



Faith Practices Toolkit Sampler

Intentional, Intergenerational Sabbath Rhythms

The Office of Christian Formation engaged a group of writers to create a toolkit for faith practices that will be released in summer 2020. The completed toolkit will provide scriptural and theological grounding for each practice, as well as ways to engage for all ages. Here is a sampling from that toolkit to provide ideas of engaging in practices during these times.

Sabbath practices are the intentional exchange of our regular, daily rhythms for God's holy Sabbath rhythms. These practices are at the core of how our faith is formed in a community. As we enter God's Sabbath time, we exchange the busyness of our human existence, work, toil and worry, for time to be as we were created. We focus on engaging the world around us and rest – just as God toiled during creation, and then rested. It is an intentional pause on daily life to worship and enjoy the wonder of God. During Sabbath time, we create an environment that is different from our ordinary space and pace of life.

In these times of crisis, chaos and physical distancing, our ordinary is completely turned upside down and it is challenging to find those rhythms and engage in rituals. But we know that by intentionally repeating and forming our time around Sabbath practices, we can re-ground our community and congregants in a common shared purpose and faith. Consider these (5) faith practices as you plan for and provide formation and education experiences that are based out of households: Prayer, Service, Hospitality, Retreat and Storytelling. These are practices that you are likely to be already engaged in during your worship services and daily lives. We are encouraging you to be intentional about noticing and naming these practices as the holy rhythms of your Sabbath faith community and we are challenging you to involve the entire church or faith community to engage together.

If you are a faith community leader, remember to consider that this crisis is overwhelming for us all and new information is hard to process. Here are some things to consider.

- Talk about a different practice each week
- Emphasize that we may already be engaging in these practices and being intentional about them is a way to find sabbath as a faith community.
- Engage in these practices intergenerationally whether that means in a household or using technology.
- Many of the ideas to engage are intentionally for households with multiple ages and/or for singles or couples. Use technology during this time to connect singles together around practices.
- You will be modifying these to fit for your faith community. This is just a sampling of engaging in practices and are meant as a place to start with your community of faith.

Hospitality

When we participate in the practice of hospitality, we are creating a welcoming space to give people a degree of safety to enter into deeper relationship and community. When we participate in the practice of hospitality, we remember that we too were once strangers, and will likely be strangers again. Extending and receiving hospitality allows us to reach beyond ourselves to break barriers and build bridges.

Ways to Engage

Celebrating the helpers. Set aside time each day or each week to talk about who the helpers are and how you can show hospitality. Choose an organization, an individual or a business and send them a note, of thanks, a treat, or a small gift.

Kindness challenge. Look for sincere and authentic opportunities to compliment or thank people. Be intentional about making the effort to be extra kind in everyday actions. Compare notes from your day at dinner or at the end of the week with your household. Keep a journal to remind yourself about these acts.

Adopt a grand-friend. Connect with your pastor or leaders in your congregation to see if there is an older adult who is isolated & could use additional support or connection. Forge a relationship through phone calls, notes or even zoom if the older adult is able.

Sidewalk notes and rocks of encouragement. Chalk your driveway, your sidewalk, your garage door, your windows or paint some rocks to take out on a walk that have words of encouragement.

Neighborhood community building. Lead the way in your neighborhood to extend hospitality through driveway gatherings, chalked messages & yard signs, organizing drive-by parades for special events on your street and making sure your neighbors have access to the resources that they need. Be aware of your community restrictions and guidelines. This is a time to really engage with your neighbors and continue those relationships.

Technology gathering host. Encourage your faith community to have a host for your digital gatherings. Church staff and pastors are overwhelmed during this time and having someone serve in this role would be an act of hospitality to them as well! Volunteer to be the person who will respond to chat threads, prayer requests, help with tech issues and follow-up with new people. Consider hosting fellowship time before or after on-line gatherings.

Prayer

If we understand Sabbath to be an exchange of our daily rhythms for holy rhythms, then prayer becomes the threshold to Sabbath-keeping. Because prayer can function like a pause button on our anxieties, fears, concerns, troubles, it is key to entering into a Sabbath rest. Prayer allows us to let go of those things which bind us or keep us stuck. The practice of prayer in community is an opportunity for reconciliation with God and with one another, so we may go back into the world to bear witness to God's reconciling love.

Ways to Engage

Prayer wall. Set aside a wall in your home and provide pens and sticky notes to post a prayer. If your household is "staying home" locate the prayer wall in the central gathering space. Prayers can be added throughout the day but develop a routine for when you might lift-up these prayers.

Encourage artwork of favorite prayers that can be hung in the dining room, bedroom, front hallway, or other area in your home.

Praying photographs. If your church has a picture directory or another way that they share photos, make a project out of cutting out these photos and putting them on the prayer wall. You can also ask your community of faith to email or text photos. Pray for someone new each day.

Prayer buddies. Within your household or extended family, set up prayer buddies in a similar manner to how you might set up a 'secret Santa'. This practice can build special connections as generations pray for each other. You might especially focus on older adults isolated in long-term care communities during this time. Make sure you let them know that you are praying for them!

Walking prayers. When out for a walk, be intentional about praying for the things you see as a way of raising awareness of God’s presence and creation all around us. Consider focusing on a different word or phrase each time you head out to walk. You might take a prayer request from the prayer wall or consider the person/people you are praying for that day. You can also simply look for signs of hope and lift up those prayers as you walk.

