

Honoring the Body



Exploration: Discovery

About this Setting

Christian tradition teaches us that we are created in the image of God. Unfortunately, in the hustle and bustle of daily living, we often forget to honor not only the spiritual presence of God in our lives, but also the reflection of God represented in our physical bodies. Throughout history, Christians have been challenged to see the body as the good gift of God. Some traditions tend to polarize views, seeing the spiritual essence as good and the body as evil. This can lead to an internal struggle that makes daily self-care difficult because the physical body is not seen as being as worthy as the spiritual self. Reflection on these elements taken together as God's gift provides a foundation for faithful living and daily devotional practice. This resource introduces a variety of faithful practices for honoring our physical bodies as a unique reflection of the Divine.

About this Exploration

God not only creates our bodies, God also relates to us through the embodied form of Jesus Christ. We are moved to reclaim God's presence in the joyful and messy details of everyday life, a task more complicated and richer than depicted in the idealized images of bodies in the media. Through the senses, we experience and explore creation. We enjoy the sight of a rainbow, the smell of roses, or the taste of garlic. We connect with each other through the sound of a voice, the touch of a handshake, or the intimacy of a kiss. We can choose to use our bodies in ways that affirm that we are made in the image of God, discover that God's goodness is planted within our bodies, and express ourselves through our varied talents and limitations.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

1 Kings 19:4-8

1 John 4:1-2

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

Prayer:

*O God, gather me to your holy mountain;
take my life for your service;
feed me on the bread of heaven;
strengthen my arms, my heart, my mind,
my soul;
and when the journey is too much for me,
gather me to your holy mountain.
Amen.*

1 Journaling about the Body as a Spiritual Discipline (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- a journal (a bound book)
- pen or pencil
- timer

Going back to ancient times, religious persons have used spiritual writing as a tool for recording the progress of a spiritual journey, just as *Pilgrim's Progress* points the way to sanctification by narrating the stages of spiritual growth. Today many people record their spiritual and religious formation through the use of a journal, which is a tool recommended in many of the exercises that follow. A journal can be of essential use in recording your personal spiritual journey in honoring the body as a gift from God. Use a good quality bound book that is handsome to look at and feels good to hold in your hand. Date the entries in your journal. Include only reflections of a spiritual nature in this journal. It is a personal and private space and must remain so if it is to be effective, so you are not required to share your journal with anyone. You will be asked to write several of your honoring the body exercises in this book as part of your journey toward honoring the body. You may, of course, include other reflections of a spiritual nature. Go back and reflect on your entries periodically.

Try journaling as a family or household. Set aside time each day to talk about what your body experienced during that day. Take turns recording your reflections in the journal.

Begin with an exercise of free writing in your journal. Set a timer and spend five full minutes writing about how you feel about your body. What do you like about your body? What don't you like? Are you good to your body? Do you give it the daily attention it deserves? Do you honor your body daily as a temple of God? What are some possible consequences of not honoring your body? How might NOT honoring the body affect your family and other people you care for or for whom you may be responsible? What might you do differently every day to increase your faithful recognition of this gift? Stop writing after five minutes.

Once you have determined what you would like to change, make a list of what you will do to accomplish this goal. Keep one copy of the list in your journal. Repeat the free writing exercise as often as needed as you advance on your spiritual journey to honor the body. You may also make other entries in written form or add collages, photographs, or newspaper clippings that help you on your journey.

Resources:

At a Journal Workshop: Writing to Access the Unconscious and Evoke Creative Ability by Ira Progoff (Tarcher Publishers, 1992) is a foundational work in humanistic spirituality and in-depth psychology. It offers many techniques that can be adapted and applied for individual and small group use. Available on Amazon.com.

Spiritual Journaling: God's Whispers in Daily Living by Dan Kenneth Phillips (O Books, 2011) is book by a Baptist minister who works ecumenically teaching the work of sacred life writing. His work is heavily influenced by the life of Thomas

Merton and the work of Ira Progoff, especially Progoff's *At a Journal Workshop*. Available in print on demand and in Kindle format from Amazon.com.

Artist's Sketchbooks and Journals: Exploring and Creating Personal Pages by Lynn Perella (Quarry Books, 2004) is a wonderful book about journal-making and the joys of incorporating icons, imagery, collage-making, sketches, color, texture, and photographs into one's personal journal pages. The practical and creative applications are endless. Available on Amazon.com.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

② Rule of Life: Honoring the Body as a Spiritual Practice

Supplies:

- a sheet of paper
- markers
- tape for posting

The Rule of Life is a spiritual discipline that provides a framework for growth in Christ. Although it originally originated in Catholic traditions, it is now used widely by Protestants in many denominations who seek to shed old ways of being in order to emerge as more fully developed beings in Christ. Rules of Life vary widely according to the needs of each individual, and they can be modified accordingly. Each Rule of Life, however, will commonly have three components: self-assessment; identification of the self-disciplines you will practice; and a plain statement of how you will assess your progress and hold yourself accountable. A Rule of Life is about choices, about growing in faith and life with God, and about how our movement and actions are done from this place of deep relationship with God.

Now begin your formal assessment. As you sit with your family or household, invite each person to name at least one thing he or she wants to change. Make a list. Once you determined what you would like to change, make a covenant with yourself. Write a list of what you will do to accomplish this goal. Post a copy of this list on a wall or at a location where you will see it regularly. If you journal (optional), keep one copy in your journal. Encourage other members of your family by your example.

What will your Rule of Life look like? Think about these possibilities:

- Do a vigorous daily walking meditation or a prayer of self-examination where you ask yourself if you are doing everything you can to honor and care for your body. Twice daily brushing and flossing your teeth will help preserve the health of your heart in later age.
- Practice mindful eating by giving thoughtful thanks for the bounty of the earth, the farmers who sowed and reaped it, the bees and butterflies that fertilized it, and the hands that brought it to you.
- Try growing a few simple food items to increase your gratitude for food.
- Try some exercise. Do you have athletic equipment you don't use? Make a commitment to use it or to give it away. Or get that bicycle off the wall, pump up the tires, and ride it three times a week.
- What about honoring all of the senses? Practice deep listening so that you really hear what others are saying. Commit to speak less and hear more. Spend a few minutes each day in a garden and dare to see. Make yourself

truly grateful for the precious gift of sight.

- What about medical care and self help? Are you keeping those scheduled medical appointments? If not, ask yourself why.

Assess yourself at the end of each day and the end of each week. Ask yourself: Am I honoring the body God gave to me? If not, ask yourself: Why not?

Resource:

Protestant Spiritual Exercises: Theology, History, and Practice by Joseph D. Driskill, Professor of Spirituality at and Dean of the Disciples Seminary Foundation at the Graduate Theological Union (Morehouse Publishing, 1999). Driskill covers the Rule of Life and other practices. Available at Amazon.com, http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/081921759X/sr=1-1/qid=1318317853/ref=olp_product_details?ie=UTF8&me=&qid=1318317853&sr=1-1&seller=.

Sending & Serving Activity

③ Walk the Dog As a Spiritual Practice

Supplies:

- dog and leash, or a walking partner
- Bible
- (optional) journal

For many people, getting started on a physical routine is the hardest part. For many, it is easier to do something for or with someone else. This exercise combines walking meditation on a biblical scripture with walking the dog. If you don't have a dog, find a walking partner. Better yet, make this a family practice. Walk for at least 30 minutes at least three times a week, meditating on 1 Kings 19:4–8 and 1 John 4:1–2. If you meet your neighbors, smile, speak and pick up the pace. Notice how happy and grateful your dog is to have the exercise. Notice what gives you joy about this faith practice. Try to cultivate that feeling of joy in physical motion so that you can come back to it as a way of honoring your body. Once you cultivate the joy of physical motion, walk for yourself, with or without the dog or your partner.

Walking meditation for Christians is adapted from a Buddhist mindfulness practice; it offers a more focused approach to honoring the body that only begins with walking the dog. Not only that, but it allows us to send restorative, healing energy to ourselves. Elizabeth Reninger has written, “When we practice walking meditation, each step of our journey becomes the destination—becomes peace and joy.” One way that walking meditation is different from sitting meditation is that your eyes are open. Walk barefoot if you can, and be sure to stand completely upright. Synchronize your breathing with your walking. Walk slowly with complete devotion to your practice. Focus on your breathing and your body as a gift from God. Walking in this way honors the first breath that God blew into Adam. Give thanks for your body. Be at peace. Be alive always to our present, earthly paradise.

If you journal, consider writing about your experience in your journal.

Resource:

The following website provides an excellent introduction to the Buddhist practice of meditative walking: <http://taoism.about.com/od/meditation/ht/walking.htm>.

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

4 Physical Self-Examination and Making and Keeping Medical Appointments (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- a calendar
- posted Rule of Life

The Rule of Life is a daily and weekly faith practice that enables us to grow in our appreciation of our physical bodies, even as we hold ourselves increasingly accountable to their care. (See Activity 2.) After you make your personal rule of life for honoring the body, the work begins. One area where many of us fail to honor the body is by not making and keeping medical and dental appointments. Another way we avoid honoring the body is by failing to perform those medically recommended physical self-examinations that can help ensure a good quality of life as we advance in years.

We've all heard stories about persons who discovered they had prostate or breast cancer when it was too late to receive life-saving medical help. Both men and women should perform self-examinations at least monthly. One reason we may fail to do this is that many feel that the body, especially the private parts of the body, are sinful. Others avoid self-exams for fear they will find something wrong. In order to honor the body as a faith practice, we need to care for the body just as we care for the church. Your local gynecologist, urologist, or oncologist will be able to provide you with a waterproof self-exam chart that you can hang conveniently in the shower. The woman's exam is usually on one side of the chart, and the man's is on the other. Ask your physician to demonstrate the examination on your next office visit. This is a way of being accountable to God for the gifts of good health you have received. Your diligence will also be a blessing to your family and to those who love you and depend on you.

