

**reCONNECT**  
**prayers – presence – gifts - service**

**Planning Guide**

Hyde Park United Methodist  
500 W. Platt St. Tampa, FL 33606  
813.253.5388 fax 813.251.3145  
[info@hydeparkumc.org](mailto:info@hydeparkumc.org) [www.hydeparkumc.org](http://www.hydeparkumc.org)

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## Introduction

Welcome to reCONNECT, a churchwide program to connect people to God, to each other, and to the world around them. The Rev. Dr. James A. Harnish and the leadership team at Hyde Park United Methodist in Tampa, Florida, share this program with you in hopes that you and your congregation will find the unity, energy, and connection that Hyde Park experienced in worship and study.

The team designed a congregation-wide program that would “reconnect” people with God’s power through prayer, God’s presence in worship, God’s generosity in giving, and God’s transformation of the world through our service. reCONNECT reaches the congregation engaging people in worship, small groups, fellowship events, and opportunities for witness and service.

Dozens of staff and laity were involved in creating the resource, planning worship and activities, and leading small groups. The reCONNECT leadership team worked with the existing worship planning teams to align weekly worship themes with small-group study and other activities for the week. For example, on the week focusing on prayer, individuals read that chapter in the reCONNECT workbook and then discussed it in their small groups. During the next Sunday’s worship, the message of the sermon and the entire worship focus was on prayer. After worship, the team offered a “Prayer Sunday” expo in the fellowship hall in which members could explore different types of prayer at different tables and learn about prayer ministries at the church.

The results for the congregation were dramatic. During the fall of 2008, the leadership team distributed over 1,000 reCONNECT workbooks. Nearly 700 adults were involved in small groups. There was a significant increase in commitments for both financial stewardship and service.

Martha Chamberlain, Director of Operations and Communications at Hyde Park United Methodist says, “reCONNECT was powerfully unifying within a diverse congregation. All of us were on the same page—literally and figuratively—with the messages of

reCONNECT. The process enabled a large number of people to use their gifts in the making the entire experience happen.”

Pastor James Harnish says that new relationships were built. “People learned to study Scripture and pray together. New people found a place to serve. It helped people see financial stewardship as one part of a whole life of discipleship.”

**From the Rev. Dr. James A. Harnish:**

Dear Friends,

We hope that reCONNECT will be a resource of reenergizing the life of any church to deeper commitments of prayers, presence, gifts, and service. We hope that the witness of what God is doing at Hyde Park will be a source of encouragement and strength for other congregations.

God has been so good to us that we can't help but want to share anything we have to help other churches become all that they can be. We have been blessed by the witness of others and look forward to sharing our story with many more.

**Jim Harnish**

**The Rev. Dr. James A. Harnish**

## Who Is Hyde Park United Methodist?

*Transforming lives, creating Christian community, and healing our city  
and the world.*

Hyde Park United Methodist is a diverse body of believers united in the beliefs and values we share, committed to our mission of Making God's Love Real. The church, established in 1899, has approximately 2,500 members. Its Mission Statement describes Hyde Park as a community of people *committed* to Jesus Christ, *empowered* by the Holy Spirit, *united* in the love of God, and *called* to make that love real to others.

The team of laity and staff involved in developing and launching the reCONNECT program at Hyde Park includes the Rev. Dr. James A. Harnish, senior pastor; Martha Chamberlain, director of operations and communications; John Barolo, director of adult education; Eric Johnson, director of media and worship arts; Justin LaRosa, director of equipping ministries; and Deborah Richards and Kendra Lee, lay writing team.

Read more about Hyde Park United Methodist at [www.hydeparkumc.org](http://www.hydeparkumc.org).

## Timeline

reCONNECT began on the first Sunday in September, 2008, at Hyde Park United Methodist and concluded with a Celebration Sunday on October 12. The basic study and worship schedule for the fall program was:

<i>August 31–September 6</i>	Individuals begin reading the daily readings in Week 1 of the workbook. Small groups hold their first meeting.
<i>Sunday, September 7</i>	<b>Longing for Connection</b>
<i>September 7–13</i>	Individuals and groups are reading Week 2: Prayers.
<i>Sunday, September 14</i>	<b>Prayers: Our Connection With God’s Power</b>
<i>September 14–20</i>	Individuals and groups are reading Week 3: Presence.
<i>Sunday, September 21</i>	<b>Presence: Our Connection With God’s People</b>
<i>September 21–27</i>	Individuals and groups are reading Week 4: Gifts.
<i>Sunday, September 28</i>	<b>Gifts: Our Connection to God’s Generosity</b>
<i>September 28–October 4</i>	Individuals and groups are reading Week 5: Service.
<i>Sunday, October 5</i>	<b>Service: Our Connection to God’s Transformation</b>
<i>October 5–11</i>	Individuals and groups are reading Week 6: Commitment: Making the Connections.
<i>Sunday, October 12</i>	<b>Celebration: Rejoicing in the Connection</b>

