

## Keeping Sabbath

### About this Faith Practice

Sabbath is intentional time taken by individuals and faith communities to integrate the Divine with humanity and creation. Jesus models how to keep Sabbath both inwardly (through prayer, solitude, silence, and meditation) and outwardly (through communal ritual and acts of justice). Our inward movement toward a life centered in the Spirit indicates the reign of God within us. Jesus embodies the depth of sabbath-keeping experiences through outward action to followers and to those he encounters who have specific needs. Our practice of Sabbath is informed by God resting on the seventh day after laboring for six days to create the world, establishing a day of Sabbath. Building on this biblical tradition, some faith communities dedicate a specific day of the week to rest, worship, and work for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

### Let's Begin...

Now that you've downloaded the files for your faith practice and age group or setting, you can get started planning one or multiple sessions:

**1 Open the .pdf file for your age group or setting. Choose an Exploration, the approach you think will help your group to best experience the faith practice. Choose any one of the following Explorations to use for one session:**



**Discovery**



**Scripture**



**Discipleship**



**Christian Tradition**



**Context and Mission**



**Future and Vision**

**Note:** If you're planning multiple sessions, you can follow the order suggested above or feel free to use any order that fits the needs of your group. Some groups may choose to start with Scripture and then see where that leads them. Others may be more ready to act in their community and might want to start with Context and Mission.

**2 Locate the Exploration you've chosen**

### 3 Look through all 9 activities and select the ones you would like to do with your group.

- If you're planning a 30–45 minute session, choose 3 activities.
- It is best to select at least one activity from Exploring and Engaging, at least one from Discerning and Deciding, and at least one from Sending and Serving.
- For 45 minutes to 1 hour, choose 4 or 5 activities.
- For a 1½ to 2-hour session, you can use all 9 activities.

**Tip:** Look for this symbol  to find activities designed for Easy Preparation (able to be done with minimal preparation using supplies normally found at the church).

### 4 Make copies of any handouts () related to your activities. Order posters (), if using art (see "Ordering Posters," below).

## Use of Art, Music, and Scripture in Faith Practices

Faith Practices activities include many opportunities to grow in faith through the use of scripture, music, and art.

### Ordering Posters

If you choose activities that use an art image, you or your church will need to purchase posters of the art by clicking on the link provided in the activity. If you wish to use art, you will need to plan ahead, since it takes 1 to 2 weeks for the posters to arrive after you place your order.

### Art

Six posters are used with the faith practice Giving and Receiving Hospitality and may be ordered by clicking on the links provided.

#### From Imaging the Word Poster Sets:

"Out of Work" by Käthe Kollwitz (<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>)

"The Public Fountain" by Manuel Alvarez Bravo (<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>)

"Guatemala: Procession" by Betty LaDuke (<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>)

#### From AllPosters.com:

"The Dance of Youth" by Pablo Picasso (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters7>)

"Going to Church" by William H. Johnson (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters8>)

"Midday Rest" (after Millet), c.1890 by Vincent van Gogh (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters9>)

### Music

Three music selections are used with Giving and Receiving Hospitality. We have selected music which is easily found in many hymnals. A web link is provided to give more information about each music selection.

Let Me Enter God's Own Dwelling, Tune: Unser Herrscher (<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong7>)

I Woke Up This Morning, Tune: Woke Up This Morning (<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong8>)

I've Got Peace Like a River, Tune: Peace Like A River (<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong9>)

### Scripture

Twelve Bible passages are used with Giving and Receiving Hospitality, two with each Exploration.

Discovery	Genesis 2:2–4	Luke 12:22–31
Scripture	Mark 2:23–3:6	Exodus 20:1–17
Discipleship	Luke 6:1–11	Deuteronomy 6:1–9
Christian Tradition	Mark 6:30–34, 53–56	Isaiah 58:9b–14
Context and Mission	Jeremiah 17:19–27	1 Corinthians 11:17–26
Future and Vision	Psalms 119:105–112, 129–136	Matthew 27:51–66 (Matthew 26:14–27:66)

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# Keeping Sabbath



## Exploration: Discovery

### About this Setting

Seekers and new church participants may come with varied reasons for choosing to be part of a church community. They may be eager, anxious, defensive, or fearful of their new adventure in this community. Some may be able to articulate their reasons for attending and wanting to participate. Some have been hurt by a church and wish to move past the resentments and concerns of a painful experience. Seekers and new church participants seek personal and spiritual connection. Some are at a transitional time of life changes, loss, and/or crisis points. Others have the desire to find like-minded people, friendship, and a social connection. The seeker and new church participant is willing to experience a wider or renewed vision of Christian community.

The resources in this setting offer activities and suggestions for ways that adults can together discover the experience of keeping Sabbath. New participants bring the gift of new eyes and ears and hands. Through these varied activities, the participants may explore old and new ways of viewing, celebrating, and enacting Sabbath, including various media and creative techniques to expand a Sabbath focus and blessing. The experiences are a time for discovering together who God is calling us to be as members of God's community.



### About this Exploration

Sabbath is intentional time taken by individuals and faith communities to integrate the Divine with humanity and creation. Jesus models how to keep Sabbath both inwardly (through prayer, solitude, silence, and meditation) and outwardly (through communal ritual and acts of justice). Our inward movement toward a life centered in the Spirit indicates the reign of God within us. Jesus embodies the depth of his Sabbath-keeping experiences through outward action to his followers and to those he encounters who have specific needs. Our practice of Sabbath is informed by God's resting on the seventh day after laboring for six days to create the world, establishing a day of Sabbath. Building on this biblical tradition, some faith communities dedicate a specific day of the week to rest, worship, and work for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

#### BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**Genesis 2:2-4**  
**Luke 12:22-31**

### Leader Preparation

Introduce this Faith Practices offering in your church newsletter, e-mail, and website postings. Announce that the Faith Practices resources include numerous engaging activities to help participants understand the history of Sabbath and how to keep the modern concept of a Sabbath that extends beyond Sunday.

Read the two Bible passages, focusing on what it means to be Sabbath-keepers. Reflect on your personal Sabbath practices as a leader, as well as other Sabbath practices in which others may participate. Practicing Sabbath can be active as well as reflective. Active Sabbath practices may include physical activity, participation in community worship and mission activities, and any activity that is a state of "doing." Reflective Sabbath is more introspective, or a state of "being," such as quiet prayer, journaling, and reading sacred texts. Take a personal inventory of your faith journey from your earliest recollection to the present time as a means to help lead others in exploring their faith journey.

### Exploring & Engaging Activities



#### 1 Inner Reflection: What Is Sabbath to You? (Easy Preparation)

##### Leader preparation:

In this session the participants will have the opportunity to uncover the many ways to experience Sabbath through imagery and group discussion. In preparation, reflect on the many ways that one can experience Sabbath individually and in community. Write a series of questions for reflection such as: What is Sabbath to you? What does it mean to take an "intentional" Sabbath? What does this kind of rest and renewal feel like in the body? Of what thoughts are you aware when you feel relaxed and peaceful? What activities are restful, relaxing, and spiritually meaningful to you? How can you experience God in a new way through a Sabbath time?

##### Supplies:

- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Introduce Sabbath as a time set aside to focus on God individually and in community. Sabbath may be experienced as an intentional practice, observed on a regular basis. Times of quiet and listening can be a vital way to communicate with God. Invite the participants to discuss times when they have practiced an intentional time to depart from the rhythms of everyday life.

On newsprint or a whiteboard list these ideas: take a walk, go to church, vacation, nap, journal, read, experience nature, etc. Draw attention to the fact that Sabbath can be practiced many different ways individually and in community. Invite the participants to add other ideas. Which of these seem most like Sabbath to them? What would they add to the list?

Read the following guided prayer as the participants listen with eyes closed: "Imagine sitting in a safe and sacred place. Allow yourself to relax fully into this place. Vividly picture the scene. Look around at the sights; listen for the sounds; imagine the feelings of being in this place. In this place the sun shines softly as a loving reminder that God is present with you and guiding you in this place. Allow that warm golden light to surround you and enfold you in God's love. Notice that you can rest in this love deeply, fully, and peacefully. Connect with the light of God's presence in whatever way seems right for you. Ask this loving light for a word or phrase that provides more insight into the Presence. As you open to this word or phrase, allow it to be a prayer and guide for you. When you are ready, open your eyes and come back fully into this space." Pause for a few moments, and then invite the participants to share their word or phrase and to describe how this relates to Sabbath.



### Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from 9 activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from Exploring and Engaging, at least one from Discerning and Deciding, and at least one from Sending and Serving. The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation using supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

\* To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.

\* To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 using at least one activity from each category.

### 2 Being and Doing a Sabbath Practice

#### Leader preparation:

Reflect on how Sabbath can be active as well as reflective. Active Sabbath practices may include physical activity, participation in community worship and mission activities, and any activity that is a state of “doing.” Reflective Sabbath is more introspective, or a state of “being,” such as quiet prayer, journaling, and reading sacred text. Write your own thoughts of “doing” and “being” in regard to Sabbath practice.

#### Supplies:

- index cards and pens

Describe how Sabbath time can be experienced outwardly by doing activities, as well as by inner reflection. Invite the participants to gather in two groups: Sabbath Be-ers and Sabbath Do-ers. Give each group 10 index cards. Have the Be-ers group name ten examples of reflective Sabbath practices. Have the Do-ers group name ten examples of active Sabbath practices. Write each example on an index card.

Pose these questions to stimulate their thinking: How do you relax and refresh: days off, vacations, study leave? How can you intentionally focus on God in a Sabbath time in community and in solitude? How do you actively practice Sabbath in your daily activities?

After the groups have completed their cards, have them switch roles and write their being and doing Sabbath practice ideas on another card. Read the lists of activities. Ask the participants to note which resonate with their lifestyle and which would be challenging for them. Encourage the participants to try at least one of these Sabbath practices during the next week.

Close with prayer for new ways to experience God through taking time for active and reflective Sabbath.

### 3 “Let Me Enter God’s Own Dwelling”

#### Leader preparation:

Read the text of the hymn and reflect upon what words or phrases stand out for you. You can hear the tune at <http://www.tinyurl.com/28dqk8n>.

