

General Synod 35

Banned Books Service Project

"Our rights are being taken away. Our histories are being taken away and rewritten. The more that we can stay aware and alert and intellectually stimulated through the truth of our history and humanity, the freer we become. Church is a place where we can do that, especially in the United Church of Christ."
— Rev. Dr. Lorraine Cenicerros, Conference Minister, Kansas Oklahoma Conference

"This project is so exciting to me because everyone needs access to ideas and information in order to be faithful members of their community. Banning books is an attempt to prevent people from learning and growing—an attempt to limit their ability to be the people God is calling them to be."
— Rev. Mary W. Nelson, Transitional Conference Minister, Missouri Mid-South Conference

What's so important about Banned Books?

Despite decades of activism aimed at desegregation, the statistics all tell us that in the United States, we still largely live in a segregated society. In our daily lives, we are most likely to cross paths with and be in relationship with people with whom we share experiences and identities. Social media algorithms, search engines, and web platforms conspire to keep us in echo chambers, encountering the lives of people who look like us, think like us, agree with us. For many of us, books have been one way to expand our horizons. What and who we read opens us to new worlds, diverse ideas, different experiences beyond our own. We rely on books to educate and inform us and expand our imaginations, so that we can be better siblings in Christ. As a people of sacred stories, we know that stories have the power to inform and transform us, to show us both who we are and who we can become.

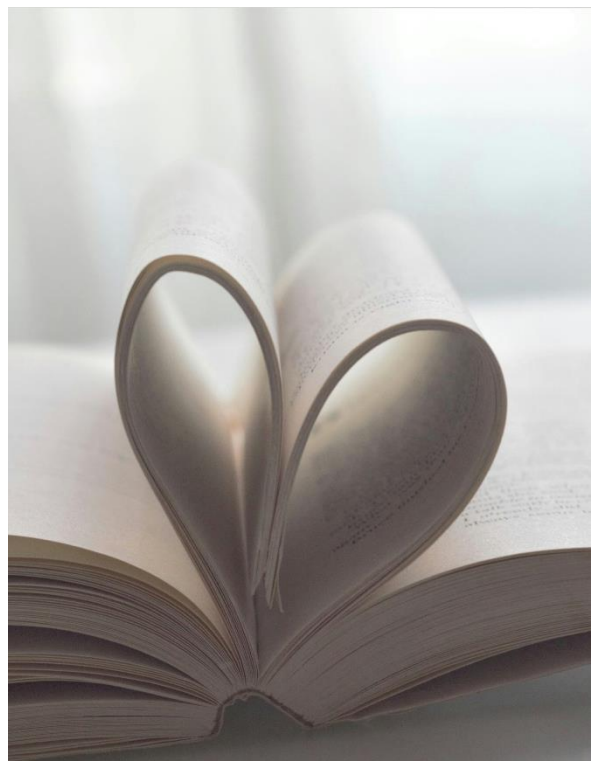
How is creating a Banned Book Library sacred work for these times?

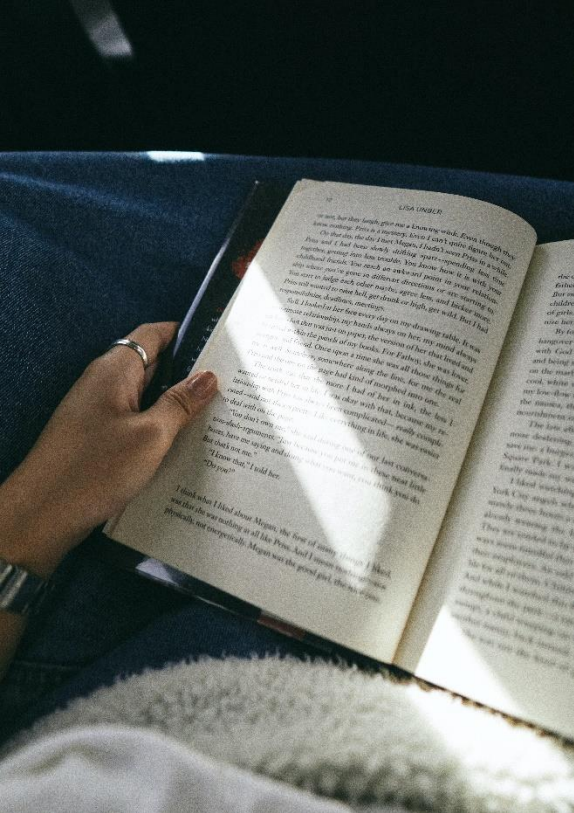
In a time of intense political polarization, we are facing an unprecedented number of attempts to ban books. Books by authors of color, by LGBTQ+ authors, by women and books about racism, sexuality, gender, culture, and history are the ones most often targeted by bans. When some seek to police access to some experiences, some histories, some understandings, some ideas, the image of God is dimmed. Without these books, our encounters with the amazing diversity of creation are incomplete, and our capacity for compassion across difference is stymied. Our love of God is limited because we do not have the chance to recognize all the ways the divine image is manifest in our world.