The promotion of the reCONNECT program began in July with banners and posters around the church campus, emails to membership, and announcements in the bulletin. Early communication—whether from the pulpit, weekly paper, in Sunday school classes, or the bulletin—is important in order to include everyone in this opportunity to reconnect: active members, frequent visitors, and lapsed members.

Recruiting leaders for your small groups as well as volunteers to drive publicity, hospitality, and any special events is also very important to accomplish early.

A possible schedule could be:

Six weeks before the launch: Post signs and posters around the church about the upcoming event.  
Include an article in the church paper, on the website, or in a weekly bulletin.  
Recruit leaders for small groups who will study the reCONNECT workbook together. Try several different times during the week, day and evening, to include the most participation.

Four weeks before the launch: Begin making weekly announcements in services.  
Start sign-ups for small groups.  
Post information on your church website.

Two weeks before the launch: Make workbooks available for members. You may print and bind the workbooks like Hyde Park did or you can also email the file to each member and have households print their own workbooks.

*\* Fund-raising idea: A youth group project could be to print and bind workbooks for those who would like the help.*

The Sunday before the launch: Encourage and remind everyone to start their devotional reading and study today.  
Post small-group times and meeting places.

## **Worship**

Worship is the time for the whole congregation to connect to each other and to God's presence. At Hyde Park, the regular worship team met with the group planning the reCONNECT emphasis to find opportunities for special activities and emphasis in worship.

In worship at Hyde Park, the reCONNECT team combined the special emphasis in sermon and music with simple video testimonies from members and after church activities. The text of the sermons by the Rev. Dr. James A. Harnish and graphics for use on PowerPoint or other projection can be found at:

<http://www.hydeparkumc.org/worship/resources/reconnect>

1st Sunday

### **Longing for Connection**

Psalm 63; Acts 1:1-14

2nd Sunday

### **Prayers: Our Connection With God's Power**

Luke 11:1-13

- Video Testimony on Prayer (actual text of the Hyde Park video is found in the reCONNECT workbook, pages 40-41)
- After service event: Prayer expo offering information on styles of personal prayer and the prayer ministries of the church.
- The reCONNECT team started a prayer chain through the courtyard creating links from prayer requests collected after service.

3rd Sunday

### **Presence: Our Connection With God's People**

Acts 2:43-47

- Video Testimony on Presence (actual text of the Hyde Park video is found in the reCONNECT workbook, pages 58-59)

4th Sunday

**Gifts: Our Connection to God's Generosity**

Acts 5:1-11; 2 Corinthians 8:9-15; 9:7-8

- Video Testimony on Gifts (actual text of the Hyde Park video is found in the reCONNECT workbook, pages 78-79)
- After service event: The adult education and small-group team provided hospitality and promoted the many opportunities for group study and fellowship.

5th Sunday

**Service: Our Connection to God's Transformation**

Ephesians 4:1-16

- Video Testimony on Service (actual text of the Hyde Park video is found in the reCONNECT workbook, page 106)
- After service event: The Missions team provided hospitality after service. The team shared the catalog of opportunities to serve both in the church and in missions in the local community and around the world and were available to talk to people about the many ways to help, serve, and support missions.

6th Sunday

**Celebration: Rejoicing in the Connection**

Psalms 147; Acts 5:33-42

- During worship, a group of members celebrated the transformations in their own lives by offering

“cardboard testimonies.” Each held up a small handwritten poster board with a phrase that described himself/herself “before” and “after” (e.g. “lost and alone” and “found in Christian community”).

## **Use of the Internet and Media**

During the reCONNECT program, Hyde Park set up a special reCONNECT section on their church blog, HydeParkSpeaks.org. Here staff and lay leadership posted short messages on the week's topics and invited members to respond.

The Internet can be a great tool for connection and interaction for some communities. Whether it is on the church site; on a special, temporary Facebook account; or another means, finding a place to respond during weekly readings can be a great addition.

At Hyde Park, a church member was recorded reading aloud the daily readings which were then posted as audio files on the church website and made available on CD. This was particularly appreciated by one of the church's oldest and most faithful members who could no longer read due to failing eyesight but who was able to participate fully with the audio.