Reflection question: What difference will your intentional self-care make in your life and in the lives of others?

Resource:

Visit the Mayo Clinic website to learn more about how to do your home breast exam: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/breast-exam/MY00743/DSECTION=why-its-done>.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

5 Getting Enough Rest (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- your unmade bed
- (optional) a journal and something to write with

"Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him . . ." (1 Kings 19:5). We all know the old adage, "You made your bed, now lie in it." Despite the obviousness of the healthy relationships and the gift of restful sleep, many people engage in mini-confrontations and micro-aggressions

during the day because they simply fail to practice the golden rule. Others fill their minds with incredibly challenging “to do” lists, failing to find compassion for themselves and others as they push ruthlessly through the day. Dare to see the relationship between showing compassion for self and others and the gift of restful sleep. Leave more time for meditation and prayer, reflecting on the Bible focus scriptures.

Before you make your bed, look at the bed. Does the appearance of your unmade bed indicate that you rested well, or were you filled with worries or concerns? If you were kept awake, what kept you awake? If you did not sleep well the night before, make sure you take time to make your bed in the morning, reflecting on the night passed. What might you do differently today in compassionate relation to yourself and others? Is there something that you did yesterday that you need to revisit today as an investment in peaceful sleep? If you are journaling, you may wish to answer these questions in your journal or experiment again with free writing. And don't forget to say your evening prayers. Maybe tonight you will be visited by the angel of sleep.

Sending & Serving Activity

⑥ Mindful Eating

Supplies:

- twenty potato chips
- (optional) journal

“Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, ‘Get up and eat’” (1 Kings 19:5). At the twenty-eighth General Synod of the United Church of Christ, the Synod passed a resolution entitled “Resolution for Mindful and Faithful Eating.” The resolution embraced the necessary challenge of raising our consciousness about what we eat, human rights, global warming, and other forms of responsible stewardship. Honor your body by improving your relationship with food. Pay attention to what you eat.

“Mindfulness,” writes author Jan Chozen Bays, “is judgment without criticism . . . being fully aware of what is happening both inside yourself—in your body, heart, and mind—and outside yourself, in your environment.” Bays promotes “the joy of mindful eating” as something that “gives us permission to play with our food.” Bays cites the story of Sally, who eats a whole bag of potato chips and goes to bed feeling undernourished and hungry, not to mention guilty for eating so much salt and fat. The next time Sally craves potato chips, she buys them but checks in with her mind first, finding that she is lonely because her husband is out of town and stressed because of a presentation she is required to do at work. She decides to have a small chip party.

You, too, can have a small chip party, but know what to eat and when to stop eating. Arrange twenty potato chips on a plate. Eat one chip slowly, relishing its flavor. Enjoy everything you can about this chip and the next: color, flavor, texture. Enjoy the crunchy sound and the smell. Take a little break or pause between each chip. Think about the chips and their formation in the earth, “the soil, the rain, the potato farmer, the workers at the chip factory, the delivery truck driver.” After eating the twenty chips, check in with your mind, body, and spirit to see what is missing and take your nourishment sensibly, with a prayerful attitude

of thanksgiving. Take in spiritual nourishment along with the physical nourishment. When eating with others, enjoy the joyful, ritual aspects of preparing the food and table. Reflect on your experiences with someone else, or perhaps write about them if you are journaling (optional).

Resources:

In July of 2011 the United Church of Christ General Synod 28 passed a resolution on “Mindful and Faithful Eating” for the purpose of encouraging health and helping to end hunger. This resolution has wide ecumenical implications—when more people eat mindfully, more people can eat. To read the resolution, which can be adapted to your own communion, regardless of your denomination, affiliation or belief, please follow this link: <http://www.ucc.org/synod/resolutions/g28/Resolution-on-Mindful-and-Faithful-Eating.pdf>.

Jan Chozen Bays, MD, has written *Mindful Eating: A Guide to Rediscovering a Healthy and Joyful Relationship with Food* (Shambala, 2009). The book and CD are available through Amazon.com. You can also learn more about Jan Chosen Bays and mindful eating on these websites: <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/mindful-eating/200902/mindful-eating>; <http://www.mindfuleating.org/MindfulEating.html>.

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

7 Developing a Positive Body Image

Supplies:

- a mirror
- song: “Imago Dei,” by Jill Kirsten Warner, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2duLAakNyuw>

Look into the mirror. What do you see? According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human services, “Developing a positive body image and a healthy mental attitude is crucial to a woman’s happiness and wellness.” Yet many people, especially women, do not like what they see when they look into a mirror. Others are influenced by the negative comments of family and friends, and this adds to personal and family stress. As parents and caregivers, we tend to pass along our own ideas about the body to our children, just as we received many of ideas from our parents. Parents who improve their body image tend to pass on this improved state of self-awareness to their children.

The Cleveland Clinic recommends a number of specific steps to improve body image:

- Take a self-image inventory.
- Define personal goals and objectives.
- Set realistic and measurable goals.
- Confront thinking distortions.
- Identify childhood labels.
- Stop comparing yourself to others.
- Develop your strengths.
- Learn to love yourself.
- Give positive affirmations.

- Remember that you are unique.
- Learn to laugh and smile.
- Remember how far you have come.

Look into the mirror again. What do you see that you like? Take an inventory of the things that you see that you like. Likewise, make a list of the things that you see that you would like to change. How might mindful eating, regular exercise, and rest help you develop a healthy body image? What would it be like to change the way you feel about your body so that you feel more positive about it? How would this change your relationship with your partner or spouse or the other members of your family? What legacy of positive self-image would you like to pass on to the next generation? Incorporate your new goals into your Rule of Life, as appropriate.

Listen to the song “Imago Dei.” Knowing that we are created in the image of God, look in the mirror again and say to yourself: I am in the image of God.

Resources:

Learn more about how you can develop and maintain positive body image by visiting these two reliable sites: U.S. Department of Health and Human services, <http://www.womenshealth.gov/body-image/about-body-image/>; the Mayo clinic, http://my.clevelandclinic.org/healthy_living/mental_health/hic_fostering_a_positive_self-image.aspx.

8 Consider Yoga

Supplies:

- yoga mat
- athletic clothing

Take a yoga class. All that is required is time, patience, proper clothing, and a yoga mat. Be prepared to stretch, sweat, and maybe even ache a little the next day.

Yoga was a topic of central interest in the June 6 and June 14, 2011, issues of *The Christian Century*. “Is yoga religious?” asks the June 6 essay by John N. Shreveland. The question stems from recent controversy about so-called Christian yoga and the historical and intrinsic relationship of yoga to Hinduism. Shreveland posits the following useful and practical questions about the usefulness of yoga and what Christians might gain from exploring yoga as a physical and spiritual, if not a religious, practice.

- Might yoga’s holistic spirituality and ethic likewise render me more conscious of my eucharistic responsibilities in daily life and not only at the Lord’s Table, so that I learn a set of moral standards from the vocabulary of yoga that show me how to translate the language of worship into morally responsible action in the world?
- Might *asanas* (postural yoga) influence a Christian’s understanding of herself as a physical body created in the image and likeness of God and thus an object of unutterable dignity, held in being and redeemed by God?
- Might my performance of postural yoga contribute new meaning to Paul’s claim in 1 Corinthians that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit?
- Might postural yoga, with its well-documented physical and mental benefits, help me to better understand my stewardship responsibilities to my own body—which Paul says is not my own—and to other bodies in creation?



In a follow-up letter to the editor in the July 12 issue, reader Joanna Gillespie writes, “Until I began yoga in my sixties, no religious leader had ever taught me to honor my physical body as a temple. Instead, they presented the opposite view: that the physical body is something to rise above, ignore, pummel into shape.”

Take a yoga class. After your class, take a moment to reflect on the preceding questions posed by Shreveland.

Resources:

Enjoy two articles on yoga from *The Christian Century* by following these links:
<http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2011-05/yoga-religious>;
<http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2011-05/my-wandering-mind>.

Sending & Serving Activity



9 Say Something Nice to Somebody, Starting with Yourself (Easy Preparation)

Supplies: None

When you look in the mirror today, find something to like about what you see and give thanks for it. Give thanks for the body that God gave you, the one that is uniquely yours, and say, “Thank you, God.” If during the day, you come upon someone who may be struggling, find something to say that will make that person feel better about his or her body. If you hear children or adults teasing someone, don’t be afraid to intervene with a good word. Make somebody’s day. You’ll feel better too.

Honoring the Body



Exploration: Scripture

About this Setting

The Bible offers us many images of God and the body. Some of them have to do with the way we perceive, love, and worship God. Some reflect our human relationships of love, friendship, work, and social interaction. If we are to be true to the divine spark within us, we need to recognize that God blesses our bodies and desires that we live in joy and abundance.

Sometimes we get so caught up in questions and details about the Bible that we forget to look for our own stories in its pages. God calls us to find ourselves in the divine story, to connect with the principles and practices we discover there. When we concern ourselves less with being “right” in what we believe, we can begin to find new truths in the stories of the sacred text.