#### Supplies:

- copies of “Let Me Enter God’s Own Dwelling” (Tune: UNSER HERRSCHER), <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong7>
- paper and pens

Music provides one way of hearing God’s word. As you read aloud the stanzas, invite the participants to note what words or phrases stand out for them. Provide paper and pens and allow time for the participants to write down the words or phrases. Invite those who are willing to share to name those words and phrases.

Repeat the hymn as spoken text, with each participant taking turns reading the text. Then sing the hymn together.

Lead a time of silent prayer in which the participants pray the text they identified that speaks to them.



### Discerning & Deciding Activities



#### 4 Faith Time Line (Easy Preparation)

##### Leader preparation:

Refer to your own faith journey from your earliest recollection to the present time as a means to lead others in exploring their faith journeys.

##### Supplies:

- legal-size paper and pens

Provide paper for all the participants. With the paper in the landscape orientation, have them draw a line across the sheet and divide that line into five- or ten-year increments, depending on how detailed you want to be. This timeline represents their life. Invite them to note on this timeline some of their memories about their faith experiences, from their earliest remembrance to the present. Put positive memories above the line, and negative or unpleasant memories below the line. This may include times when they attended Vacation Bible School, church school, or church camp; the first visit to a church; a discussion among friends about creation or the Bible or God; a time when they sensed God's presence in their life; an experience of prayer; a conversation with an older person about faith or faith questions; a significant book or movie that inspired them; an activity when they helped someone; important decisions and relationships. We don't often name our experiences as faith-related, but this activity may provide the opportunity to reflect on those experiences from a faith perspective.

After time for writing and reflection, invite the group to discuss their timelines. Ask: What was the most significant time frame for growth on your faith journey? How did you most experience God — in solitude, in community, in worship, in nature? Were there times when your faith, belief, and experience of God were absent? Historically how have you felt most centered in God? Where can you see Sabbath practices on your faith journey?

Close with a prayer of gratitude for the faith journey that has led to this very moment.



#### 5 Exploring Sabbath through Art

##### Leader preparation:

Obtain a copy of the poster and display in it a prominent place where all can see it. Reflect on the ways that water is used as a symbol for refreshment, cleansing, purification, and healing.

##### Supplies:

- basin of water, pitcher, and a towel
- poster, "The Public Fountain" (<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>) by Manuel Alvarez Bravo
- journals and pens

Place a basin of water in the middle of the group. Invite the participants to dip their hands in the water. Use the pitcher to pour water over one another's hands. Let the water flow across your fingers and drip back into the basin.

Direct attention to the poster. Describe how Sabbath, a time for rest and re-creation, is time to find refreshment for our souls. We come to God in prayer and meditation to find this refreshment.



Ask the participants to name ways they are refreshed and find Sabbath rest. Call attention to “The Public Fountain” poster. Notice how this boy comes to drink for refreshment. Spend time in silence pondering what it is like to receive cool, moist refreshment from God, the source of living water.

Ask: How can you increase how you are refreshed by God? Record your ideas on paper and later share in small groups.

### ⑥ The Desires of the Heart

#### Leader preparation:

Mentally take your breath into the area of your heart and pray that God speaks through our hearts’ desires.

#### Supplies:

- paper
- scissors
- drawing supplies
- uplifting music (e.g., classical instrumental)

Read Psalm 37:1–4 as an opening prayer, focusing on verse 4: “Delight yourself in God, and God will give you the desires of your heart.” Ask the participants: What are your heart’s desires? What does God desire for you?

Gather around the table filled with drawing utensils. Invite the participants to draw, write, and feel free to explore what God truly names for their heart’s desires with uplifting music in the background, such as instrumental classical music of Bach and Mozart.

Invite them to discuss in pairs or small groups what they have drawn or written.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### ⑦ Creating Sacred Space (Easy Preparation)

#### Leader preparation:

Read Psalm 139:1–10. Pray and reflect on how reading the psalm can be both a comfort and a challenge. As God is present in all times and places, any moment can be used as a Sabbath time. Ask the participants ahead of time to bring to the session an item that represents something sacred to them such as something from nature, a photograph, a small memento, poem, or music. If this is not possible, the participants may describe their objects to the group.

#### Supplies:

- Bible or copies of Psalm 139:1–10

If possible, gather in a circle. Read Psalm 139:1–10, noting that God is present at all times, in all places, as a context for bringing the sacred items together. Ask the members of the group to share their items, describing how this represents something sacred to them, and then to place the items in the center of the circle.

When all the items have been placed in the center of the circle, read the verses from Psalm 139 again as a prayer and meditation, honoring the sacred in all.





### 8 Creating and Resting

#### Leader preparation:

God worked for six days creating everything and then rested. Gather art supplies and review the creation story in Genesis 1:1–2:3. Prepare butcher paper: Draw lines to divide the paper into seven sections. At the top of each section, starting on the left, write:

1. Day and night
2. Dry land and water: earth and sea
3. Plants
4. Sun, moon, and stars, seasons
5. Birds and sea creatures
6. Animals, people
7. Rest: Sabbath

#### Supplies:

- Bible
- magazines with nature photos
- a 6' strip of butcher paper
- markers
- scissors
- glue

Read the creation story, Genesis 1:1–2:3. Divide the participants into seven work teams. Ask each team to choose a day of creation to illustrate with magazine pictures or original drawings. Ask each team to cut out magazine pictures and glue them on the paper strip to illustrate their day. When the mural is complete, ask how a Sabbath practice can be both a way to step back from the labors of the week and a way to “give back” to the creation. Discuss ways to “give back” to creation.



### 9 Passing the Peace

#### Leader preparation:

Reflect on ways that the poster “The Dance of Youth” represents passing the peace in the circle.

#### Supplies:

- poster, “The Dance of Youth” (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters7>) by Pablo Picasso.

Invite the participants to look carefully at the poster and to describe how it depicts the emotions and exuberance of gathering in community. Ask: What emotions can you see in this picture?

Invite the participants to stand in a circle and clasp hands with their left palm up and right palm down. Explain that the left hand is the hand that receives, and the right is the hand that gives. As hands are held in the circle, offer a meditation: “Focus your attention on your right hand. What can you give to the person next to you? Offer the energy of that giving: love, peace, wisdom, rest, whatever you feel you can give to the person next to you. Now focus your attention on your left palm. What would you like to receive? Feel the flow of giving and receiving around the circle. Pass this peace, love, healing to someone or something outside this circle that needs it.” Allow time for silent reflection.

Say, “Peace be with you.” Invite participants to share the peace with the others through a handshake or hug of peace.



### Reflect

Sabbath time is a precious gift, offering a means of refreshment, helping us to find what really matters, even in our everyday patterns. This time together offers the opportunity to teach and learn from one another. How have you grown in your understanding of keeping Sabbath? What insights about keeping Sabbath have the participants gathered to take with them into their daily lives? As you think about your time with this group, reflect upon what went especially well for you in this session, as well as what challenges may have come up. What might you do differently next time? Take a moment to write down ideas and reflections to remember for future sessions.

These experiences have introduced ideas and insights of Sabbath from the perspective of what one has already experienced, as well as new ways to experience what Sabbath can be. The intention of these activities is to embrace and affirm past experiences of Sabbath and to open us to active and reflective practices that will bring us to a closer relationship with God.

# Keeping Sabbath



## Exploration: Scripture

### About this Setting

Seekers and new church participants may come with varied reasons for choosing to be part of a church community. They may be eager, anxious, defensive, or fearful of their new adventure in this community. Some may be able to articulate their reasons for attending and wanting to participate. Some have been hurt by a church, and wish to move past the resentments and concerns of a painful experience. Seekers and new church participants have a desire for personal and spiritual connection. Some are at a transitional time of life changes, loss, and/or crisis points. Others have the desire to find like-minded people, friendship, and a social connection. The seeker and new church participant can be opened to a wider or renewed vision of Christian community.

The resources in this setting offer activities and suggestions for ways that adults together can discover the experience of keeping Sabbath. New participants bring the gift of new eyes and ears and hands. Through these varied activities, seekers may explore old and new ways of viewing, celebrating, and enacting Sabbath, including various media and creative techniques to expand a Sabbath focus and blessing. The experiences are a time for discovering together who God is calling us to be as members of God's community.



### About this Exploration

Scripture defines Sabbath in several ways. Our journey will help us explore how Sabbath was given as commandment and blessing, and how Jesus expanded Sabbath to be more inclusive. Jesus reinforced the concept that the Sabbath was about God but for people (Mark 2:23--3:6). Sabbath is a time of blessing, a time to rest from daily work and restore energy and "godness." Sabbath is not a time to worry about rules, but to work for God's reign, letting God take care of the rest. What helps us focus on Sabbath? Consider how we can recharge, refresh, and renew our spirits, minds, and bodies.

#### BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**Mark 2:23–3:6**  
**Exodus 20:1–17**

### Leader Preparation

Introduce this Faith Practices offering in your church newsletter, e-mail, and website postings. Announce that the Faith Practices resources include numerous engaging activities designed to help seekers understand the history of Sabbath and how to keep the modern concept of a Sabbath that extends beyond Sunday.

Read the Bible Focus Passages, focusing on what it means to be Sabbath-keepers. How do the scriptures invite you to a variety of Sabbath practices?

### Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from 9 activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from Exploring and Engaging, at least one from Discerning and Deciding, and at least one from Sending and Serving. The first activity in each category is designed for "easy preparation" (able to be done with minimal preparation using supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

### Exploring & Engaging Activities



#### 1 Prayers for Healing (Easy Preparation)

##### Leader preparation:

Read Mark 2:23–3:6, reflecting on Jesus' choice to heal on the Sabbath.

##### Supplies:

- Bibles
- index cards or small pieces of paper
- basket

Read and discuss the Mark passage in which Jesus chose to heal on the Sabbath. Pose these or similar questions to stimulate discussion: What was so sacred about the Sabbath? Where did the Sabbath law seem to originate? In what ways did the Sabbath law become abused? In what ways might we abuse the Sabbath? How might we honor keeping the Sabbath while respecting others? Distribute index cards or small pieces of paper, and invite the participants to write where they would like to see healing in their lives, in others, and in the world. Gather the cards and place them in a basket in the center of the circle. As you or a volunteer draws and reads each card, invite the participants either silently or aloud to pray for each request in a group meditation.

Following a time for reflection, ask the participants to close their eyes and to focus on the heart of Christ within them. Ask Christ the Healer these questions: How is God working through these requests? What is Christ calling me to do or be or hear or know? What is the next step to a closer relationship with my Spirit?