In the United Church of Christ, we know that as people called to build a just world for all, we need each other's stories and experiences to live into the fullness of the Body of Christ. We believe that banned books have a special vocation, a particular calling in our faith communities: to help expand and enliven the image of God and empower us to reckon with truths that demand our loving accountability. General Synod 35 invites us into the deeper truths, beauty, and reckonings these books hold, so that they might live out their calling and empower us to continue becoming God's kindom of justice and love, on earth as it is in heaven.



So God created humankind in God's own image, in the Divine image, God created them. Genesis 1:27





How do we get started?

Here are some ideas about ways to engage your community in General Synod 35's Banned Books Service Project.

1. Participate in the General Synod 35 Banned Books Service

Project: The wider Church is encouraged to ship Banned Books (list options below) to Colonial Church in Prairie Village with the note “Books” to support live sorting, boxing and offering of Banned Book Libraries in our host conferences.

Shipping Address:

Colonial Church in Prairie Village

7039 Mission Rd, Prairie Village, KS 66208

Also, join us during Synod to collect and sort donated Banned Books, as well as empower one another to create libraries across the United Church of Christ.

2. Create your own Banned Books Library or shelf/section of your church library by curating banned books you already have from a list of banned books (here's [one index of banned books](#) to consult from PEN America).
3. Invite congregation members to purchase and donate banned books for the church's Banned Books Library or shelf/section or for another library or book exchange. To help, provide them with a list of targeted books. Here are some places to start:
 - [American Library Association's Top 10 Most Challenged Books by Year](#)
 - [NY Public Library's Banned Books Reading List](#)
 - [Harper's Bazaar Banned Books List](#)
 - [National Coalition Against Censorship's Youth Censorship Database](#)
 - [8 Books to Add to Your Faith and Justice Reading List](#)

Make it even easier and [create a Wish List on Bookshop.org](#) where folks can buy books from independent bookstores and have them shipped directly to church!

4. Invite church members to bring their favorite or most influential banned book to church with them, share stories with each other about them during worship or fellowship time, and donate those books to the church's Banned Book Library, or to another library or book exchange to expand their use!

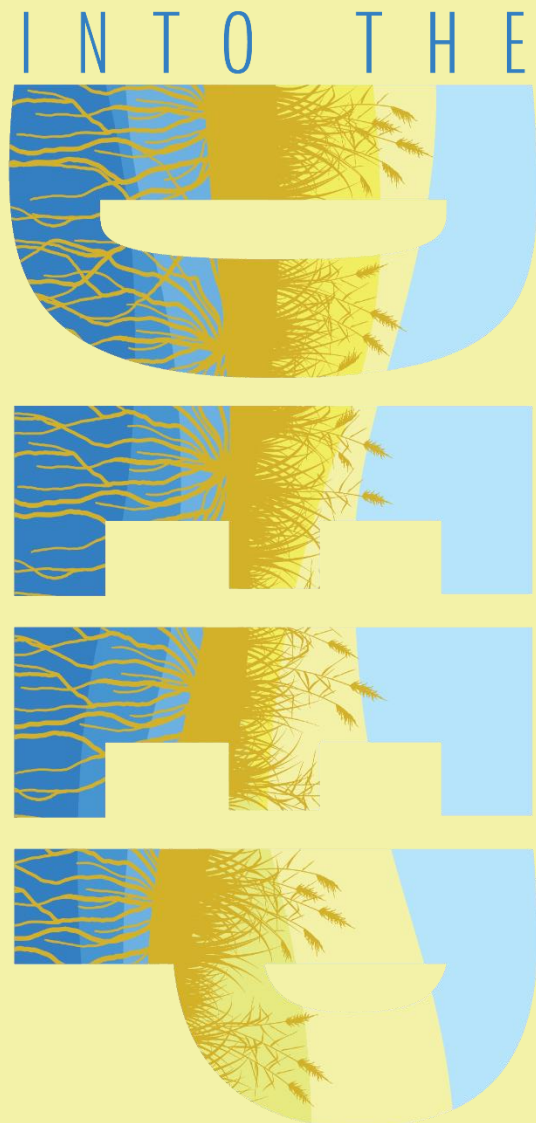
Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. - John 21:25



What are ways to continue the journey “into the deep?”

Now that you’ve gathered some books, where do you go from here? Here are some ideas for how you can continue to engage in this important work of justice:

- Contribute books to the General Synod Banned Books Service Project
- Use [our worship, children’s time, and sermon resources](#) to plan a Banned Book Blessing in your community, perhaps around [Banned Books Week](#).
- Once a month, read a banned book or excerpt from a banned book during worship or at your fellowship time/coffee hour after worship.
- Start a Banned Books Club. Invite folks to share with the community how their image of God and their understanding of “a just world for all” is changing and expanding based on what they are reading.
- Feature a banned book in your newsletters or weekly emails.
- Invite a banned book author to speak to your community or view one of the many videos of banned book authors talking about their work and discuss it as a community.
- Consider other ways to take action:
 - From the [American Library Association](#)
 - From [PEN America](#)
 - From the [National Coalition Against Censorship](#)
 - From [Unite Against Book Bans](#)
 - From [Prison Banned Books Week](#)



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