About this Exploration

Through careful study and prayer, we discern scripture’s guidance for faithful living. From the creation of human beings in Genesis to the Gospel accounts of God Incarnate in Jesus Christ, scripture references and celebrates the human body. The body is a source of wonder in the Psalms, of delight in the Songs of Solomon, and of hope in the New Testament. We learn of God’s tender embrace of humanity, made in God’s very image. We discover bodies of all ages, abilities, and healthiness—multifaceted and diverse. While scripture cannot be used as an inerrant blueprint for modern living, it presents the opportunity to continually evaluate and reimagine the miraculous and amazing vessel that God not only gives but co-habits with us. Scripture is a living, breathing source continually growing and changing as it empowers persons in all ages and of all ages.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Genesis 2:1–25
Romans 12:1–8

Prayer:

Thank you for the blessings of this life, God; help me to live in faith, seeing your beauty and grace,

knowing that each is created and endowed by you,

blessed by you to some unique purpose, some divine placement,

in accordance with your will. When there is prophesy,

may my ears be open. When there is teaching, may I stretch to learn;

if I am to give encouragement, may I give generously.

If I am to lead, God, please order my steps that I may be worthy.

Mercy, mercy, mercy, God. Mercy and blessing. That is my prayer.

Amen.

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



1 Eating an Apple in the Garden (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- Bible
- a freshly cut-up apple in a container
- paper and pencil

Read Genesis 2:1–25. Close your eyes. Imagine the original garden of paradise. What do you see when your eyes are closed? Can you imagine the Pishon, the Gihon, the Tigris, and the Euphrates Rivers, and all the wonderful, happy creatures in the garden? Listen. Keep your eyes closed. What do you hear in the garden where you sit? Do you hear the rustle of leaves blowing in the wind? Are there birds singing? Bees buzzing? If you are a hearing person, give thanks for the gift of hearing. It is a gift that people sometimes lose. Be truly thankful for your hearing. With your eyes still closed, give thanks for the sense of touch. Touch your cheek with your hand, and thank God for the ability to touch and feel touch. Open your mind to these blessings, the experience of which resides in the body.

Open the container and take out the cut apple. Taste the apple as the good gift of God; savor its perfection. Chew slowly and swallow slowly, giving thanks. Now open your eyes and see. Spend a full five minutes reflecting on and giving thanks for the wonder of sight. See very small things—things close to you and things far away. Read Genesis 2:1–25 and give thanks for the beauty of the earth and for your own body, through which you perceive the beauty of God’s creation.

What if you are not fully able? Imagine what it would be like not to be able to see or give thanks for the senses that you have. What if you could not hear or see? Someone reading this may not be able to hear, and some of us who can see and hear now may lose our sight or hearing over time. Give thanks for the senses that you have. If you are a fully able person, ask yourself if you appreciate your senses as if you might one day lose them. Then ask if you follow the practice of treating others who are not fully able in such a way as to enable them to appreciate fully the gifts of life that they have. Are you respectful of the ways in which some people are differently able, perfect in themselves as creations of God?

Write a prayer of thanksgiving for yourself and a prayer of encouragement for someone you know who may have a set of bodily challenges different from your own.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

2 Plant Something and Watch It Grow

Supplies:

- seedlings, seeds, or plants
- fertilizer or compost
- tools

As a family choose what you will plant and where you will plant it. Your choice may be influenced by the season of the year, your geographical location, and the

accessibility of equipment. You may choose to plant an indoor herb garden or an outdoor vegetable garden. You may plant a tree or a bush or flowers. If possible, participate in a community garden. The point is to work together as a family, remembering that God created humans from the mud of the earth.

Gardening is healthy for the mind, body, and spirit. God was the greatest gardener of all. Imagine it. If we are all created in God's image, then we are all meant to be gardeners.

Sending & Serving Activity

③ Your Temple

Supplies:

- Bibles
- note cards
- pens

Read together 1 Corinthians 6:19–20, in which Paul describes the body as being a “temple.” What regular activities do you practice that help you to treat your body as holy and sacred? Brainstorm together what it means to care for a holy and sacred space such as a temple or a church. What attitudes do we have toward such spaces? How do we work to assure that these spaces are respected as being “holy”? The scriptural term “holy” relates to our own word “whole.” Brainstorm together what practices you might take up in the coming week that would encourage each person to treat his or her whole body as a temple—as a sacred vessel for God's Spirit. Suggestions might include getting regular exercise, drinking water, eating healthy food, getting proper rest, enjoying sexual activity with a committed partner, reading, taking a walk, and so on. Then challenge each participant to write on a note card at least one of these ideas on which to focus in the coming week. If you have time and there are “brave souls,” ask if anyone would share his or her commitment with the group.

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



④ Overcoming Anger in the Body through Scripture (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- Bible
- journal

This activity calls on you to recognize the presence of anger and its destructive influence on the physical body and in the body of Christ. It also calls upon you to medicate that anger through effective self-help grounded in scripture and the contemplation of scripture, especially Romans 12:1–8. Sometimes we get stubborn about our ideas and defensive or even angry. Anger has been shown to have a negative effect on the physical health of the body. We get defensive and stop using our ears, so that we no longer hear, and our bodies get tight and agitated. Contemplate on scripture to help calm down and return to a grounded emotional setting.

Set aside an hour each day (either in one sitting or two half-hour sittings), at the same time each day, and use *lectio divina* to feast on scriptures related to the physical body and/or the body of Christ.

Lectio divina: Take a few minutes in prayerful reflection before beginning the activity. Take a “bite” of the scripture, reading it slowly and carefully (*lectio*) in silence. Next, meditate on the scripture, “chew” on it a bit (*meditatio*). Next, read the scripture again, this time aloud (*oratio*). The fourth and final stage is where the scripture is ingested to become part of the body (*contemplatio*), just like eating the apple. This activity should take about an hour. Remain in touch with the sensations in your body as you do the activity.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

5 Marvel at the Perfection of God’s Creation

Supplies:

- a garden
- Bible
- paper and pen or pencil

Feasting on the Word (*lectio divina*)—Genesis 2:1–25: Where better to encounter Genesis 2:1–25 than in a garden? Seek out a garden that is pleasing to you. Take a few minutes in prayerful reflection before beginning the activity. Take a “bite” of the scripture, reading it slowly and carefully (*lectio*) in silence. Next, meditate on the scripture; “chew” on it a bit (*meditatio*). Then read the scripture again, this time aloud (*oratio*). The fourth and final stage is where the scripture is ingested to become part of the body (*contemplatio*), just like eating the apple. This activity should take about an hour. Remain in touch with the sensations in your body as you do the activity.

Record your reflections on your garden experience of Genesis 2:1–25. Write for about half an hour, focusing on your body as a gift from God, special and unique among all of God’s creations and created in God’s own image. Reflect on ways you can share these reflections with others in your daily life.

Sending & Serving Activity

6 Grandmother Harrison’s Scripture Box

Supplies:

- cigar box
- bright wrapping paper cut in strips for bands
- card stock paper (for scriptures)
- pen
- popsicle stick

Once upon a time, a long time ago, there was an old African American woman, Mrs. Emma Margaret Harrison (1895–1982), who loved her grandchildren very much. She had a fourth grade education and her father had been a slave, but she could read and write. She was also a wise and holy person and a deaconess in her church. Every Sunday morning, she would draw her three grandchildren together.

Mrs. Harrison had a box about the size of a cigar box, filled with small scrolls containing scriptures. Under her watchful eye, Joanne, Harry Jr., and Douglas would each carefully reach into the box with a wooden pointer and draw out a scripture for memorization, reflection, and discussion. They never knew what the scripture would be until they saw it on the end of the stick. If a child pulled out a scripture already memorized, another was chosen.

Make your own scripture box, using the materials described above. Cover it with a collage that recalls Genesis 2:1–25 or another scripture of your choice. Try to fit at least 100 scriptures into your box. Share the scripture box with your children, parents, grandchildren, or someone you love. Remember the wise old woman, a cook and a maid, who found a way to share her faith and scripture knowledge with her grandchildren. Remember, there are people who are poor in the way the material world measures things, but rich in spiritual wealth and the blessings of the Holy Spirit. Be open to receiving blessings from humble sources.

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



7 Embodying the Holiness of Christ and the Other (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- Bible

Think of someone who is not like you—maybe someone not of the same gender, race, class, or ethnic group. Perhaps it is someone of a different sexual orientation, maybe even someone of a different faith. Alternatively, you may think of someone you consider as being “difficult.” This may even be someone close to you. Read aloud Romans 12:3–8.

What does the scripture call you to do that will be difficult for you? What can you do that is not so difficult? Sometimes when we relate to others, we find that we have to change ourselves. Make a covenant with yourself to embody the scripture you have read and reflected on. Go forth into the world more confident to live as a part of the body of Christ even when dealing with people who may look, act, or think differently from you, or when dealing with people you may find difficult. See if how you change the way that you relate to this person (or persons) changes the way that they relate (or seem to relate) to you. Record your observations in some form, perhaps in your journal. Be prepared for spiritual growth.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

8 Pray Together

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pens or pencils

Sit in a circle with members of your family or a few friends in an informal setting. Read Genesis 2:1–25, and invite each person to offer a response, reflection, or question. Don’t discuss; just listen. Distribute paper and ask each to write a short

prayer based on what he or she heard, including his or her own contribution. Gather the prayers, and then pass them out again. Go around the circle again, reading the prayers.

Go around the circle again, inviting each person to create a new line of prayer for Genesis 2:1–25 until the group has created a corporate, scripture-based prayer. Take a few minutes to reflect on how corporate prayer is different from praying alone and some ways corporate prayer represents the church and the body of Christ. What did you learn from this experience that you can share with your family and friends in different settings?

Sending & Serving Activity

9 What Makes Things Grow

Supplies:

- coffee grounds
- commercial or homemade composter
- pitchfork
- shovel
- access to these websites: <http://compostguide.com/>, <http://www.composting101.com/>, and <http://www.dep.state.pa.us/dep/deputate/airwaste/wm/recycle/facts/compost.htm>

Food and the making of food is an excellent metaphor for both spiritual and physical health. In a very real sense, we are what we eat. A gardener must do the careful work that makes good soil for the seeds of God's blessing to flourish. Making good soil takes time and intentional care.