Invite each participant to pray in silence or aloud for the person on his or her right.

#### 2 Lectio Divina: Divine Reading

##### Leader preparation:

Learn about lectio divina at <http://www.tinyurl.com/2dks6gt>.

Become familiar with the steps of lectio, oratio, meditatio, and contemplatio (reading, hearing, praying, and contemplation). Use Exodus 20:8-11 for this activity.

##### Supplies:

- Bible
- paper
- pens
- whiteboard or newsprint and markers
- meditative music (suggestions: instrumental music of Mozart or classical or "new age" piano music)

Choose a few verses from Mark 2:23–3:6 or Exodus 20:1–17. Describe the process

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## SEEKERS & NEW CHURCH PARTICIPANTS

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of lectio divina, and list the steps on a whiteboard: lectio — reading, oratio — hearing, meditatio — praying, contemplatio — contemplation. Read through the scripture and discuss the literal meaning of the text. Read the passage again. Invite participants to notice what word or phrase draws their attention. Ask each participant to share his or her word or phrase with the group.

Play music and invite the group to journal, pray, and meditate with the word or phrase that they have chosen. Talk about this experience with one or two partners.

### ③ Christ, Make Me More Holy

#### Leader preparation:

Become familiar with the song. Look up the word “holy” in a Bible dictionary or on the Internet in order to present some optional interpretations.

#### Supplies:

- copies of “Lord, Make Me More Holy” (Tune: Lord, Make Me More Holy) available at <http://www.tinyurl.com/22mpzgt>; music available at <http://www.tinyurl.com/2e9on28>
- paper
- pens

Read Exodus 20:1–17. Reflect on how the Ten Commandments are intended to make us more holy. Consider what “holy” means. Which commandments are easier to follow? Which are more challenging? What other commandments would you add that might help lead you toward holiness?

Sing “Lord, Make Me More Holy.”

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### ④ Psalm 103: Body Prayer I (Easy Preparation)

#### Leader preparation:

Praying with movement can be an effective way to feel the energy of the prayer in a visceral way. Learn the body prayer on the handout so that you can teach it to the group.

#### Supplies:

- copies of Psalm 103
- handout “Psalm 103 Body Prayer,” Attachment: Activity 4

Teach the movements to Psalm 103. As the participants pray with the body movements and the text, repeat the psalm several times. Then pray the psalm with the movements only. Invite the participants to choose a movement and word that are meaningful to them in this exercise. Hold that movement and word as a prayer for a minute, then repeat the entire psalm. Allow time to share insights in pairs or with the whole group.



### 5 Jesus Prayer

#### Leader preparation:

Study <http://www.jesusprayer.org>. The Jesus Prayer is one of the oldest Christian prayers. The original form was from the words that the two blind men cried out to Jesus in Matthew 20:31. The prayer was formalized by the Orthodox churches in the fifth century.

#### Supplies:

- copies of the Jesus Prayer, “Jesus Christ, Child of God, have mercy on me, a sinner” (shortened forms may also be used: “Christ, have mercy on me” or “Christ, have mercy”)
- music to play during the prayer

Provide information about the Jesus Prayer to the group. Use whatever form is best for your situation. Invite the participants to give alternative words or phrases for “mercy” and “sinner” to help clarify the meaning of these terms. Used as a breath prayer, the Jesus Prayer can be an effective way to move through fears and feelings of unworthiness to grace and peace in Christ.

With soft instrumental music in the background (suggestions: Mozart, or soft classical or “new age” piano music), invite the participants to inhale when praying the words “O Christ Jesus” and exhale when praying the words “have mercy on me” (or other forms of the prayer, as chosen). You might want to substitute some of the words the group offered as substitutes for “mercy” and “sinner.”

After a few minutes, ask the group to sit in silence and reflection, and/or offer time to journal their insights and experiences. Ask them to share with the group as time allows.

### 6 Taize Music: Body Prayer II

#### Leader preparation:

Learn the song from the Taize community: “Bless the Lord, My Soul”

<http://www.tinyurl.com/2fgo39d>.

You might change the first line to “Bless our God, my soul.” See the body prayer for this song

#### Supplies:

- copy of the song lyrics
- handout “Taize Music Body Prayer,” Attachment: Activity 6
- paper and pens

Describe how Psalm 103 is about giving and receiving. We ask for God’s blessing upon us, and we offer blessing to God. Teach the participants the song with the movements as an opening prayer. Discuss the lyrics: How does God bless us? How can we bless and honor God? What does it mean to be led into life? What kind of life does God bless for us?

Invite the participants to write a short gratitude blessing for God and a blessing from God back to the participants. Share the blessings with one another. Sing the song again with movements as a body prayer.



### Sending & Serving Activities



#### 7 “No Other Gods” (Easy Preparation)

##### Leader preparation:

Reflect on Exodus 20:3. Consider what “other gods” (meaning anything central to life that we worship) we worship in our society. How can you stay centered on God?

##### Supplies:

- Bibles
- magazines
- scissors
- glue
- poster board for collage

Read Exodus 20:1-17, focusing on verse 3. Pose these or similar questions: What other gods does our culture worship? What in our lives do we hold sacred?

Divide a large poster board in half. Ask the participants to fill one half with symbols, pictures, or words representing other “gods” that take our focus away from being centered in God. Fill the other half of the poster with symbols, pictures, or words representing the one God that we worship through this commandment. How can we stay focused on one God, with the glamour of other gods that our culture pulls us toward? Ask the participants to talk with one another about the challenges of being, as Paul wrote, “in the world, but not of it.”

Close with prayer: God, you are the light and truth that can guide and center our lives. Help us to know you in a deeper and more intimate way, so that we hold no gods in our hearts but you. Amen.



#### 8 Sunday: A Day for Worship

Leader preparation: Reflect on the varied experiences of worship attendance (or not) of the participants.

##### Supplies:

- poster, “Going to Church” (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters8>) by William H. Johnson.

Display the poster “Going to Church.” As the participants look at the poster, pose these or similar questions: In what time frame could this be happening? How might the characters in the poster feel? To what kind of worship experience do you think they are going? How does the painting make you feel? What has been your experience of going to church? What does going to church have to do with “keeping Sabbath”?

Read Exodus 20:8-11. Explain that “remembering the Sabbath day” is one of the Ten Commandments. In most Christian churches, Sunday has been the Sabbath day, a day with less work and a focus on worship. Many Christians celebrate the Sabbath on Sunday as a reminder that Jesus rose from the dead three days after he was crucified (Friday to Sunday). In a sense, each Sunday is a celebration of the Resurrection.

Reflect on these questions:



If someone painted you and/or your family going to church, what would be in the picture? What do you and/or your family do on Sunday that differs from other days?

Do you eat special food or special meals? Wear special clothes? Visit family or friends?

In what ways, if any, does a Sunday worship experience bring you closer to God? Worshiping God in community with others is a way to honor the Sabbath. It is also a means to enter individually into a deeper relationship with God.

Close with prayer: God, thank you for our Sabbath day, for each Sunday when we come together to learn about and grow closer to you. Help us always to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Amen.

### 9 Breath Prayers

#### Leader preparation:

The breath prayer, an ancient prayer practice, allows us the opportunity to make prayer a part of our daily life. The apostle Paul asks us to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Developing a breath prayer is very easy. Choose a breath prayer from scripture or compose several of your own. Here are some examples:

- a. My Creator and my God.
- b. Bless the Spirit, my soul.
- c. God, increase my faith.
- d. Holy Spirit, pray in me.

For more breath prayer ideas, see: <http://www.tinyurl.com/2g6cq2z>

#### Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper
- pens
- background music

### Reflect

Sabbath time is a precious gift offering a means of refreshment, helping us to find what really matters, even in our everyday patterns. This group gives the opportunity to teach and learn from one another. How have you grown in your understanding of keeping Sabbath? What insights about keeping Sabbath have the participants gathered to take with them into their daily lives? As you think about your time with this group, reflect upon what went especially well for you in this session, as well as what challenges may have come up. What might you do differently next time? Take a moment to write down ideas and reflections to remember for future sessions.

Spend a few moments in silence. Relax. Imagine Christ standing before you, asking, “What do you want? What do you seek from me?” Respond with the first thing that comes to your mind. Ask the participants to write down what they would say. Then ask them to choose their favorite name for God (such as Father, Mother, Creator, Christ, Jesus, Lord, Abba, Holy One, etc.) and write that down. Write a short sentence prayer that combines your favorite name for God with your answer to Christ’s question. For example, “Christ Jesus, give me peace”; “God, help me to love”; “Holy One, give me courage.”

After you have composed a breath prayer, remain in God’s abiding presence as you begin saying your prayer. Slowly say the first part of the prayer as you breathe in. Then slowly say the last part of the prayer as you exhale. Spend time with your breath prayer with background music. Offer your breath prayer to someone that needs it. If there is time, write your own breath prayers from scripture.

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## Psalm 103 Body Prayer

Bless God, my soul

*(stand with hands in prayer position)*

And all that is within me

*(arms raised)*

Bless God's holy name

*(bow forward)*

Bless God, my soul

*(hands in prayer position)*

And forget not all God's benefits

*(left hand out)*

Who redeems our life from the pit

*(sweep left hand from floor to above head)*

And crowns our life with goodness

*(sweep right hand above head, making a crown)*

Who heals all our iniquities

*(left hand moves down front of body)*

And heals our diseases

*(right hand moves down front of body)*

So that our youth is renewed

*(both arms up)*

Like the eagles

*(spread arms in a flying motion)*



## Taize Music Body Prayer

Bless the Lord, my soul

*(Begin with arms open and then cross arms in front of chest)*

and bless God's holy name.

*(Open arms and bow forward)*

Bless the Lord, my soul,

*(Cross arms in front of chest)*

who leads me into life.

*(Raise arms and look upward)*

# Keeping Sabbath



## Exploration: Discipleship

### About this Setting

Sabbath time was established by God in order that all creation might enjoy the fullness and peace of God's presence. In this Seekers and New Church Participants setting we will introduce the concept of Sabbath and the many ways that one can experience a Sabbath practice.

Seekers and new church participants may come with varied reasons for choosing to be part of a church community. They may be eager, anxious, defensive, or fearful of their new adventure in this community. Some may be able to articulate their reasons for attending and wanting to participate. Some have been hurt by a church and wish to move past the resentments and concerns of a painful experience. Seekers and new church participants have a desire for personal and spiritual connection. Some are at a transitional time of life changes, loss, and/or crisis points. Others have the desire to find like-minded people, friendship, and a social connection. The seeker and new church participant can be opened to a wider or renewed vision of Christian community.

