, that it may be a family that brings blessing to the people of Israel. “House” means lineage and descendents, and we as Christians believe that “house” of Ruth and Boaz was blessed because they were part of the lineage of Jesus, and are a part of our spiritual heritage, and teach us how to live as faithful followers of God.

12 Questions- What practices do we have today to bless each other?
Do you feel that our practices of blessing include diverse peoples? How do we see others as part of the faithful “household” of God, as faithful followers of Jesus Christ?

14 Volunteers to read aloud 4:13-15- The storyline of Ruth is not completely patriarchal because we also learn that when Ruth and Boaz give birth to a son, Obed, “the son is to be valued because of his mother! This child will be a blessing because your daughter-in-law, who loves you, has borne him, and she means more than seven sons!” And as we read of how Ruth flourished in Israel, we must remember that if we were reading this story in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, when “foreigners” were outcast, that redemption comes for Ruth and Naomi because “foreigners and outcasts” were embraced into the covenant community of Israel. We are taught in this story from Ruth that we do not know who will be part of God’s plan for redemption, it could be anyone!

13 Questions-How have your children or children in your life been a blessing to you and to our world? Have you experienced God’s redemption in unexpected ways in your life? How does the story of Ruth speak to you about being open (remembering the current motto of our church is Open Hearts, Open Doors, Open Minds)?

15 Volunteers to read aloud 4:18-22-This is the family tree of Ruth and Boaz, the genealogy of our spiritual mothers and fathers. Naomi went from being bitter and empty to being full of life, and the women of Bethlehem praise God with a collective voice in 4:14, and it seems that it is clear to them that God has provided Naomi with a “redeemer”. The heart of the Biblical story of Ruth, is that human beings personify and communicate the loving-kindness (hesed) of God to one another. Everything that God gives, including a child, comes through human interaction. We might be able to conclude that God’s love embodied in humankind gave birth to the messianic line.

Ruth’s faithfulness to a God who she did not grow up worshipping is an essential part of this story also, and Ruth has much to teach us even today about what it means to reflect the faithfulness of God in our daily lives and actions. Ruth’s faithfulness is far more important than her ethnicity or status in society. It is the faith of people like Ruth (and and Rahab and Tamar), that reminds us that our God is faithful to us, and is faithful in God’s offer of redemption to ALL people.

14 Questions-In what ways do we each need to change in order to more fully personify and communicate the loving-kindness (hesed) of our God? How do we see each human interaction as an
opportunity to do the will of God? How has God been faithful to each of us? How have each of us been faithful to God?

16 Some people today connect deeply with Ruth because there are so many in our society who are outcast still today. Women, immigrants, ethnic minorities, widows, children, the poor and more. Renita Weems, an African American theologian, states that still today she sees her life experience reflected in that of Ruth. That she is one of the “unelected woman”, but in seeing one’s own reality mirrored in the character of Ruth should assure those who feel like Moabites in their own contexts today that God does not choose agents of redemptions according to human standards or expectations of society today.

Sometimes when we think we are the “chosen ones” of God, we exclude those who are not like us, those who are “the others”. God reminds us in the story of Ruth (and in so many other ways), that “the other” is often the one who will help make God’s redemption a reality in our own lives and in our world today. We should all be challenged by the story of Ruth, but those of us who have power in our society and church today should be especially challenged, to see Ruth reflected in “the other”, however we currently define “the other”.

15 Questions-Who are the “Moabites” in the eyes of our community of faith, of our community? Who do we despise on the basis of their origins or blame for the decline of our morals? To whom do we deny admittance into the church and into our lives? Who do you feel like God is using to bring redemption to your own life, and to our community? Are you constantly looking to those who you consider “the other”?

Closing-Prayer of Thanksgiving for the people of the United Methodist Church for how they fought and continue to fight for the full inclusion of all people (including woman, ethnic minorities, and more) in our church and world, and to God for God’s unending faithfulness and gift of redemption that we receive as free gifts Prayer of Supplication for the ways we each need to change to respect the dignity and worth of all people and for all those who we have individually and collectively denied access to the household of God (the church), and Prayer for Openness to truly be the people and the church of Open Hearts, Open Doors, Open Minds and to see the redemption of God coming in “the other”