Are you a coffee drinker? Collect your expired coffee grounds in a can or plastic container and find a location in which to start your compost heap. Compost generates heat that breaks down the coffee grounds into organic nutrients that can be added to the soil as amendments to make things grow. Compost is a soil amendment that makes things grow; scripture is a soul amendment that leads to a more abundant life.

Reflect on Deuteronomy 10:14 while you make and turn your compost: "To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it."

Using the websites listed under Supplies, imagine the cycle by which your coffee grounds can become a source of nourishment for plants in your garden or perhaps on the church grounds. Carry forth the idea of adding scripture to everything you do to help transform the garden of the world into a heavenly paradise the way compost transforms a garden.

Honoring the Body



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Setting

As people of God and members of the church of which Christ is the head, we are called to Christian discipleship. We are called to be like Christ, who is not only our Lord and Savior, but also our teacher and founder. We are called to lead by example in the human struggles for justice and mercy in times of both joy and sorrow. This Exploration focuses on honoring the body as a form of Christian discipleship.

About this Exploration

When Jesus said to the first disciples, “Come, follow me,” he was speaking not only to their hearts and minds, but also to a reorientation of their entire bodies. He expected a physical movement from one place to another and a commitment of their whole person to a new way of living. All Christian disciples are incarnations of God’s love and compassion. For modern-day disciples, following Jesus remains an embodied task—one rooted firmly in practice and lifestyle as well as belief. As disciples we are still invited to follow Jesus with our whole selves, engaged body and soul, by God’s grace and love. As we care for and with our bodies, in the daily practices of eating, movement, resting, and relating to other God-created beings, we offer new and profound models of Christian discipleship as an embodied practice for others to embrace.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Psalm 71
Mark 5:21-43

Prayer:

Come, follow me, he said;

Follow me in love and compassion.

The Holy One invites us.

Be with me, in me, through me,

*be my eyes, my hands, my feet, my love—
my body*

in this world, he asks,

and the good disciple answers:

Amen.

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



① Personal Examination (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pencil

Read Psalm 71 together. Talk with one another about how our bodies change throughout our lives. Compare hand and foot sizes with one another. Measure your height. Talk about some of these body facts, and see which ones are true for your family:

- Babies are born with 300 bones; adults have 206 bones. Many of the early bones grow together to make the larger bones.
- The length of your outstretched arms is about the same as your height. Compare these measurements with those in the family.
- Nearly all boys grow at least as tall as their mothers. Is this true in your family?
- The slowest growing fingernail is on the thumb, and the fastest growing is the finger nail on the middle finger. Look at everyone's finger nails.

Each body part contributes to the whole in differing ways through the years. What stages of life are represented in your family? What stages of life are represented in the psalm?

On the paper draw a human figure. Have family members choose a body part, such as an eye, a foot, a hand, the heart, and so forth. Name at least one way each person can use that body part to honor God as a disciple in daily life.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

② Rule of Life: Honoring the Body As Discipleship

Supplies:

- a sheet of paper
- tape

The Rule of Life is a spiritual discipline that provides a framework for growth in Christ. Although it originated in Catholic traditions, it is now used widely by Protestants in many denominations who seek to shed old ways of being in order to emerge as more fully developed beings in Christ. Rules of Life vary widely according to the needs of each individual, and they can be modified accordingly. Each Rule of Life, however, will commonly have three components: self-assessment; identification of the self-disciplines you will practice; and a plain statement of how you will assess your progress and hold yourself accountable. Now begin your formal assessment. This is about eliminating bad habits and replacing them with good habits. Name at least one thing in your life that you want to change. Write that on a piece of paper and post it where you will see it each day.

Once you have determined how you would like to change so that your personal body care is more faithful, make a list of at least three things you will do to accomplish this goal. Post a copy of that list in a place where you will see it regularly.

What will your discipleship Rule of Life be like? Take time each day to reflect on this question. Maybe you will do a vigorous daily walking meditation or prayer of self-examination where you ask yourself if you are doing everything you can to grow in Christian discipleship while simultaneously honoring your body.

Sending & Serving Activity

3 The Places You'll Go

Supplies:

- book: *O The Places You'll Go* by Dr. Seuss (hear it read at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQRWeZy-S8Q>)

Gather the family in a circle and read to them the picture book *O The Places You'll Go*, or pass the book around and have each person read one page at a time, or watch the YouTube video. Invite people to reflect on how the story of the book might be a metaphor for the bodily challenges we will encounter as we choose to follow the path of discipleship.

Invite all into a time of silent prayer. Have them consider where God might be calling them to use their bodies in discipleship to others in the days ahead. Encourage them to consider, as does Seuss' story, both the blessings and the challenges this journey may bring. Close by standing in a circle. Invite each person to stand, one at a time, in the center as the others lay hands on him or her, as you recite this prayer: *May God bless you as you now go out into the world, to places far and near, to be the hands and feet of Christ.*

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



4 Feasting on the Gospel (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- Bible
- (optional) journal

Use the practice of *lectio divina* to feast on the two healing stories in Mark 5:21–43. Take a few minutes in prayerful reflection before beginning the activity. Take a “bite” of the scripture, reading it slowly and carefully (*lectio*) in silence. Next, meditate on the scripture; “chew” on it a bit (*meditatio*). Then read the scripture again, this time aloud (*oratio*). The fourth and final stage is where the scripture is ingested to become part of the body (*contemplatio*), just like eating a piece of fruit. This activity should take about an hour. Remain in touch with the sensations in your body as you do the activity.

Think about the woman who had so much faith that she was healed simply by touching Jesus' garment. What is the role of faith and well-being in your life?

If you keep a journal, write your reflections and any “Aha!” revelations there. Write a prayer based on scripture or your own experience or need. Post it somewhere you will see it several times a day or find a way to share it with another person. Be bold like the woman of faith. Discern and decide how you will share your faith.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

5 Give It a Rest

Supplies:

- Bibles
- small cardboard boxes (available at craft stores) large enough to hold a wallet or cell phone
- markers

Consider where you find rest or Sabbath in your life. Reflect on the biblical concept of Sabbath, which in many ways stands in opposition to how the modern world has turned work into an idol. In ancient Israel, people lived lives of hard labor, but they also recognized a need to listen to the rhythms of God’s creation, of night and day, and of the seasons. They acknowledged that in order to follow God there is a need for all people, all of creation, to take time for rest.

Think about the messages we receive about the priority of work in our culture. What are the implications of the fact that many of us can do our jobs or study from home via computer? Take work calls anywhere (even while on vacation)? Answer work e-mails any hour of the day or from almost anywhere? Where does the notion of rest fit into these cultural attitudes about work? When do we find time for rest? What implications might the need for rest have on our abilities to be fruitful disciples of Christ? In what ways might our constant activity deny Sabbath rest to others?

Read Deuteronomy 5:12–15 and Luke 13:10–17. Consider how the biblical ideas about Sabbath can influence our practice of honoring our own bodies’ need for rest as well as the bodies of others.

Find a small cardboard box and on the outside of the box write words or draw images of things you might do when you take time for rest and Sabbath. Consider the difference between activities that are entertaining and activities that are actually restful. Then empty your pockets, purse, or backpack of anything that might distract you from taking time for rest: cell phones or any handheld devices, car keys, money, pens, and so on. Place these items in the box as a symbol of “letting go.”

Spend a few moments resting in silence, erasing from your thoughts everything you placed in the box and the work and activity associated with those items. In what ways can you see a regular practice of Sabbath rest becoming an important aspect of your life of discipleship?

Sending & Serving Activity

6 Storytellers

Supplies:

- paper and pen or pencil

Faith, together with thought and attitude, plays an important role in well-being. There are many older people among us who have lived many years because their faith has sustained them. We tend to overlook these people or to view them as invalids. Interview someone you know who might be termed a “survivor” of illness, war, or natural disaster, and ask this person about his or her faith journey. What hymn or spiritual song has been meaningful in his or her life? What scripture has formed a foundation for life? What role has faith played in sustaining this person, body and soul, where others less fortunate have given up? Listen to the person’s stories and write them down. Once you are done, read the stories back to the person you interviewed to make sure they are accurate. Do not rely on a recording device; build a relationship.

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



7 Healing the Body of Christ (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- *UCC Book of Worship* or another appropriate denominational resource

No congregation is completely without strife and difficulty. Sometimes the body of Christ needs healing. Participating in the healing of a congregation can be a form of discipleship. Form a committee to recognize and address the problem and the necessary repair. Read the “Order for Corporate Reconciliation” in the *UCC Book of Worship*. (If you are not a UCC congregation, check with your pastor about where to find similar direction in your denomination.) Consult with the minister, moderator, and other appropriate members to determine whether a ritual of reconciliation might be healing for your church body.

The *UCC Book of Worship* provides a specific ritual, the “Order for Corporate Reconciliation,” to address such circumstances. If your congregation has sustained injury, strife, or corporate grief and is in need of repair, consider creating a ritual of reconciliation for your church body. Keep your pastor informed about this activity and follow the pastor’s suggestions.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

8 Honoring the Bodies of the Elders

Supplies:

- personal grooming items for the elder being served
- basin, water, towel, and soap

This activity is to bathe and anoint the feet of a family elder, beginning and ending with prayer, while maintaining an attitude of prayer and intentional service throughout. The face of aging is changing in America. A generation ago, elder parents were more likely to live at home in multigenerational surroundings, among family and familiar objects passed down through generations and well worn with love. Today, in our fast-paced world, young professionals follow opportunities far from their places of origin, and the multigenerational household is fast becoming a thing of the past.