These resources offer activities and suggestions for ways that adults can together discover the experience of "keeping Sabbath." New participants bring the gift of new eyes and ears and hands. Through these varied exercises, seekers can explore old and new ways of viewing, celebrating, and enacting Sabbath, including various media and creative techniques to expand a Sabbath focus and blessing. The experiences are a time for discovering together who God is calling us to be as members of God's community.



### About this Exploration

Practicing the Sabbath leads us to a fuller understanding of who we are as children of God. God calls the people of Israel to keep the words on their hearts, to teach them to their children, to fix them as an emblem on their forehead. Jesus reminds the Pharisees that the law is to free people from oppression, not further to oppress an already downtrodden people. As we explore what it means to keep the Sabbath, we will experience that the Sabbath becomes a way of being, as well as a way of doing.

#### BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**Luke 6:1-11**  
**Deuteronomy 6:1-9**

### Leader Preparation

Introduce this Faith Practices offering in your church newsletter, e-mail, and Web site postings. Announce that the Faith Practices resources include numerous engaging activities that will help seekers understand the history of Sabbath and how to keep the modern concept of a Sabbath that extends beyond Sunday.

Read and reflect on the Bible Focus Passages, focusing on the intention of what it means to be Sabbath-keepers. How do you follow God's guidance through Sabbath time?

### Exploring & Engaging Activities



#### 1 The Holy in the Ordinary (Easy Preparation)

##### Leader preparation:

The title "The Holy in the Ordinary" comes from a book by Macrina Wiederkehr, *Tree Full of Angels: Seeing the Holy in the Ordinary*. The idea is to observe common items with the eyes of God. Prepare for this session by collecting ordinary, common items for observation in this experiential exercise. These may be objects found anywhere in the church or a purse or a car.

##### Supplies:

- various objects (rock, feather, photograph, Bible, cross, candy, glass of water, plant, wallet, calendar, mobile phone, etc.)
- paper and pens

On a table in the center of the circle of the group place the various items you gathered.

Describe how by looking through the eyes of Spirit, God can be seen and experienced in all ways, in the ordinary times and through ordinary objects of life. Invite the participants to close their eyes and breathe deeply. Pray the following: Spirit, live and move in our eyes, ears, and hearts as we silently gaze at the objects on the table. After the prayer, with open eyes and through the eyes of Spirit, invite the participants to look again at the items on the table. Provide paper and pens and invite people to write down any thoughts or insights that come to them as they look again at these ordinary objects. What is God saying to you through this exercise? Divide the group into pairs or groups of three and invite the participants to share their thoughts.



#### 2 Finger Labyrinth

##### Leader preparation:

Obtain a printed labyrinth. The internet offers several sites where a labyrinth can be downloaded, such as <http://www.tinyurl.com/28yd5cj>. Or, copy the handout, Attachment: Activity 2. Make a copy of this labyrinth for every participant. Read about the history of the labyrinth. Spend time with the labyrinth before you work with the seekers.

#### The History of the Labyrinth

During the Crusades, when there was much conflict in the Holy Land, the labyrinth became popular as a spiritual tool. During this time pilgrims were prevented from making their required pilgrimage to Jerusalem. To counter this, the Church designated seven great European cathedrals as pilgrimage "destinations" and made labyrinth patterns (technically, unicursal paths) on the floor of several of them. By following the path, early Christians could make a symbolic journey to Jerusalem, with the center of the labyrinth standing in for their desti-



### Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from 9 activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from Exploring and Engaging, at least one from Discerning and Deciding, and at least one from Sending and Serving. The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation using supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

\* To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.

\* To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 using at least one activity from each category.

nation. Church labyrinths are characteristically flat or inlaid into the floor of the nave of the church. Many retreat centers and modern day churches have revived the labyrinth by creating labyrinth gardens from low growing bushes, flowers or rocks. One can also purchase portable labyrinths online that require a large space on which to lay the labyrinth so it can be used indoors or outdoors. An alternative to a full-sized labyrinth is to use a hand-held one and to trace the pattern with your finger.

Walking the labyrinth deepens spirituality by inviting us to examine the inner recesses of our soul. A labyrinth walk is a contemplative walk or journey. Although it can take just a few minutes, it is more meaningful when one takes 20–30 minutes to allow for reflection and contemplation. There are basically three stages: 1. Entering or walking in — a time to let go of distractions; 2. Centering — this is done in the center of the labyrinth and is a time to be still and silent; a time to listen to God; 3. Exiting — a time to feel at one with God, yourself, and others.

#### Supplies:

- copy of the labyrinth for each participant, Attachment: Activity 2

Use the description above to explain the labyrinth. Invite the participants to spend some time with their labyrinth. (It may be helpful to use some sort of tool, like the eraser end of a pencil, to trace the labyrinth.) Explain that the labyrinth is not a maze and is to be left as is, so that it can be used repeatedly. Ask the participants to think of a problem or issue in their life for which they would like guidance. Invite them to pray about their issue and use the labyrinth as a guide to listen to and follow the guidance of God. After 5–10 minutes, invite the participants to think of one word or phrase that God is speaking to them in response to the issue they are praying with. Close with a prayer of thanksgiving for guidance on all our paths in life.



### 3 Unwanted Rest

#### Leader preparation:

Reflect on the poster “Out of Work.” In these times of underemployment and unemployment, many people can relate to a rest that they have not chosen.

#### Supplies:

- poster “Out of Work” (<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>) by Käthe Kollwitz
- paper
- pens
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Ask the participants to reflect on the poster “Out of Work” with these questions: How do you feel as you see this poster? How do you think the person feels experiencing this type of unwanted rest? In what ways can you relate to these feelings or this situation, either now or at other times in your life?

On newsprint or a whiteboard, in one column invite the participants to list the feelings experienced about unwanted rest. Allow time for everyone to name at least one feeling. It may be something they or someone they know have experienced, or it may be a feeling they can imagine someone having. Then invite the group to see this list of characteristics and feelings through the eyes of Jesus. In a second column list characteristics, words, or feelings that represent what Christ would bring to the people in this poster.



Close with prayer: Christ, you are ever present among us, in all of the situations of our lives. Help us to follow the path that you call us to live, through your grace, guidance, and peace. Amen.

### Discerning & Deciding Activities



#### ④ Spirit Space Walk (Easy Preparation)

##### **Leader preparation:**

Discipleship is about being led by and following Spirit. This session explores the physical space of the worship area. Take a walk in your sanctuary or other worship space and pray that you are guided by Spirit to lead this activity in the best way.

##### **Supplies: None**

Invite the group to move to the sanctuary for this activity. Pray this prayer as preparation for the walk of meditation: “Spirit of the living God, guide our steps as we begin to explore this worship space with new eyes, to see your presence in new ways. Guide our hearts to hear Spirit with new ears; guide our feet to follow in the path of Christ. Spirit of the living God, here among us now, be with us in our walk of silent meditation.”

Then have the participants take a slow, deliberate, meditative walk around the sanctuary. Encourage seekers to pray that they will see, hear, and experience this familiar space in new ways, as guided by Spirit. As participants walk around the worship space in silence, hold each one in prayer. Allow about 10 minutes for this walk.

Return to your meeting area and invite people to describe their experience. Use a process of mutual invitation. The first person describes his or her experience and then invites another person to share. That person may pass or take a turn. Continue until each person has been invited.



#### ⑤ “Midday Rest”

##### **Leader preparation:**

Explore how the poster “Midday Rest” is a means to Sabbath. How do you relate to this poster in regard to taking a Sabbath? What are some ways to break from the work routine to remember who we are as children of God? Ponder these and other questions to share with the group.

##### **Supplies:**

- poster, “Midday Rest” (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters9>) (after Millet), c.1890 by Vincent van Gogh
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers
- paper and pens

Describe how our society is driven to work hard and evaluates success from how busy our lives are. In what ways have the people in the group experienced this kind of busyness?

Invite the participants to close their eyes and mentally scan how they are feel-



ing physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Guide them to think about themselves from their head to their eyes to their mouth to their neck, etc. all the way to their feet. Pay attention to your breathing. Take a deep breath. Slow down your breathing. Notice how the breath can be used as a means to slow down, relax, and refresh. Then have them open their eyes. What responses do they have to this activity?

Show the poster “Midday Rest.” Allow time for discussion of how the picture relates to Sabbath. Share ideas of how participants can take mini-Sabbath time in the midst of a busy schedule. Write these ideas on the newsprint or whiteboard. Encourage the participants to try new ways to connect with God throughout their day.

### 6 Trinity Body Prayer

#### Leader preparation:

Review your denomination’s statement on the doctrine of the Trinity. For example, the statement of the United Church of Christ can be found at <http://www.tinyurl.com/29mstea>.

Practice the Trinity Body Prayer so that you can comfortably lead the group. Note which posture and aspect of the Trinity you most identify with, as well as which is more challenging for you.

Trinity Body Prayer

(inhale) To God the Creator (hands above head)

(exhale) To Christ the Redeemer (hands spread outward, as on a cross)

(inhale) To the Spirit who inspires us (hands on heart)

(exhale) And lives among us (hands extended)

#### Supplies:

- copies of the prayer
- paper
- pens

Begin by stating that there is one God. The Trinity is a doctrine used by Christians to express the unity of God as three persons: Creator, Christ, and Spirit (in more traditional language, Father, Son, Holy Spirit). Invite the participants to discuss how they relate to this theology. What questions do they have about this? What other examples can you use to help clarify this doctrine?

Teach the Trinity body prayer and repeat it several times. Ask the participants to note which posture and aspect of the Trinity most speaks to them at this time. Which posture or aspect of the Trinity is challenging in some way? Share observations by allowing time to journal or discuss with the group.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Hymn Favorites: Hymns of Praise (Easy Preparation)

#### Leader preparation:

Look through your congregation’s hymnal or praise book for favorite songs of praise. These may be used as an introduction to new church members, or seekers not familiar with hymn tunes and texts. Here are some suggestions for familiar



and more traditional hymns (you may wish to avoid some hymns that use more traditional language about God):

Joyful, Joyful  
All Creatures of Our God and King  
Praise Ye the Lord  
O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing  
Rejoice Ye Pure in Heart  
This is the Day  
When Morning Gilds the Skies  
Holy, Holy, Holy  
Every Time I Feel the Spirit  
Jesus Shall Reign  
Glorious Things of You are Spoken

### **Supplies:**

- copies of your congregation's hymnal or praise book
- a musician who can play hymns

The poetry in the hymns of the church can guide the group to practicing Sabbath individually and in community. Sing or read through some of the chosen hymns and find what text leads toward a Sabbath practice. Or, ask the participants to choose and/or talk about their familiar and favorite hymns. Choose a favorite hymn and read the text as a closing prayer.