Service

When we participate in the practice of service, we are living out what Jesus called the “greatest commandment”: to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Loving our neighbor is a demonstration of our love for God. We see service as a Sabbath practice because the act of service takes us out of our daily rhythms and into the holy practice of caring for God’s created order in often simple, yet extraordinary ways. In service to God’s people, we are reminded that we were created for relationship and we celebrate that relationship by showing love in tangible ways.

Ways to Engage

Seek out service projects that can be done in the home. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a call for individuals to make face masks for medical personnel. Many hospitals collect knit hats for patients undergoing chemotherapy. There are endless opportunities for this kind of service, which is especially good for homebound adults and families.

Serve those in your church who need assistance. Connect individuals and families with those in need of assistance within the church community. Providing rides when restrictions are lifted, picking up groceries or sharing home cooked meals are just a few ways that members could be in service to others in their congregation. Not sure where to start? Ask a pastor or a deacon for ideas.

Create Blessing Bags. Blessing Bags are gallon zipper-top plastic bags containing items that are helpful to homeless individuals and are a simple way to be prepared to respond to the needs of your community.

Learn about a new organization or a church mission partner. Consider using this time to learn how your community is responding to crisis and how they may be in need. Learn about the [PCUSA Matthew 25](#) vision and how you can be a part of it.

Earth Care. Don’t forget about service to our environment and to our earth during these times. Consider a litter walk around your neighborhood, plant a garden outside or in containers, begin a recycling project and learn about how staying at home has impacted the earth in a positive way. Take time to wonder together about how we might continue this positive impact.

Storytelling

When we participate in storytelling, we encourage others in their faith, we encourage one another through our interconnected stories, and we create space for vulnerability and authenticity. When we participate in storytelling, we help to establish ourselves within a sabbath community. We are intentionally slowing ourselves down and participating in the telling of our own story and the hearing of others.

Ways to Engage

Storytelling at mealtimes. Have a different prompt for your household meal. Talk about favorite traditions, worst family vacation, funniest blunders and times when you were most proud of each other. Have someone record the answers and start a book of stories for your household.

COVID-19 time capsule. Start assembling items and stories to put into a time capsule to remember this time. This can be done as a household and later put together as a community of faith. Consider drawings, recordings on a flash drive, photos and written stories.

Draw upon the stories of our faith in everyday life. Hearing a story of people crossing society's boundaries to offer kindness to those in need is a chance to recall the story of the Good Samaritan. A rainbow in the sky is a time to reflect on God's faithfulness. Look for connections, and name & claim those stories at every opportunity.

Borrow the Jewish practice of midrash to enter into stories and wonder about our sacred texts. Did Noah's ark smell? Probably, but scripture doesn't tell us. This practice invites us to consider our sacred stories with wonder and imagination. Midrash helps readers claim the stories and bring them to life by creating a sort of "Bible fan fiction" together.

Bring games that spark creativity and storytelling into game nights. Games such as 'Dixit', 'Rory's Story Cubes' and others ask players to create stories and scenarios using their imagination. Playful and creative thinking brings the practice of storytelling into everyday life.

Do a home version of "Storycorps". Interview extended family members or close friends to learn more about their stories. Consider having prompts prepared when you reach out to friends, family or someone in your community of faith. This practice can also be used with the prayer buddies practice.

Retreat

We see retreat as a Sabbath practice because it is the fully immersive expression of Sabbath. It allows us the opportunity to separate from our daily responsibilities and live into our connection with God and creation in a focused way. Retreat will often be temporary, but the experiences will avail us the opportunity to go deeper in our connections with God and other community members, while also helping to develop new spiritual habits to continue in our daily lives. These experiences can help us to see God's forward path for us through crisis, distress or change in our lives and communities.

Ways to Engage

Find one time in the week that is sacrosanct in your home as a holy time. This could be the first step in creating an observation of sabbath.

Make shared meals a mini retreat. Create rituals including prayers, lighting candles, sharing highs and lows, as you set aside this time as a distraction-free opportunity to connect with everyone in your household. Utilize the other practices like storytelling or prayer during this time.

Establish a home worship center. This can be done without added expense or space. Find items that draw you close to God. These may include candles, a Bible or other books, and a cross (if you don't have one, make one!). As you use the space, you will know what else needs to be added. The space should be set aside for this purpose, yet easily accessible.

Participate in on-line retreats. Looks for opportunities to join on-line retreats such as the Taize community, yoga or meditation classes, or other communities offering retreat during these times.

Consider setting a regular date and time for members of your household to be outdoors. This could be a beach, park, or other space where you can have distraction-free time together. To set this time aside as retreat and not just an outing, decide on a way to ground the time as a retreat. This might be a contemplative time or a time of play but be intentional about your activity.

PLAY is retreat. Retreat is not just a time to be quiet and contemplative. Everyone can benefit from a retreat of being playful. Build a fort, have a screen free game night, have a water fight and especially encourage times for silliness and the practice of joyful play with one another. Zoom scavenger hunts and games are also a way to engage all.

Although there are dozens of Christian practices we could have emphasized in this resource, we are beginning this journey with five that allow for a wide range of generational participation and which could be adapted for a variety of ministry settings. These five practices were curated through a Christian formation symposium hosted by the Office of Christian Formation in 2017. Over 30 notable ministry practitioners and academics came together to discern a short list of practices that could be used through various types of age and stage ministry. When used regularly in your faith community, these practices offer a means to connect the different life stages in life-long formation.

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The complete Faith Practices Toolkit will be released in the summer of 2020. It will be posted online as a free download on the Christian Formation website: <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/formation>