Having passed the age when they might safely hold and play with their children, grandchildren, and even their great grandchildren, many elders face their advancing years alone, often in institutional settings. Most of the food that they eat is institutional food, often unpalatable to them. After a certain stage of life beyond which they are no longer able to care physically for themselves, even to dress themselves or comb their hair, most of their physical care needs will be met by professionals. This is very difficult for proud and formerly independent people who were once caregivers themselves.

Done with prayerful intention, foot washing is a gift to both the giver and the receiver. Think of the many stages of life in which you have known the body of your mother or your father as you wash his or her feet.

Arrange with the elder in advance to provide personal care for the hands and feet. Check with the appropriate medical personnel in advance to make sure there is no medical reason that would prevent you from washing, massaging, and even clipping the nails of the hands and feet of the beloved elder. Make sure the water in your basin is of a comfortable temperature; the elder may have lost the ability to tell the difference between heat and cold. Put some gentle soap in the water. Allow the elder to sit and soak his or her feet. Keep silence unless spoken to. Be aware of the sacredness of what you are doing. Think of the many stages of life in which you have known this body, these feet. Think of all the places that they have traveled and the stories they could tell you. Listen to everything the elder says. Listen deeply, even if it does not make sense, and give thanks.

Examine the elder's feet. Do they need professional care? If not, notice that after some time sitting, the nails will soften. If necessary, clip them. Be respectful. Imagine these feet as the feet of our Lord Jesus, or as the feet your own feet will one day become. Wrap up the activity by drying and then by gently anointing the elder's feet and legs with an appropriate oil or lotion. You may pray silently or aloud as you complete this activity. Be hospitable, like Jesus; bring, this day, a small joy, the joy of touch, to someone who may have all but forgotten it. Honor the body of the elder, and by so doing, honor the body of Christ in this world.

What insights did you gain about honoring the body? Write in your journal, maybe including photographs of the beloved elder at different stages in his or her life and your reflections about the ways in which the body changes throughout the stages of life. Repeat the activity of foot washing/honoring the body of the elder on a monthly basis. Allow your theological reflections and your capacity to listen to the beloved elder to deepen.

Sending & Serving Activity

9 Honoring the Body at the Time of Death

Supplies:

- *UCC Book of Worship* or another appropriate denominational resource

This activity focuses on honoring the body at the time of death. As Chaplain Hank Dunn outlines in his booklet *Hard Choices for Loving People*, difficult decisions face loving people as the time of death of a loved one approaches. As the goals of medical care change from finding a cure to preparing for a comfortable and dignified death, there may come a time when CPR and artificial hydration and nutrition are no longer appropriate—when, in fact, CPR is no longer effective or it becomes apparent that a patient is nearing the end of his or her life, re-

ardless of treatment. Caregivers have learned that dying patients are sometimes more comfortable without IV fluids and that the “burdens of artificial feeding” can include the formation of painful ulcers from lack of movement. There is substantial evidence “that dehydration in the end stage of a terminal illness is a very natural and compassionate way to die” as the body’s systems shut down. At such times, withholding food and water while providing comfort care (also known as palliative care) and relief from pain can be a way of honoring the body’s natural process of dying. Recognizing the last stage of life enables families, physicians, and caregivers to eliminate painful diagnostic testing that will not be helpful but may prolong pain and suffering. Families also honor the body when obtaining living wills in advance and following the directives they receive.

Beyond the management of physical pain and the sorrow of saying goodbye to the physical body, there is the need for the management of spiritual pain. Keeping spiritual companionship with a beloved dying person can be a rich journey and a legacy for those who remain in the world of the living. The gift of touch is important, as is the gift of gentle voices or soft music as a form of comfort to the one who is saying goodbye to this world. The *UCC Book of Worship* (or similar resources from other communions) includes prayers for the one nearing death, prayers for those caring for the sick, and prayers for those grieving. At such times, we may pray for the assurance of God’s embrace, the ears of faith and the eyes of hope, together with the release from fear. These prayers also become a way of honoring the body as it nears death. Keeping a responsible watch with the dying loved one and honoring the body at the time of death is both a form of Christian discipleship and a very high calling.

Resources:

- Hank Dunn, *Hard Choices for Loving People*, <http://www.hospicenet.org/html/choices.html>
- Maggie Callahan and Patricia Kelley, *Final Gifts: Understanding the Special Awareness, Needs, and Communications of the Dying*
- Ira Byock, *Dying Well: The Prospect for Growth at the End of Life*

Honoring the Body



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Setting

For those of us who have experience in the church, we may find that our traditions limit—or even hinder—a genuine expression of godly care for and experience of the body. These activities are designed to help us recapture the delight and joy of honoring the body, and to discover new ways of being that can help us keep in touch with the daily joy that God desires for us to have.

Sometimes we forget that God wants us to have a healthy, happy, fulfilling life and a positive image of our bodies as created in God's image. We buy into the image of God as a cosmic killjoy and faith as drudgery. But Christian tradition isn't all about rules and dogma—it's about joyful, abundant living in an awareness of the presence of God.

About this Exploration

Tradition presents a mixed perspective on the body. Part of tradition upholds the body as created by God and proclaimed as "good." Hebrew law contains regulations to keep the body safe and healthy, and Hebrew praise includes joyous movement. Jesus shared God's presence in bodily form—touching, laughing, walking, eating, speaking, and exploring. Through Jesus we see the body as "the temple" of God's spirit. The body is cherished during Sabbath time and engaged fully during worship through song, dance, touch, and more. The same tradition also sees the body as "evil" and opposed to the Spirit, leading individuals and groups to abuse it and attempt to limit its impact on the Spirit. Because this part of tradition does not agree with the teachings of Jesus, it is important to go beyond its influence and seek to honor, feed, celebrate, and engage the body on our spiritual journeys.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**Song of Solomon 4:1-7,
5:10-16
Luke 7:36-50**

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

Prayer:

God,
How blessed are we to laugh, to touch, to
walk, to laugh,
to know the holy joys of the body!
Teach us to watch over ourselves and each
other,
to cultivate, tend, and weed the holy gar-
dens of our lives,
to resist temptation and that which de-
stroys
what only God can create—
the temple of the body, the house of the soul.
Amen.

1 How Beautiful (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper, pens or pencils
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Read Song of Solomon 4:1-7 and 5:10-16. Think about the elegant imagery of these verses. In this activity those present will evaluate scripture's relationship to honoring the body.

On a sheet of paper make two columns. The left column lists the body parts identified in the scripture, and the right column lists descriptors or adjectives for each respective body part. Fill in the columns based on the scripture.

As you look at the lists together, what do these passages tell us about the human body? About human relationships? About honoring the body?

In Genesis 2 we learn that God created male and female. The human body is a holy vessel, beautiful in God's sight. Honoring the body brings glory and honor to God.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

2 Picturing Jesus

Supplies:

- video: "Face of Love," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wRkn6GaO-AM&feature=related>
- video: "Faces of Jesus," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GAHJrkY1vYA&feature=related>
- printed art images of Jesus
- article, "Choc Full O' Anger," http://www.nydailynews.com/news/2007/03/30/2007-03-30_choc_full_o_anger_.html

Collect a variety of images of Jesus from art and display these where the family will gather. You might find images at various websites, including this site: http://www.rejesus.co.uk/site/module/faces_of_jesus/. Together look at the images on the website. Ask each person to identify an image he or she feels most drawn to and why. Next, watch together the "Face of Love" and "Faces of Jesus" videos, asking people to note the different ways Jesus' body has been depicted artistically. Invite reflection on what these various depictions throughout history and across cultures might have to say about how we have responded to the body of Jesus in Christian traditions.

After considering more ancient renderings, share and discuss the "Choc Full O' Anger" article about the recent controversy concerning an artist who, during the season of Lent, displayed a life-size nude sculpture of Jesus made of chocolate.

Ask family members to respond to the controversy. What limits would they place on the depiction of the bodily image of Jesus? How do our own attitudes about the bodily image of Jesus reflect our feelings about our own bodies and those of others? How have the ways that Jesus' body has been depicted in the church helped to shape both positive and negative ideas about the body? What depictions of Jesus' body are helpful or necessary or important to create an honest reflection of Christian tradition?

Sending & Serving Activity



3 Love Letter from God (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- Bibles
- writing paper or stationery, envelopes with postage, pens

Read Song of Solomon 4:1–7 and 5:10–16. Consider the love and adoration that occurs as one beloved describes the other. In the faith practice of honoring the body, we discover God's spiritual and physical love for all people.

People are God's beloved creation, each with unique qualities and characteristics, including physical manifestations. God created each of us. How we take care of our bodies is one way we honor and glorify God.

Invite each family member to consider his or her own body and the specific details with which God blesses it. Have the women read Song of Solomon 4:1–7 and the men read Song of Solomon 5:10–16.

Pass out paper, pens, and envelopes. Invite each person to write a letter to him- or herself from God using the Solomon passage as a guideline. Explain that this letter is addressed to each individual from God. It is meant to be a letter of love as a parent would write to a child or a partner would write to a beloved. Remind writers that all unique individual attributes are given by a loving God. Even the aspects of self we might not find pleasing are pleasing to God. Write the letter in loving acknowledgment of God's work in you. Feel free to ask God's guidance for you and your body. Seal the letter and address it to yourself. Set a date when you will gather again to open and read the letters.

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



4 Meditation on the Perfection of the Beloved Other as a Reflection of the Divine (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- Bible
- journal
- pen or pencil

Throughout history Christians have struggled with negative messages about the body. Even today, we live in a culture that is deeply conflicted about sexuality. Developing responsible sexual health and wholeness can be a way of honoring

the body. This activity invites you to explore and meditate on a passage of scripture that is often incorporated into wedding liturgies, one that embraces sexuality without shame or discomfort.