## **8 Hymn Favorites II: Hymns of Prayer and Reflection**

### **Leader preparation:**

Look through the hymnal or praise book for songs of prayer and reflection that are favorites of your congregation. These may be used as an introduction to new church members or participants not familiar with hymn tunes and texts. This list includes familiar and more traditional hymns (you may wish to avoid some hymns that use more traditional language about God):

Guide Me, O Thou Great Redeemer  
O God, Our Help in Ages Past  
Just As I Am  
Spirit of the Living God  
Breathe on Me, Breath of God  
Jesus Loves Me!  
Let Us Break Bread Together  
Blessed Be the Tie That Binds  
Be Thou My Vision  
Precious Lord, Take My Hand  
I've Got Peace Like a River  
What a Friend We Have in Jesus  
This Little Light of Mine  
Amazing Grace

### **Supplies:**

- copies of your congregation's hymnal or praise book
- a musician who can play hymns

The poetry in the hymns of the church can guide the group to practicing Sabbath individually and in community. Sing or read through some of the chosen hymns and find what text leads toward a Sabbath practice. Or, ask the participants to choose and talk about their familiar and favorite hymns. Choose a favorite hymn and read the text as a closing prayer.





### 9 Looking Outward

#### Leader preparation:

Discerning how God calls us to be in Sabbath individually and communally is the goal of this activity. The magnifying glass and binoculars symbolically represent looking deeply inward and to the far-reaching places where Sabbath can be practiced. Reflect on the people and situations that can be considered by magnifying what is close to us and looking beyond what we can now see and know.

#### Supplies:

- magnifying glass
- binoculars

Ask the participants to reflect on a Sabbath practice that would include both looking deeply and looking outward to the needs of other people/places/things. Pass around the magnifying glass. Ask the participants to describe what they see as a Sabbath practice by looking more deeply into what is familiar to them. Pass around the binoculars. Ask participants symbolically to look beyond themselves to consider what needs are beyond their seeing. Invite them to reflect on this question: How can we practice Sabbath by looking both inward and outward?

Close with prayer: God, you call us to look at both ourselves and the world with new eyes and open hearts. Be with us as we learn the ways we can both look more deeply and look beyond ourselves, to practice the love and presence that you are. Amen.

### Reflect

Sabbath time is a precious gift offering a means of refreshment, helping us to find what really matters, even in our everyday patterns. This study gives the opportunity to teach and learn from one another. How have you grown in your understanding of keeping Sabbath? What insights about keeping Sabbath have the participants gathered to take with them into their daily lives? As you think about your time with this group, reflect upon what went especially well for you in this session, as well as what challenges may have come up. What might you do differently next time? Take a moment to write down ideas and reflections to remember for future sessions.

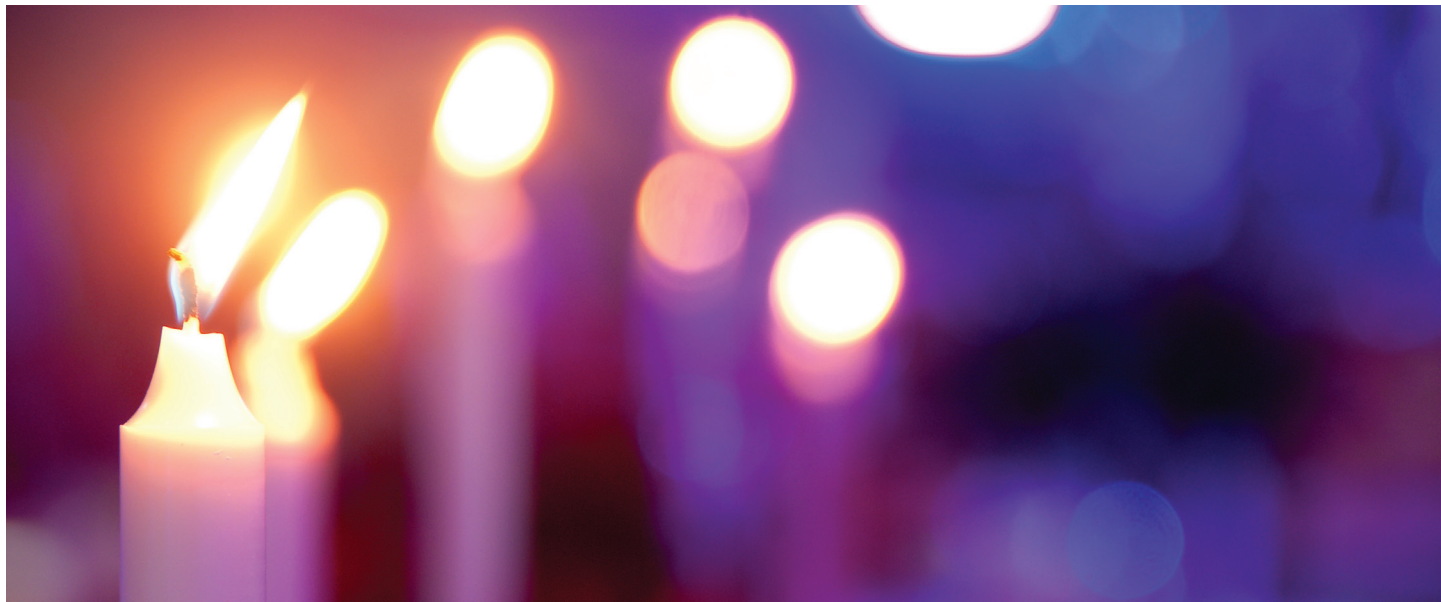
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Attachment: Activity 2



# Keeping Sabbath



## Exploration: Christian Tradition

### About this Setting

Sabbath time was established by God in order to allow that all creation might enjoy the fullness and peace of God's presence. In this setting we will introduce the concept of Sabbath and the many ways that one can experience a Sabbath practice.

Seekers and new church participants may come with varied reasons for choosing to be part of a church community. They may be eager, anxious, defensive, or fearful of their new adventure in this community. Some may be able to articulate their reasons for attending and wanting to participate. Some have been hurt by a church, and wish to move past the resentments and concerns of a painful experience. Seekers and new church participants seek personal and spiritual connection. Some are at a transitional time of life changes, loss, and/or crisis points. Others desire to find like-minded people, friendship, and a social connection. The seeker and new church participant can be opened to a wider or renewed vision of Christian community.

These resources offer activities and suggestions for ways that adults can together discover the experience of keeping Sabbath. New participants bring the gift of new eyes and ears and hands. Through these varied exercises, participants can explore old and new ways of viewing, celebrating, and enacting Sabbath, including various media and creative techniques to expand a Sabbath focus and blessing. The experiences are a time for discovering together who God is calling us to be as members of God's community.



### About this Exploration

Throughout the history of the church the practice of Sabbath has run from narrow to broad. Certain faith traditions establish restrictions limiting everything from household tasks to social activities on a Sabbath day. Other traditions focus on the intent of the practice: worship, study, and rest. All these traditions tend to highlight rest and re-creation. Current practices have broadened Sabbath to embrace the practice of justice and devotion in and around the moments of our daily life. These various interpretations provide the foundation for our practices of Sabbath today.

#### BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**Mark 6:30–34, 53–56**  
**Isaiah 58:9b–14**

### Leader Preparation

Introduce this Faith Practices offering in your church newsletter, e-mail, and website postings. Announce that the Faith Practices resources include numerous engaging activities that will help participants to understand the history of Sabbath and how to keep the modern concept of a Sabbath that extends beyond Sunday.

Read and reflect on the Bible Focus Passages, focusing on what it means to be Sabbath-keepers. How is Sabbath time reflected by the Christian tradition?

### Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from 9 activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from Exploring and Engaging, at least one from Discerning and Deciding, and at least one from Sending and Serving. The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation using supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

### Exploring & Engaging Activities



#### 1 Centering Prayer with Sabbath Time (Easy Preparation)

##### Leader preparation:

Sabbath time is a space and time to stop and reflect on God’s presence. Centering prayer is an ancient prayer practice rediscovered in our time. Trappist monk Thomas Keating has led this movement with his book *Open Mind, Open Heart* (London: Continuum, 1994). Review the simple steps of the prayer before the session.

##### Supplies: None

Review the steps of Centering Prayer:

- Choose a prayer word as a symbol of your intention to open and surrender to Spirit and the awareness of divine presence. The word becomes a sacred word (examples: love, peace, God, rest).
- Sit comfortably and with eyes closed; relax in a prayerful consciousness.
- Silently introduce the word as the symbol to listen to divine presence.
- When you become aware of thoughts, sensations, feelings, memories, reflections, etc., gently return to the sacred word.
- At the end of the prayer time, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.
- Offer thanks.

Spend 5 minutes in a silent prayer time with the centering prayer. Invite the participants to share their insights and experience of the prayer time.

Closing prayer: God, you are in this place. Thank you for Sabbath time, time to stop and listen and quietly to be in your presence. Amen.

#### 2 Keeping Sabbath

##### Leader preparation:

Read the article “Keeping Sabbath: Reviving a Christian Practice,” by Dorothy C. Bass at <http://www.tinyurl.com/25te7st>. Become familiar with how the author describes reviving a Sabbath practice as a gift for busy and active lives. Make copies of the article to give the group in advance of the session.

##### Supplies:

- copies of the Dorothy Bass article
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Discuss the article as a means to explore Sabbath-keeping from the Christian tradition.

Ask the participants to name ways they can practice Sabbath in simple ways

## Keeping Sabbath



## SEEKERS & NEW CHURCH PARTICIPANTS

\* To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.