Read Song of Solomon 4:1–7, which celebrates the physical body of the female beloved, and 5:10–16, which celebrates masculine physical perfection. Meditate on these scriptures, relating to masculine and feminine physical perfection using any techniques you choose. Write these reflections in your journal, together with your reflections about any negative messages you may have received about the body, romance, and love, and any struggles you experience or may have experienced in the past about claiming the beauty of the beloved other and/or yourself. Consider whether and how you might change the negative messages and enhance the positive, especially in the context of your most intimate relationship.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

5 Labyrinth Walk

Supplies:

- labyrinth
- pens and paper
- “Walking a Labyrinth,” Attachment: Activity 6

Walking a labyrinth is an ancient Christian tradition that goes back to the time of the early church. Actually the labyrinth predates Christianity, but it was adopted and adapted by the Christian faith. It incorporates mind, spirit, and body in one activity. Print Attachment: Activity 6, “Walking a Labyrinth.” Consider the labyrinth as a metaphor for your own journey of faith. Who has been important to you on our journey of faith? What have been the major landmarks along that journey? (For example, your most important spiritual experiences) What questions do you still have about your faith? What challenges do you think still lie ahead for you on that journey? Where do you think God is still calling you to on that journey?

With these thoughts in mind, begin tracing the labyrinth in silence. Where do you think God is still calling you to on this faith journey?

Sending & Serving Activity



6 Baptism as Blessing

Supplies:

- artwork “Baptism of Jesus” by Pheoris West, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1725021198?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37961&store_id=1401
- Bible
- bowl of water

Baptism is a sacrament, a sign of God’s blessing. Sit and study “Baptism of Jesus” by Pheoris West. What words and actions of blessing does this picture bring to your mind? Is there anything you have to let go of in order to appreciate this image? If so, what is it?

Read the story of Jesus’ baptism in Mark 1:9–11. Consider the powerful blessing of the words in verse 11. As you think about Jesus’ baptism, recall your baptism

and feel the power of God's blessing for you. Dip your fingers in some water to remember your baptism. Receive God's blessing: "You are my child, chosen and cherished, delight of my life." Hold this blessing with you.

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



7 Good Touch

Supplies:

- artwork: "Margot Embracing Her Mother" by Mary Cassatt, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=17101&store_id=1401
- Bibles
- large bowl and pitcher of water

Christian tradition often experiences and expresses a duality when it comes to understanding the place of the body within our faith. Though we practice an embodied faith, at times in our history we have seen the body as negative because it is seen as the source of pain, illness, abuse, or carnal temptation. Consider your own attitudes about the complex history of our faith traditions related to the body.

Read together Luke 7:36–50 and reflect on the intimacy of physical contact in this story. How might we react if the same scenario between Jesus and the woman played itself out in our churches today? What would our comfort level today be with the physical intimacy of ancient Christian traditions, such as anointing with oil or the bathing of another person's feet? Does our comfort level in such situations depend on the gender or age of the persons involved? Consider why this might be so.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

8 Healing the Body of Christ: Ending Intimate Partner Violence

Supplies:

- Bible
- computer with Internet access

Read two or three books that raise violence against women as an ecclesiological question for people of faith. Form a small discussion group to address these issues in the context of faith practices for everyday life.

Form a covenant group to address the problem of intimate partner violence. Such conversations can make it easier for women to talk about this most intimate form of oppression, often cloaked in silence because of the shame associated with being a victim.

The Bible has been used not only to keep women “in their place,” but also to justify the enslavement and importation of Africans and genocide of Native Americans, among other evils. Identify those passages of the Bible that have been used to degrade women and justify violence against them. Discuss how and when these passages were written and by whom and what purpose they were intended to serve at the time they were written. Is there a period or a comma behind these pronouncements? How can you make a difference in your home community? Consider serving as a volunteer at a women’s center or being a listening ear in your community. Write about your experiences in your journal.

Sending & Serving Activity



9 Practice Open Table

Supplies:

- transportation
- Thanksgiving leftovers, or a simple supper (beans, grains, salad), prepared at church or brought in from homes of parishioners
- artwork: “Golden Rule” by Norman Rockwell, <http://www.art.com/products/p12549842-sa-i1917233/norman-rockwell-golden-rule.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=c5dd66dac7d541809fb8256c7daa3064&searchstring=golden+rule+norman+rockwell>
- Bible

Jesus not only fed the hungry, he also practiced fellowship at table with strangers. It is one thing to put faith into action by feeding the hungry through volunteering at a food bank; it is quite another to practice radical hospitality and humility by sitting down with a homeless person on his or her own turf. At least one church in the Northern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ has hosted a day after Thanksgiving meal where Thanksgiving leftovers were shared with the poor and homeless at a common table away from the church campus. Feeding the body of Christ in this way not only emulates Jesus and extends the practice of tradition, it also opens the church to the wider community and makes radical hospitality a real and tangible force. Write about your experiences in your journal.

Read and meditate on Mark 8:1–9, Luke 9:10–17, and John 6:1–15. Organize a committee to help with this project. As you meet with your committee, spend time together with the scriptures and with Rockwell’s famous painting “Golden Rule.”

Walking a Labyrinth

An Ancient Christian Spiritual Tradition

The labyrinth, a spiritual tradition more than four thousand years old, reflects one of the most basic shapes in nature—the circle. It is not a maze, a design that usually includes false or dead-end paths where the goal is to focus on finding the correct way in and out of the structure. Rather, in a labyrinth there is only one path, and it leads you to the center of the design. When are you ready to exit, you reverse your direction and follow the very same path out of the labyrinth. The focus is not on the path, but upon your time of reflection and mediation as you walk the path. It is often helpful to think of the labyrinth as a metaphor for the journey of faith.

The following are some helpful hints to consider as you walk or the trace the path of the labyrinth:

- Before entering, consider a spiritual question or concern you wish to focus on as you journey through the labyrinth. Let this question center your thoughts as you move along the path.
- Move at your own pace. At times, you may need to step aside so that others may pass you coming or going.
- Feel free to pay attention to others on the labyrinth. As you pass others or find yourself at times walking next to them in parallel, consider how these encounters might be symbolic of those you have met along your own journey of faith.
- When you reach the center, feel free to take time to rest and pray.
- As you are ready, turn and follow the path out of the labyrinth. As you come close to the end, place the question you began your walk with in God's hands and seek a sense of rest and peace as you exit.



Honoring the Body



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Setting

Mission is essential to the practices of the Christian faith; it encompasses every aspect of faith practice, but particularly those aspects of service to others. When whole health is a goal of Christian practice, both positive and negative forms of behavior must be taken into account. Negative behaviors must be weeded out before the rule of God can be realized on this earth. The practical theology applied to mission is called missiology. The lives we live and the lifestyles we form are evidence of our missiology, whether positive or negative.

About this Exploration

Since our bodies are temples of God's Holy Spirit, our bodies are extensions of God's grace and love as we interact with others in our families, communities, and the world. Through our bodies we are invited to serve, responding to human need in all persons. We are invited to help others see the God in them through the presence of God in us. When we love, serve, nurture, and care for one another by respecting and honoring our body and others' bodies, we live out the healthy wholeness that God created us for. Considering the various and diverse contexts in which all live, we learn to choose well between caring for or abusing the body, even as we consider Christian responses to healthy and wholesome as well as violent and abusive living.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Exodus 23:10–12
2 Corinthians 4:13–5:1

Prayer:

*God of Work and God of Rest,
open my eyes to those around me
whose weary bodies are in desperate need
of the rest only you can bring.
Help me find your rest,
to feel it deep in my bones,
and to carry it into the world around me.
Amen.*

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



1 With These Hands (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- 2" x 8½" strips of paper (one per person)

Read together the “About this Exploration” paragraph above. What does this statement mean to you? What is challenging about it? What is exciting or engaging about it? Describe times when you have been loving, serving, nurturing, and caring for another. How did you feel? Describe times when others have been loving, serving, nurturing, and caring for you. How was that experience?

Pass out slips of paper. Have everyone write “With these hands, I ____.” For example, “With these hands, I will serve the young mothers of the church.” Each should fill in the blank with some service to the body of Christ. Collect everyone’s statements and read them aloud as prayer petitions while you hold hands in prayer. End with, “and all God’s people say ‘Amen.’”

Discerning & Deciding Activity

2 Sabbath Word Map

Supplies:

- large pieces of paper, or tape several pieces together
- colored markers
- Bibles
- word map worksheet such as at http://www.eslflow.com/Visio-brain-storm_worksheet_cluster_diagram.pdf

Together read Exodus 23:10–12 and 2 Corinthians 4:13–5:1. What is the overall message? Why does God rest? Why does God desire that we rest? Why is Sabbath necessary for God? For us? For other creatures? Review ways that Sabbath is described in the scriptures. Work together to create a word map.

In the middle of the paper write the word SABBATH in large letters. Using arrows, circles, and different colors, write other words that come to mind as you consider Sabbath, the scriptures, and your life. Continue adding words in relationship to one another until the paper is filled. Note the final shape and, using markers, create a picture that encompasses the entire word map.

Sending & Serving Activity

3 Team Effort

Supplies:

- sturdy wooden box, or four concrete blocks

An important component of serving in mission is that we do it together—in community with one another. Jesus sent his own disciples out in twos, with each relying on the other.

Set out a sturdy wooden box or four concrete blocks in a square formation. The challenge of this task is for the entire household eventually to be standing together on the box or blocks with no one touching the ground or floor. Begin by adding two persons who will likely need to hold onto each other for support. Continue to add one person at a time, allowing the group to consider ideas and strategies for completing their task with each additional person.

What connections can you see between this activity and the ways we are called to rely upon one another when we engage in mission? In what ways might we be called upon to support one another physically or with our bodies? In what ways might such dependence on one another represent a challenge to us as we work together in mission?

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



4 Meditation on Exodus 23:10–12 (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- Bible

Meditation on Exodus 23:10–12 reveals a profound relationship between order, rest, and justice. Use *lectio divina* and feast on the word of Exodus 23:10–12. Take a few minutes in prayerful reflection before beginning the activity. Take a “bite” of the scripture, reading it slowly and carefully (*lectio*) in silence. Next, meditate on the scripture; “chew” on it a bit (*meditatio*). Then read the scripture again, this time aloud (*oratio*). The fourth and final stage is where the scripture is ingested to become part of the body (*contemplatio*). This activity should take about an hour. Read the text, then read it aloud, contemplate or meditate on the text, and digest it inwardly.

Do you work on Sunday? If so, what other day do you use for Sabbath? On your Sabbath day, how do you refrain from working or causing other people to work? Keeping the Sabbath involves more than just not working. It involves intentional faith practice. Ask yourself what practices of justice and devotion you can embrace in your Sabbath practice.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

5 Meditation on 2 Corinthians 4:13—5:1

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pen or pencil

Meditation on 2 Corinthians 4:13—5:1 reveals the necessity of faith, order, and the resurrection of the spiritual body often threatened by worldly things. It invites consideration of the body as a manifestation of the Divine. Meditate on this scripture using the *lectio divina* method. Then, ask yourself questions such as these: How do I treat my body when discouraged? Do I remember to eat, rest, and get adequate exercise, or do I dull my senses with more work, alcohol, or prescription or over-the-counter drugs? In what ways am I honoring the body, and in what ways am I dishonoring it? Write about your actual practices, not your ideal.

Observe your own behaviors and patterns of behavior for a week—just as if you were watching someone else. Do you like what you see? Is your missiology one of faithful care or one that dishonors the body? What about the people around you who love you? Are your behaviors ways you would want them to emulate, or must your theology of the body, as practiced in daily life, change? Record your observations in your journal.

Sending & Serving Activity

6 Food for Thought

Supplies:

- website: “My Pyramid,” <http://www.foodpyramid.com/mypyramid/>
- paper and pen or pencil

Make a list of what you eat in a week. This is not about how much you eat, but what you eat. Include all your meals and snacks. Once your list is done, look at the “food pyramid.” Looking at the list you made, what categories do your food items fit into? Look at which categories of the pyramid make up the largest percentage of your diet. Consider these questions:

- What does food have to do with God?
- What stories do you remember from the Bible that include food?
- How often do you pray over or about food?
- Why do we tend to pray at meal times, but not for snacks?
- What happens to extra food in your home?
- I wonder if it is better to finish the food on our plate, remembering some people are going hungry while we have plenty, or if it is better to throw away extras so that we don’t overeat. What might be a solution?
- I wonder what God thinks about our eating habits (daily diet).
- I wonder how eating healthier could help us express our faith.
- I wonder how praying at all meal times might change our eating habits.

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity



7 Walk to Save Lives

Supplies:

- artwork: “Back Bone, c. 1997 by” Tony Cragg, http://www.art.com/products/p12210191-sa-i1581812/tony-cragg-back-bone-c1997.htm?sorig=cat&so_rigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=c5dd66dac7d541809fb8256c7daa3064&searchstring=back+bone+cragg
- website: “Out of the Darkness,” <http://www.outofthedarkness.org/>

According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, someone commits suicide every 15 minutes, resulting in 34,000 deaths each year. Almost everyone knows someone who has committed suicide or whose family has been touched by suicide. Suicide deaths by young people are on the rise. This foundation provides education about suicide and helps to create communal activities like suicide prevention walks that raise public awareness about a topic that often stays in

the dark until, for someone, it is too late. Be proactive. Honor the body. Help create an atmosphere and an environment where people know where to go for help.

Organize a suicide prevention walk. This is something one person can do in daily life. Form a committee to help organize a suicide prevention walk to raise public awareness in your community. Use Tony Cragg's "Back Bone" as a way of thinking together about what it means to have stand up against the various messages that denigrate people and lead to suicide. Also consider how the community can have "back bone" to stand against those wrong messages.

The website "Out of the Darkness" will teach you everything you need to know about organizing a suicide prevention walk.

Discerning & Deciding Activity

8 Preventing Substance Abuse in Children, Teens, and Young Adults

Supplies:

- films
- brochures
- tables
- chairs

Read about the problems of drug abuse in your area. Talk to the local police department or social service agency. What types of drugs are the young people using? Where do they get them? Are they all illegal, or are some of them legal?

Organize a Community Program with Talk Back. Young people who abuse drugs and alcohol are exposed to these elements in a variety of settings, some of them highly unpredictable. Part of the problem is that these juvenile abusers may not understand that they are dishonoring the body. Another problem is that programs sometimes do not provide the youngsters with adequate opportunities to speak out—or sometimes, the youngsters are too ashamed to speak.

Engage a health professional to come and speak about drug prevention. Make sure there is an atmosphere of safety established so that youngsters feel free to talk. Give them the opportunities to tell their stories without fear or shame.

Engage the young people and health care professionals in working together to build networks of safety for the young people of your community who are affected by these problems. Make sure that they know that their ideas, thoughts, and concerns are heard, felt, and understood. Help them understand that their bodies are their own to preserve and protect and that bodies only come one to a customer in this life as we know it.

Resources:

These online sources are useful to parents to help prevent drug abuse in their children.

- "Parents. The Anti-Drug" offers important tips and advice, <http://www.theantidrug.com/>
- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) offers a helpful U.S. government site, <http://store.samhsa.gov/home>
- The National Institute on Drug Abuse offers advice on drug abuse prevention, <http://drugabuse.gov/prevention/index.html>

Sending & Serving Activity

9 Uphold the Resurrection: Survivors of Abuse Speak Out

Supplies: None

Research local organizations working for the prevention of drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, and suicide, and identify specific individuals who might be willing to speak about how God has worked in their lives to bring them back to life. This works even better if you have members from your own congregation who have taken such a journey and are willing to give their personal spiritual testimony.

Invite a survivor (or survivors) from a local abuse prevention program (or programs) to speak about his or her struggle and faith journey from death to new life. In our communities and in our families, we sometimes see the miracle of someone who has, with the help of God, been resurrected from the living hell of drug or alcohol abuse. Sometimes these individuals have stories to tell about their struggles and the faith journeys that they have taken with God, as well as the dramatic encounters they have experienced with evil.

After hearing the testimony, write your reflections on what you have heard. In what ways can you support the journeys of people in your community who may be struggling in silence with deadly behaviors? Are there people very close to you who are waiting for your encouragement? Where can you begin this week?

Review your personal mission in light of this activity and the part you play in the body of Christ. Revise your personal Rule of Life as you continue to change and grow.

Honoring the Body



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Setting

This setting explores the future and vision of the church in relation to individuals in diverse contexts as representations of *imago dei* and the body of Christ. It advocates for the inclusion of disparate and diverse elements understood to constitute the body of Christ with a view toward an expansive and celebratory future embracing global values of humanity and wholeness for persons of all ages and abilities.

About this Exploration

The strength gained through honoring the body empowers those who follow Jesus to lead and serve. The fullness of the body of Christ is contingent upon the ability of humans to appreciate, respect, and celebrate our God-created diversity. Rather than discovering distinction and condemning brokenness, Christians are called to remember our common creation—*imago dei*. In that creation, we celebrate the unique abilities of every person, discovering opportunities to grow, feel, love, and express the fullness of each one's individual humanity. By claiming our physical bodies as spiritual gifts, we grow as persons and as the children of God, finding wholeness as we grow in our ability to more fully reflect the image of God.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Ezekiel 37:1-14
Matthew 22:34-40

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

Prayer:

Oh Holy One, who quickens spirit in the womb of mothers,

you who knot us of bones and sinews and who breathed into us the breath of Life; you who causes the wind to move across the waters;

you who lull us to sleep and waken us each morning—

we give thanks to you and praise your holy names.

Open our eyes and ears that we may see and hear the visions you have prepared for us.

Make us bold to do your work in this world as you keep on speaking;

bring your Spirit within us afresh each day, never-ending still-speaking God.

Amen.

1 No Mirrors

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- video: “No Mirrors in My Nana’s House,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GD57KULeIgg&feature=youtu.be>

Play the video “No Mirrors in My Nana’s House,” and invite everyone to listen and reflect. Use the following questions for discussion:

- When have you felt judged based on your appearance?
- How important is physical appearance in our culture?
- How does your relationship with another person change the way you physically see that person?
- How do we look past our own biases when we see other people?
- How do we teach people to see past the physical?
- How do we help people see their own beauty?
- I wonder if, by affirming the beauty of everyone, regardless of circumstance, we suggest that it is acceptable to not care for the body.

Discerning & Deciding Activity



2 Dance of Celebration (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- Bible
- “The Hokey Pokey,” <http://www.gardenofsong.com/hokeypokey.html>
- space to dance safely

Read Ezekiel 37:1-14, and contemplate the marvelous machine that is our body. Find a recording of “The Hokey Pokey” dance and appropriate playing device. A second option is to find a children’s dance CD, where that song is usually included. Arrange the room so that there will be space for participants to dance the Hokey Pokey as a celebration to honor the body.

Read aloud Ezekiel 37:1-14. Ask everyone to think about the body as a marvelous machine made by God. How is our body useful for work? For rest? For play? For praise?