\* To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 using at least one activity from each category.

throughout the day. Some ideas might include: think about God every time you wait at a stop light, or in line; say a prayer while brushing your teeth or making the bed; take a 5-minute break to close your eyes and remember that your breath is the Spirit breathing in you; pray the prayer of Jesus before you read the news; at the end of the day remember to offer thanks. List their ideas on newsprint or a whiteboard for reference in another session.

Close in prayer: God, you are always present here and now, among us, beside us, breathing in us. Help us always to find new ways to connect with your sacred presence. Amen.

### ③ Sabbath Practice in Church Groups

#### Leader preparation:

Be aware of the happenings in your church community for fellowship opportunities to share in this session.

#### Supplies:

- church newsletters, bulletins, social networking page, etc.

Describe fellowship opportunities in the church community, including the type of event, who sponsors the event, who usually attends, who is welcome, what a person needs to bring, child care provisions, etc. After you name each event, invite the participants to describe what is helpful or hindering about such an activity for building community. What would draw them to such an event? What brings people together? How might such events better bring people together? How is fellowship with one another a Sabbath practice?

Keeping in mind that some people are less comfortable in groups than others, ask the participants to brainstorm ways that the community could help them be more connected and included.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### ④ Journaling with Scripture (Easy Preparation)

#### Leader preparation:

Read and reflect upon Isaiah 58:9b-14. Where do you see your strengths and growing edges from the ways that the scripture describes keeping the Sabbath?

#### Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper and pens

Some people may journal, keep a diary, or write a blog on a regular basis, but may not have considered how that can be a practice of faith. Discuss with the group how journaling can be a way to dialog and discern with scripture.

Ask volunteers to take turns reading the scripture with each person reading one verse. Then have one person read the entire passage. Invite the participants to reflect on ways this scripture invites them to honor a Sabbath practice. Provide paper and pens and invite the participants to write a journal or blog entry in dialog with this scripture.



Close with these or similar words: God will say, “I am here,” as we take the time to remember God’s presence and life in us through a Sabbath practice. Let us remain open to be led where God calls us in this journey. Amen.

### 5 “Borning Cry”

#### **Leader preparation:**

Become familiar with the hymn “I Was There to Hear Your Borning Cry” (Tune: Borning Cry). If this hymn is not in your congregation’s hymnal, you can find the lyrics at <http://www.tinyurl.com/272gz4y>.

Listen to it at <http://www.tinyurl.com/29tets3>.

#### **Supplies:**

- Bibles
- copies of the hymn “I Was There to Hear Your Borning Cry”  
<http://www.tinyurl.com/272gz4y>

Read Hebrews 13:8: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” Listen to or sing the hymn. What does this hymn say about God’s constant presence? Ask the participants to choose a section of the hymn that captures their attention. While our lives have ups and downs and twists and turns, God remains the same. Our understanding of God and our perception of God’s presence in our lives may fluctuate, but God is steadfast. Pose this or a similar question: How might our Sabbath practice reflect the sameness of God yesterday, today, and tomorrow, throughout our lives?

Close by reading or singing the hymn.



### 6 God Guides, Strengthens, and Repairs

#### **Leader preparation:**

Reflect on Isaiah 58:10-12. How does God guide, strengthen, and repair in this scripture?

#### **Supplies:**

- Bibles or copies of Isaiah 58:10-12
- poster “Guatemala: Procession” (<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>) by Betty LaDuke
- paper and pens

Display the poster so that everyone can see it clearly. Provide a few moments for the participants to study the picture. Invite them to respond to this picture: What might be going on? Who is in the crowd? What are they saying or thinking? Why have they gathered? Where are you in this picture? Why? Where is Christ in this picture?

Read Isaiah 58:10–12. Pose these or similar questions: How does God guide us, strengthen us, and use us as repairers and restorers? What kind of imagery is present in these passages? How does the imagery of the poster reflect the feelings of the people?

Distribute paper and pens. Have the participants write the words “guide,” “strengthen,” “repair” somewhere on the paper. How would you connect these three words? Draw an image for each word. How can your practice of keeping Sabbath guide you, strengthen you, and use you to be a repairer of a broken world? Invite those who are willing to share their drawings and ideas.



### Sending & Serving Activities



#### 7 Emmaus Walk (Easy Preparation)

##### Leader preparation:

Read and reflect on Luke 24:13-35.

##### Supplies:

- Bibles

Read the story “On the Road to Emmaus,” Luke 24:13-35. Discuss with the group how a walk with a partner can be a spiritual exchange, a Sabbath practice, as when two or more are gathered, Christ is with you. Ask the participants to choose a partner. Instruct the pairs to take a short walk together, with the intention of speaking together from their hearts of what it would be like to take the Emmaus walk with Jesus. Allow 10 minutes for the walk, which could be outside or within the building. Gather again as a group and ask each person to give a one-word or one-phrase description of their Emmaus walk.

#### 8 Elements of Worship

##### Leader preparation:

Read through several recent church bulletins (printed order of worship) and consider the elements of the service. Prepare to lead a discussion about creating a worship experience in the group.

##### Supplies:

- paper
- pens
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers
- recent church bulletins
- Bibles
- hymnals

Ask the participants to name elements of a worship service, and list these on the newsprint or whiteboard. Distribute some recent church bulletins and ask them to look at the order of worship. If your congregation has two different styles of services of worship (such as traditional and contemporary), provide bulletins from each type. Are there any elements that are not included in their list? Which parts of the service hold the most meaning for them? What might they eliminate or replace? Why? What parts of the service don't make sense to them? (You might want to note these and talk with the pastor or worship committee about this.) What might they add to a service of worship? Why? From these elements, design an order of service for a brief worship service that the group creates and experiences in 10 minutes. (Possibilities: Hymn, Call to Worship, Scripture, Prayer, Testimony, Passing of Peace, Benediction/hymn.)

#### 9 Intercessory Prayer

##### Leader preparation:

Read and reflect on Mark 6:53–56. Jesus not only healed on the Sabbath, but was sought out by the sick to be healed. The Sabbath practice includes intercessory prayers for others in search of healing.



### Supplies:

- Bibles or copies of Mark 6:30–34, 53–56
- scraps of paper
- basket

Ask volunteers to read one verse each of the scripture. Then have one person read the passage. Describe intercessory prayer. Provide a few moments for the participants to think of people, places, and situations that need to be prayed for. Give everyone paper and pens and have them write the names of those for whom they wish to pray on separate scraps of paper. As they write the name or place or situation, have them offer a few sentences of silent prayer. Then place the paper in a basket in the center of the circle. As they put the paper in the basket, say aloud the name written on the paper. When everyone is finished, lift the basket in prayer: Christ, you are the great Healer. We place these names before you in faith that you hear our prayers. Be with all those who seek you in this place and in all the unknown places of the world. Be with these here among us, that we may know how faithfully to follow you in prayer. Amen.

### Reflect

Sabbath time is a precious gift offering a means of refreshment, helping us to find what really matters, even in our everyday patterns. This group offers the opportunity to teach and learn from one another. How have you grown in your understanding of keeping Sabbath? What insights about keeping Sabbath have the participants gathered to take with them into their daily lives? As you think about your time with this group reflect upon what went especially well for you in this session, as well as what challenges may have come up. What might you do differently next time? Take a moment to write down ideas and reflections to remember for future sessions.



# Keeping Sabbath



## Exploration: Context and Mission

### About this Setting

Sabbath time was established by God in order to allow that all creation might enjoy the fullness and peace of God's presence. In this setting we will introduce the concept of Sabbath and the many ways that one can experience a Sabbath practice.

Seekers and new church participants may come with varied reasons for choosing to be part of a church community. They may be eager, anxious, defensive, or fearful of their new adventure in this community. Some may be able to articulate their reasons for attending and wanting to participate. Some have been hurt by a church and wish to move past the resentments and concerns of a painful experience. Seekers and new church participants have a desire for personal and spiritual connection. Some are at a transitional time of life changes, loss, and/or crisis points. Others desire to find like-minded people, friendship, and a social connection. The seeker and new church participant can be opened to a wider or renewed vision of Christian community.

These resources offer activities and suggestions for ways that adults can discover together the experience of keeping Sabbath. New participants bring the gift of new eyes and ears and hands. Through these varied exercises, seekers can explore old and new ways of viewing, celebrating, and enacting Sabbath, including various media and creative techniques to expand a Sabbath focus and blessing. The experiences are a time for discovering together who God is calling us to be as members of God's community.



### About this Exploration

Jeremiah goes to the busiest places in the city to call the people to observe Sabbath as a day intentionally set apart by God. In the same way, we are called to take the gift that is Sabbath to our communities and then into the wider world. As communities of faith we are encouraged to model Sabbath living that is joyful, inclusive, and not burdensome. The Corinthian church was challenged to rethink the way they lived out the Sabbath together in community. Maybe we will have to do the same! What do you mean—change?

**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**  
*Jeremiah 17:19–27*  
*1 Corinthians 11:17–26*

### Leader Preparation

Introduce this Faith Practices offering in your church newsletter, e-mail, and Web site postings. Announce that the Faith Practices curriculum will include numerous engaging activities that will help seekers to understand the history of Sabbath and how to keep the modern concept of a Sabbath that extends beyond Sunday.

Read and reflect upon the Bible Focus Passages, focusing on the intention of what it means to be Sabbath-keepers. How does is Sabbath time reflected by the Christian tradition?

### Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from 9 activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from Exploring and Engaging, at least one from Discerning and Deciding, and at least one from Sending and Serving. The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation using supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

### Exploring & Engaging Activities



#### 1 Living Inward and Outward

##### Leader preparation:

Read and reflect upon the poem “Living.” How do you personally balance an inner reflective Sabbath practice with a practice of giving outward?

##### Supplies:

- poem “Living,” Attachment: Activity 1
- paper and pens

Discuss how a Sabbath practice can be both inner reflection and connection with God, and offering our gifts outwardly to others. Read the poem “Living.” Invite the participants to journal their responses to these questions: How do you practice an inner, reflective Sabbath, as the poem states, “intimately connected”? In what ways do you practice Sabbath by giving outward to others with “authentic Love”? What does “Living Truth” mean to you? Ask them to gather in pairs to discuss their answers.

#### 2 “Let Me Enter God’s Own Dwelling”

##### Leader preparation:

Read and reflect on Jeremiah 17:19–22. Familiarize yourself with the hymn “Let Me Enter God’s Own Dwelling” (Tune: Unser Herschel). You can hear the tune at <http://www.tinyurl.com/28dqk8n>.