One way we honor our body is by using it for joyful celebration of praise and dance. Have everyone stand in a circle and join in dancing “The Hokey Pokey.” Laugh and have fun as you rejoice in using all the parts of the body. If some persons are physically challenged, encourage them to raise their hands or move in whatever way is comfortable and safe for them. This is a time to honor the body as we dance in praise to God! When the dance is over, invite people to talk about their memories associated with “The Hokey Pokey.”

Sending & Serving Activity

3 On the Tightrope

Supplies:

- artwork: “Man in a Wheelchair on a Tightrope,” <http://www.art.com/products/p13951106-sa-i2746744/man-in-a-wheelchair-on-a-tightrope.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=c5dd66dac7d541809fb8256c7daa3064&searchstring=wheelchair+and+tightrope>
- “Thought Bubble,” Attachment: Activity 3

Set up the artwork “Man in a Wheelchair on a Tightrope” where it can be easily seen by everyone. Ask people to imagine what the man might be thinking. Pass out “Thought Bubble,” Attachment: Activity 3, and have everyone write what he or she imagines the man’s response is in the “thought bubble.” Ask each person place their thought bubble by the head of the man in the artwork and share with the group. Then ask what they think is about to happen in this image. *How might this image help us all to reflect on our spiritual practice of honoring the body?*

Invite everyone to consider what impediments exist within the culture that keep us from honoring the bodies of all people. Ask how they would envision a more inclusive world that honors all persons’ bodies. What challenges might need to be overcome? How might this be accomplished? Is there something we could do in our neighborhood, home, places of work, or meeting space to help this happen?

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

4 Meditation on the Golden Rule

Supplies:

- Bible
- artwork: “Golden Rule,” by Norman Rockwell, <http://www.art.com/products/p9388041612-sa-i5446642/norman-rockwell-golden-rule-do-unto-others-april-1-1961.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=5000032&ui=6c6a730242504593a62db31e60ee1963&ssk=norman+rockwell>
- journal

Get in a comfortable position. For meditation it is recommended that you sit in a chair with your spine erect. However, choose a position that is comfortable for you that will allow you to concentrate for at least 15 minutes.

Read Matthew 22:34–40, especially focusing on verses 37–40. Don’t try to push out thoughts or resist them. Simply notice that thoughts are present and let them go the way they come—effortlessly. When you find that the awareness has been caught up in a train of thought, easily come back to the focus of your meditation, which is the scripture passage.

In order to love others, we must first love ourselves. We love ourselves and others if for no other reason than that we are created in the image of God. Loving the other as the self is a way of showing our obedience to God in loving the Holy One

with all of our being. Without this love, this scripture tells us, all other scriptures are in vain.

Study the artwork “Golden Rule.” Who in the picture might you find difficult to love? Why? To whom in the picture might you easily relate? What strikes you about this art? Reflect on the scripture and the artwork, and then write your meditations in your journal.

It’s important to take time to come out of meditation slowly. When you are deeply rested in meditation, it can be jarring to suddenly get up and start any other activity. Remain with your eyes closed for a minute or two. Stretch, move around a bit, and gradually become more active. When you are ready to open your eyes, you can open them downcast at first. Take your time!

Discerning & Deciding Activity



5 Prayer of Examen (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- journal
- Bible

The Daily Examen is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God’s presence and discern God’s direction for us. The Examen is an ancient practice in the church that can help us see God’s hand at work in our whole experience.

This is a version of the five-step Daily Examen that St. Ignatius practiced.

1. Become aware of God’s presence.
2. Review the day with gratitude.
3. Pay attention to your emotions.
4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.
5. Look toward tomorrow.

Each day for the next week, take a few moments to reflect on Matthew 22:34–40 and the meditations you recorded in your journal. Examine yourself in prayerful reflection at the end of each day. Have you truly loved God with all your heart, soul, and mind? Have you loved your neighbor as yourself? If not, have you loved yourself? What can you do better tomorrow? How will you love God and your neighbor and yourself even better? How can you be a better reflection of God and the body of Christ in your treatment of your own body and the bodies of others in this world and this life? Record your reflections, confessions, and intentions in your journal each day.

Sending & Serving Activity



6 Commanding the Body (Easy Preparation)

Supplies:

- Bible

Read Matthew 22:34–40 and think about the following questions:

- Which is harder for you—loving a neighbor or loving yourself?

- Does how we answer the first question alter the way we hear Jesus' words?
- How do you love God with your heart? Soul? Mind?
- How might you love God with your body?

Read Teresa of Avila's words about being the body of Christ, and use the questions that follow for reflection.

Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes with which Christ's compassion look on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands by which he will bless all the world. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

—St. Teresa of Avila

- How is Christ active through your hands?
- How is Christ active through your feet?
- What do you think Teresa meant about our eyes and Jesus' compassion?
- If Jesus is looking through our eyes, what should we expect to see?
- If Jesus is looking through our eyes, how are we called to respond?

Read Matthew 22:34–40 again.

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activity

7 Opening the Doors of the Church to Affirm Humanity

Supplies:

- equipment and location for showing the film
- video: *For the Bible Tells Me So*, <http://www.forthetellmeso.org/index-exc.htm>
- (optional) film: *Call Me Malcolm*—a transgendered seminarian struggles with gender identity; comes with a study guide

The film *For the Bible Tells Me So* is about Christian families as they learn how to cope with a child or sibling who has come out as gay or lesbian. Invite friends or co-workers to join you in viewing the film. As you gather, establish an atmosphere of openness. No bigotry or intolerance is to be accepted; an atmosphere of radical hospitality must be maintained.

Gay and lesbian Christians have always been a part of the church, but often at the cost of being completely silent about their sexual identities; in fact, gay, lesbian, transgendered, and intersex (LGBTQI) people have often been the victims of religiously sanctioned violence. Invite participants to share their own stories about being in the closet, having a gay or lesbian child, living as a gay person in a straight world, or any related topic.

If yours is an Open and Affirming Congregation, invite someone from your own church to talk about what it has meant to him or her not to have to hide his or her bodily identity within the body of Christ. If your church is not "O and A," explore what it might be like to become open to the gifts of LGBTQI people and affirming of their presence. How will the active and unfettered participation of LGBTQI people open the future of the church for Christian witness?

Discerning & Deciding Activity

8 Witnessing the Hospitality of the Future Church Today

Supplies:

- materials for making banners, or commercially made banners
- artwork: “The Public Fountain” by Manuel Alvarez Bravo, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1033816467?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37962&store_id=1401

Organize a multigenerational committee or task force for the purpose of creating banners that witness to hospitality. Plan to make one banner at a time over a period of weeks or months. Acquire the necessary materials, or make the necessary arrangements with a commercial concern like Kinko’s/Fed-Ex duplicating services.

The future church doesn’t “happen”; it must be created and/or built. On the walls of the First Congregational Church in Oakland, California, there are three banners. The first and largest reads “First Congregational Church of Oakland, Where Love is First.” This horizontal banner carries the church’s rainbow logo and is the one that is most frequently carried in parades and social justice actions. There are also two huge vertical banners. One reads “Freedom” and the other reads “Justice.” Together these banners say a great deal about the church’s mission, vision, and purpose. But is this enough? This is what the guest or visitor sees once he or she is inside. What does the passerby see?

Consider what banners your group might create to display your mission and bring in the future. Study “The Public Fountain.” How would your church quench the thirst of people in your community? Is your church Accessible to All, Open and Affirming, A Whole Earth Church, or a Just Peace Church?

Once the banners have been made, post them proudly outside the church and proclaim your witness to the world. This makes radical welcome evident to the world and forms the foundation of the future church.

Sending & Serving Activity

9 Integrate Youth and Young Adults into the Once and Future Church (or Other Setting)

Supplies:

- Activity Bags (pictures to color, crayons, a puppet, paper, a book)
- song: “I Was There to Hear Your Borneing Cry” by John Ylvisaker (tune: Waterlife), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYnmtQI50ic&feature=related> This song welcomes children of all ages to a space of worship.
- artwork: “Margot Embracing Her Mother” by Mary Cassatt, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1502057828?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37961&store_id=1401

Take a look at your setting and assess your setting’s leadership development and inclusion of youth and young adults as you build for the future. Keep an open mind and a willingness to grow. Are your activities and communal life accessible to families with young children and to youth and young adults? Study Mary Cas-



sat's painting and consider what it says to you about the importance and timelessness of intergenerational connectivity in faith practices of all kinds.

Balaam's Unofficial Handbook of the United Church of Christ, by Baalam's Courier staff, makes a profound assertion: "Children . . . are gifts to all of us from a loving God. They challenge our assumptions, surprise us with wisdom, stun us with sensitivity, and call forth our caring not only for them but for all who share the earth. They belong in worship, in Sunday school, in children's choirs, in ministries of outreach, and at church dinners . . . they can serve as acolytes, greeters and ushers."

For younger children, *Balaam's* suggests providing activity bags (see Supplies) for their use in worship times and other gatherings. Consider the following questions to assess how welcoming your setting is to children and youth:

- How does your church embody multigenerational worship?
- How are children and young adults involved in Sunday worship beyond the children's sermon?
- Do they participate in baptisms and share Holy Communion?
- Are they comfortable in praise?
- Do they understand how and why we pray?
- Are they learning our hymns and songs?
- Do we consider them for board service? (*Balaam's*, pages 108–9)
- In what ways can parents increase the expectation of welcome in congregational life by treasuring and empowering children more fully in the home?
- How can adults generally be more viable advocates for the respected and anticipated presence and participation of young people in congregational life?

When we incorporate children and young adults fully into the life of the congregation, we are, to borrow a phrase from Karen Tye, "building the road we are walking on." We create traditions, reinforce foundations, and build the necessary bridge to the future for our denomination and our faith. Discuss the preceding questions while creating the activity bags for children.

Attachment: Activity 3

Thought Bubble