##### Supplies:

- Bibles
- copies of the hymn, <http://www.tinyurl.com/28dqk8n>

Read Jeremiah 17:19–22. Invite the participants to sing or read the text of the hymn. If possible, divide the group into small groups of two or three. Assign one verse to each group and ask them to discuss this question about that verse: How is the scripture of hallowing the Sabbath reflected in the verses of this hymn? Have each small group decide on an adverb to complete each stanza such as:

Stanza 1: God receives...

Stanza 2: God welcomes...

Stanza 3: God changes...

Stanza 4: God engages...

Stanza 5: God upholds...

Stanza 6: God leads...

Re-gather and invite each group to share its statements.

## Keeping Sabbath



## SEEKERS & NEW CHURCH PARTICIPANTS

\* To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.

\* To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 using at least one activity from each category.

### ③ Music and Meditation

#### Leader preparation:

Practice the meditation script to be comfortable leading the imagery.

#### Supplies:

- instrumental classical music (suggestions: Vaughn Williams, “Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis”; J. S. Bach, “Air on a G String”; Mozart, Symphony #41)

We can use music and our imaginations to recognize where God is guiding us to see the needs of our community and the world. Invite the participants to close their eyes and take a few deep breaths. Play music softly in the background as you read this narration: “In your mind’s eye, place yourself in a beautiful and safe place in nature. Use your imagination to create a space surrounded by the beauty of God’s creation. What do you see? What sounds do you hear? How does it feel to be in this place? Do you have a sense of God’s Spirit with you? Now imagine that God is leading you to experience other places from the perspective of God’s loving presence. These are places that need God’s comfort, love, and help. Begin to envision or get a sense of where those places may be. Look first in your own families. Who or what needs God’s comfort, love, and help? Imagine that you can send your breath to those needs, representing the Spirit of God. (Pause.) Now extend your vision where God leads to your community. Who or what needs God’s comfort, love, and help? Again, imagine that you can send your breath to those needs representing the Spirit of God. (Pause.) Once more, extend your vision where God leads to the world. Who or what needs God’s comfort, love, and help? Once more imagine that you can send your breath to those needs, representing the Spirit of God. (Pause).”

Invite the participants back into the group’s space: “Come back into this space, this room, completely. Breathe a full breath of Spirit for yourself. Where does God call you to offer your Sabbath practice in the world, in your community, and in your families?”

Invite the participants to share their insights with the group.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### ④ Circles of Relationships

*(Used with permission, from Mary J. Morreale, “Music and Transformation”)*

#### Leader preparation:

On an 8½" x11" paper draw four concentric circles. Make copies for members of the group.

#### Supplies:

- sheets with circles

The circles on the paper represent different types of relationships. The center of the circle includes the most intimate of relationships: your relationship with God. The circle closest to the center includes your closest relationships with others, perhaps your spouse, significant other, parents, children and/or closest friends. The third concentric circle is for associates that are close, but not as close as the previous circle. This might also include groups and affiliations that are in your life. The last concentric circle is for institutions, organizations, the world, and



others who are in relationship to you, but not as close as the others. On the outside of the center circle place current thoughts, concerns, issues that pull you away from the center.

Allow for time to fill in the circles. Encourage the group to use this as an opportunity for reflection, realizing that relationships can be complicated.

Ask the participants to choose an item or person to pray about silently. In all the circles you may find occasion to pray as Jesus has urged in Matthew 5:44: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Following this time of silent prayer, invite the participants to discuss their reflections about how our relationships can relate to a Sabbath practice.

### 5 Mandalas

#### Leader preparation:

Draw a plate-size circle on an 8½" x11" piece of paper and make copies for the participants. For more information about mandalas see:

<http://www.tinyurl.com/cxcg35> .

Other sources for mandala information: <http://www.tinyurl.com/ytd3vh>.

#### Supplies:

- drawing materials: colored chalk, crayons, markers, or finger paint
- paper with circle drawn

Self-expression in the form of freely created drawings can offer insight and discernment of where God is calling us to be in our Sabbath practice. "Mandala" is a Sanskrit word for "circle." Invite the participants to close their eyes and take a deep breath as you pray: "Center our hearts, minds, and presence in you, God. Lead us through this experience to draw whatever comes as a means to explore how you call us to a Sabbath practice. Guide our drawing by opening our heart to your leading with love. Amen."

Have the participants choose colors that appeal to them. Using the circle on the paper as a starting point, make designs or shapes that suggest themselves to you. Draw inside or outside the circle; you are not limited to the boundary of the circle. Use the space however you wish. When you have finished drawing, add a title to your mandala. Allow time for drawing. Invite the participants to share their thoughts and insights of the experience.



### 6 "The Dance of Youth"

#### Leader preparation:

Spend time reflecting on the aspects of unity and divisions within your congregation. Become familiar with the poster "The Dance of Youth" by Picasso.

#### Supplies:

- poster "The Dance of Youth" (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters7>) by Pablo Picasso
- Bibles

Display the poster in a way that all can see it clearly. Invite the participants to study the poster. What do the colors suggest to them? What kind of feeling does the picture evoke? In what ways does the poster reflect unity? Note that the Sabbath experience encourages us to gather as a community to share God's love with one another.



Invite volunteers to take turns reading verses of 1 Corinthians 11:12-26. How does this poster relate to the situation in that passage? Paul, who wrote this letter to the church in Corinth, wanted the people to love one another, not disengage, when they gathered for worship.

Ask: How would the poster look different if it represented what Paul was describing? In what ways can you be an instrument of peace in a divisive situation?

Close in prayer: “God, forgive us when we are in disharmony with one another. Help us find ways to love one another within our own church, and to spread that love into our community and world. Amen.”

### Sending & Serving Activities



#### 7 Keep the Sabbath Holy (Easy Preparation)

##### Leader preparation:

Read and reflect on Jeremiah 17:19–27. Get copies of a recent church bulletin, one for each participant.

##### Supplies:

- Bibles
- copies of worship bulletin

Take turns reading a verse from Jeremiah 17:19–27. Ask: How can we create space for attending worship in our busy and hectic lives? How does worship feed the spirit?

Distribute a recent church bulletin to each participant, and ask each person to circle the portions of worship that help in practicing inner Sabbath and which portions help in practicing Sabbath outward to the world. Share insights about worship attendance and Sabbath practice.

#### 8 Singing for Creation

##### Leader preparation:

Be familiar with creation hymns such as

“For the Beauty of the Earth” (<http://www.tinyurl.com/8fydd>)

“Fairest Lord Jesus” (<http://www.tinyurl.com/ysmn3v>)

“O For a World” (<http://www.tinyurl.com/25umvg8>)

##### Supplies:

- hymnal
- paper and pens

Ask the participants to sing or read through the text of the hymns named above or other creation hymns. Invite their responses to these or similar questions: How do the words of these hymns represent the world around us? What is our individual and collective responsibility to creation? What relation might there be between keeping the Sabbath and being a good steward of creation? Allow a few moments for personal reflection. Provide paper for writing. Have the participants get in small groups of two or three to share their ideas. Close by singing a creation hymn.



### 9 Palms Up, Palms Down

#### Leader preparation:

Reflect on how a Sabbath practice is both giving and receiving connection and communion with God. Be familiar with “I’ve Got Peace Like a River” (Tune: Peace Like a River). You can access the lyrics and tune at

<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong9>.

#### Supplies:

- copies of the hymn

A Sabbath practice involves receiving connection and guidance from God, as well as giving back to God and community. Ask participants to use their hands as an interpretive metaphor for giving and receiving. First, ask the group to sit with their palms up and eyes closed and to think of all the ways that they receive from God and from others in community. Then ask the participants to place their palms down and reflect how they can give back to the world a portion of the love and gifts given by God. The flow of giving and receiving exemplifies a balanced Sabbath practice.

Have the group sing “I’ve Got Peace Like a River” with hand motions:

Peace like a river (hands wave palms down)

Joy like a fountain (hands clap and move upward)

Love like an ocean (hands at heart then open outward)

Close with each participant choosing “peace, joy, or love” as a word to represent what they would most like to give and receive.

## Reflect

Sabbath time is a precious gift offering a means of refreshment, helping us to find what really matters even in our everyday patterns. This time together gives opportunity to teach and learn from one another. How have you grown in your understanding of keeping Sabbath? What insights about keeping Sabbath have the participants gathered to take with them into their daily lives? As you think about your time with this group, reflect on what went especially well for you in this session, as well as what challenges may have come up. What might you do differently next time? Take a moment to write down ideas and reflections to remember for future sessions.

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## Living

Living inward,  
Living outward.  
The juxtaposition of life  
Living inward—in your True Self  
Living outward—as led by the Divine  
Inwardly, outwardly.  
Living inwardly—intimately connected  
Living outwardly—authentic Love.  
Being who you are:  
Living Truth.

—Mary J. Morreale ©2007

# Keeping Sabbath



## Exploration: Future and Vision

### About this Setting

Sabbath time was established by God in order to allow that all creation might enjoy the fullness and peace of God's presence. In this setting we will introduce the concept of Sabbath and the many ways that one can experience a Sabbath practice.

Seekers and new church participants may come with varied reasons for choosing to be part of a church community. They may be eager, anxious, defensive, or fearful of their new adventure in this community. Some may be able to articulate their reasons for attending and wanting to participate. Some have been hurt by a church, and wish to move past the resentments and concerns of a painful experience. Seekers and new church participants seek personal and spiritual connection. Some are at a transitional time of life changes, loss, and/or crisis points. Others desire to find like-minded people, friendship, and a social connection. The seeker and new church participant can be opened to a wider or renewed vision of Christian community.

These resources offer activities and suggestions for ways that adults can together discover the experience of keeping Sabbath. New participants bring the gift of new eyes and ears and hands. Through these varied exercises, seekers can explore old and new ways of viewing, celebrating, and enacting Sabbath, including various media and creative techniques to expand a Sabbath focus and blessing. The experiences are a time for discovering together who God is calling us to be as members of God's community.





### About this Exploration

Sabbath implies renewal based in reflection. Rooted in the past, Sabbath beckons us toward the future. It calls us to encounter God in the present moment. Sabbath is a way for us to remember that we are God's beloved children. Awareness of God's presence can guide us through all of life's experiences. As God's people, we often find ourselves facing challenging times, not unlike those faced by the psalmist and by Jesus' followers after his crucifixion. At such times, a sense of God's presence can guide our choices toward a future filled with the possibilities of Sabbath transformation.

#### BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

***Psalm 119:105–112,  
129–136***

***Matthew 27:51–66  
(Matthew 26:14–27:66)***

### Leader Preparation

Introduce this Faith Practices offering in your church newsletter, e-mail, and Web site postings. Announce that the Faith Practices curriculum will include numerous engaging activities that will help seekers to understand the history of Sabbath and how to keep the modern concept of a Sabbath that extends beyond Sunday.

Read and reflect upon the Bible Focus Passages, focusing on the intention of what it means to be Sabbath-keepers. How do you follow God's guidance through Sabbath time?

### Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from 9 activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from Exploring and Engaging, at least one from Discerning and Deciding, and at least one from Sending and Serving. The first activity in each category is designed for "easy preparation" (able to be done with minimal preparation using sup-

### Exploring & Engaging Activities



#### 1 Be Still (Easy Preparation)

##### Leader preparation:

Review Psalm 46, focusing on verse 10.

##### Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper and pens or journals

Ask the group to take turns reading the first 10 verses of Psalm 46. Ask: How have you experienced being quiet to experience the peace of God? Describe how part of the psalm can be used as a simple breath prayer, as a means to connect with God for guidance and help. Ask the group to think of a current issue or problem that they may be facing, and to use that issue to pray the breath prayer for guidance. Invite all to pray. Inhale thinking the words "Be still," and exhale thinking the words "and know." Pray the breath prayer in silence for 3-5 minutes.

Invite the participants to journal or discuss insights from the experience.

#### 2 What a Wonderful World

##### Leader preparation:

Check sites below for a recording; print copies for each person of the lyrics of the song "What a Wonderful World" by Louis Armstrong.

##### Supplies:

- printed text to the song "What a Wonderful World" by Louis Armstrong  
<http://www.tinyurl.com/kxewn>
- pens
- online resources: <http://www.tinyurl.com/23wt31o>

Part of practicing our faith in the world is expressing gratitude. Sing or read the lyrics of "What a Wonderful World." Ask the participants to circle all the words in the song that describe something for which they are grateful. The song lends itself to rich imagery and the glory of God's world. Then ask each participant to share one aspect of gratitude with the group. Affirm that offering thanks is a way to continue a Sabbath practice.

Closing prayer: "God, we are grateful for all the blessings you continue to bring us throughout our life. Help us always to remember you and your world with thanks. Amen."

## Keeping Sabbath



## SEEKERS & NEW CHURCH PARTICIPANTS

plies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90-120 minutes.

\* To plan a session of 30-45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.

\* To plan a session of 45-60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 using at least one activity from each category.

### ③ The Eyes of God

#### Leader preparation:

The art form of icons for prayer is widely utilized in the Orthodox tradition. For more information about icons, see "Praying with Icons" by Jim Forest (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008). Online resources: <http://www.tinyurl.com/2aaryjt> or <http://www.tinyurl.com/33braqz>.

#### Supplies:

- mirrors (for those who wish to do this session without a partner).

It has been said that the eyes are the windows of the soul. Praying with icons is a spiritual practice widely used in the Orthodox tradition, and a Sabbath practice tool. We will use the human face as an icon; so we will work with a partner. If you prefer to work alone, you may use in a mirror, and write your answers.

Invite the participants to explore praying with the human face as an icon by choosing a partner, or by gazing into a mirror. Provide this guidance: "As you gaze at your partner, soften your eyes and set your gaze slightly above and between the eyes of your partner. You are both looking into the eyes of God. Choose which is partner 1, the 'questioner,' and which is partner 2, the 'seeker.' Partner 1 asks: 'Who are you?' Partner 2 answers, 'I am (name).' Partner 1 says, 'God is merciful,' and repeatedly asks, 'Who are you?' Partner 2 answers, 'I am (name).' This conversation continues for about three minutes."

Direct the partners to switch roles and repeat the exercise for another three minutes.

Ask all to close their eyes as you offer a closing prayer.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### ④ As Above, So Below (Easy Preparation)

#### Leader preparation:

In Eugene Peterson's *The Message, The Bible in Contemporary Language*, both Colossians 1:16 and Matthew 6:9-13 include the phrase "as above, so below." Make copies of the texts for all participants. This translation uses masculine language for God; change the text "him" to "Christ" and "Father" to "Creator" if desired.)

#### Supplies:

- copies "As Above, So Below," Attachment: Activity 4
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Invite everyone to reflect on the two passages as you read them. Ask: How does the phrase "as above, so below" apply to a Sabbath practice? Remind the group that establishing a discipline of Sabbath practice will enable a closer relationship with God. Have the group identify practices that help us keep Sabbath throughout the week. List their ideas on newsprint or a whiteboard. Invite each participant to choose one Sabbath practice at which he or she will endeavor to spend at least 15 minutes this week.

End by praying the Prayer of Jesus (traditional version, modern ecumenical version, or the Peterson version).



### 5 God and Light

#### Leader preparation:

Gather various sources of light: flashlight, lamp, lantern, candle, etc.

#### Supplies:

- light sources
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers
- Bibles

Set the various sources of light on the table. Ask the participants to name other sources of light, and list these on newsprint or a whiteboard (e.g., sun, moon, stars, headlights, an insight, a new perception). Read Psalm 119:105-112, focusing on verse 105. Invite the participants to choose a light source to gaze upon as they mentally repeat verse 105. What word or impression does the source of light offer? How can this word be incorporated into a Sabbath practice? How can this word lead us into the future?

Invite the participants to share their words and insights at the close of the session.

### 6 Seeking Psalms

#### Leader preparation:

Choose three psalms to work with in this session (suggestions: Psalm 23, Psalm 91, Psalm 100). Make copies of the handout.

#### Supplies:

- Bible
- handout, Attachment: Activity 6
- pens

Psalms can be an honest expression of human emotion and need: praise, thanksgiving, lament, liturgical hymns for worship. Read portions of the psalms you selected. Invite each person to choose and read a portion of a psalm of his or her choice. Then have the seekers fill in the blanks on the handout to create their own psalm.

An example to share: God, I come before you seeking peace. Let your voice be heard within me. I feel lost and I know that your comfort can heal me. Show me the way, for you are my Hope. In gratitude, I wait patiently for your voice. Amen.

Invite all to share in small groups or with the group as a whole. This activity may also be done as a group process.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Be and Do (Easy Preparation)

#### Leader preparation:

Review the suggestions for the practice of keeping the Sabbath as introduced in all six Explorations of "Keeping Sabbath."



### Supplies:

- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

If your group has used the resources in the other Explorations of “Keeping Sabbath,” review the suggestions for strengthening or renewing the practice of Sabbath-keeping. What have been some memorable practices in these learning experiences? As the participants name these, list them on the newsprint or whiteboard (possibilities: body prayer, breath prayer, scripture focus, music and movement, hymns, prayer, meditation, mission/giving to others, art focus, hands experiences, discussion and dialogue, journaling, community). Your group may have used many or only a few of these. Even if your group has not used the other Explorations, you could make the list yourself.

Pose the question: What does a Sabbath-keeping practice call us to be and do? As participants name these, list them on the newsprint or whiteboard (possibilities: be faithful, be prayerful, be still, do for others, do a practice, be close to God, worship).

## 8 Walk of Renewal

*(Used with permission, from Mary J. Morreale, “Music and Transformation”)*

### Leader preparation:

If the group will be walking inside, select peaceful instrumental music such as “new age” piano, or orchestral music by Mozart. Read and reflect on Philippians 4:5–9.

### Supplies:

- Bibles
- music

Walking can be used as a moving meditation and Sabbath practice. Ask the participants to take turns reading Philippians 4:5–9. Invite the group to use walking as a movement meditation with music (if they choose to walk inside) or in silence (walking outside). Remind all to be open to where the words, the music, and the movement take them.

Begin the music as the participants take a walk with this scripture. Let people choose whether to walk outdoors or inside. After 5–10 minutes, re-gather and discuss which words drew their attention. Ask: In what ways does this text call you to service for others? Read the Philippians text again.

## 9 Christ, Your Light

### Leader preparation:

Review the crucifixion story in Matthew 27:51–66.

### Supplies:

- Bibles
- a candle for each participant

Give each participant a candle. Introduce the scripture by telling how in the crucifixion story on Saturday (the Sabbath) nothing happened. Sometimes we are in darkness or face a dead space where we are on the threshold and we can’t see the future. Keeping Sabbath may mean that a time of emptiness may lead to transformation. We become empty in order to be able to be filled again.



### Reflect

Sabbath time is a precious gift offering a means of refreshment, helping us to find what really matters, even in our everyday patterns. This group has given opportunity to teach and learn from one another. How have you grown in your understanding of keeping Sabbath? What insights about keeping Sabbath have the participants gathered to take with them into their daily lives? As you think about your time with this group, reflect upon what went especially well for you in this time together, as well as what challenges may have come up. Take a moment to write down ideas and reflections to remember.

Turn down the lights, and read the scripture. At the end of the reading, turn off the lights (if possible). Invite the group to sit in darkness and silence for a moment. Then share the following or something similar: “Think of the dark and waiting times of your life. Perhaps at this moment you are waiting for a transformation to come. The light of Christ shines in the darkness and is available to you anytime you stop, look, and listen for God’s word, touch, and presence. As I light my candle, may it light all those in darkness, so that our light can shine for the world.” Light your candle, and then pass the light to the person on your right saying, “Christ, your light.” Pass the light to everyone in the group saying, “Christ, your light.” When all candles are lighted, sit in silence for a few moments. Then invite the participants to offer sentence prayers of thanksgiving for Christ’s presence in their life.



## As Above, So Below

“For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank of angels—everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him.” (Colossians 1:16)

The Prayer of Jesus:

“Our Father in heaven,

Reveal who you are.

Set the world right;

Do what’s best—

as above, so below.

Keep us alive with three square meals.

Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.

Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.

You’re in charge!

You can do anything you want!

You’re ablaze in beauty!

Yes. Yes. Yes.”

—(Matthew 6:9-13)

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## Seeking Psalm Fill-in

God, I come before you \_\_\_\_\_

Let your voice \_\_\_\_\_

I feel \_\_\_\_\_ and I know that your \_\_\_\_\_

Show me the way, for you are \_\_\_\_\_

In gratitude, \_\_\_\_\_

Amen.