

Honoring the Body



Exploration: Discovery

About this Setting

Most people associate worship with the mind more than the body—with the intellect and spirit more than the physical self. Children are often raised to think of worship as a time when they must be silent, when their fidgeting bodies must somehow remain still. In truth, however, worship is one of the most embodied things we do. It engages us from head to toe. As we stand and sit and kneel; as we go forward to receive communion or to present our offering; as we breathe into our rising diaphragms in song and feel the waters of baptism drip off of our faces, worship provides a weekly chance to discover how our whole bodies are called to encounter the living God. The activities in this setting provide a variety of ways to help worship planners and worshipers alike become more aware of the ways they already use their bodies in worship even as they discover new ways to honor their hands, hips, lips, and lungs as essential participants in the ways they offer praise to God.

About this Exploration

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



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

1 Kings 19:4-8
John 4:1-42

Leader Preparation

What do you think of when you hear the title of this practice of faith, "Honoring the Body"? Pause for a moment and consider the number of ways you honor your body each day. Try making list of them all. Include anything from bathing to brushing your teeth to exercise to rest. How much time each day do you think you spend caring for your body? How often do you connect these things with your faith in Christ? In what ways can these activities become acts of worship to the God who created your body?

Prayer: God, I give you thanks and praise for the wondrous creation that is the human body. Thank you for intricately creating our every nerve, muscle, organ, and cell to join in the praise of the Creator of all things. Make me aware this week of how even my small acts of caring for my own body—even my mundane acts of honoring the body of someone else—can be means of offering honor and worship to you, the One whose Spirit dwells within us and in whose image our bodies are crafted. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



❶ Passing of the Peace (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: The passing of the peace is one of the oldest Christian worship traditions, and one of the most physical. The apostle Paul encouraged the early Christians to offer one another "the kiss of peace." Over the centuries this practice has shifted from being one of kissing on the cheek to exchanging embraces or other physical signs of reconciliation and community. The Quakers are said to have popularized the handshake as a way of passing the peace that showed equality under God rather than division by the class systems of their day. Today, however, the physical signs of this practice are often lost among a flurry of conversation that leads to coordinating schedules, small talk, and catching up on news. Invite the congregation to reclaim the physical nature of this holy practice by exchanging signs of peace in silence, communicating using only touch and body language.

Supplies: None

If the passing of the peace is not a usual practice of your congregation, take time at the outset of worship to introduce the background of this component of ancient liturgy. If the passing of the peace is part of your worship practice, share with worshipers that today all will pass the peace in a way that encourages us to be more attentive to our bodies. Invite worshipers to stand, if they are able, and to exchange signs of the peace of Christ with their neighbors by sharing a handshake, hug, or resting a hand on their neighbor's shoulder. Encourage them to remain silent in this time, embodying signs of peace rather than speaking them. You may wish to conclude this time by singing a simple hymn of unity.

❷ Our Bodies in Worship

Leader preparation: This activity will work well in a time of staff reflection, a worship leadership or worship committee meeting, or with any gathering of lay leadership who have an interest in worship. Discover how your particular congregation involves people's physical bodies in worship. Where are we doing this well? Where are we coming up short? What parts of the body are we neglecting to honor and involve in the way we come before God each week? Make sure you have enough copies of recent worship bulletins from your congregation for each person to have one, and place a large outline of a human body on a poster, sheet of butcher paper, or whiteboard where it is visible to the whole room.

Supplies:

- copies of recent worship bulletins
- an outline of a human body on a poster, butcher paper, or whiteboard
- markers
- hymn: "Take My Life and Let It Be," by Frances R. Havergal (tune: Hendon), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXy2MmMLjGQ&feature=related>; lyrics, <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/t/m/tmlalib.htm>

Invite each person to take a copy of a recent worship bulletin from your congregation. Together, go through each element of the worship service from beginning to end, and talk about the parts of the body that are engaged in that particular aspect of worship. As a part of the body is named, write that worship element beside or on that body part in your human outline (for example, if someone says



"eyes" for "Invocation" because that is a time when you close your eyes, write "Invocation" where the eyes would be on your person).

Once you have moved through the whole worship order, look at your outline of a person. Discuss the following questions:

- What parts of the body are engaged most by a typical worship experience in your congregation?
- What parts of the body are most neglected or rarely used?
- What could be added or adapted in our worship to engage some of the neglected parts in worship? Discuss creative ideas that your group may have.

Think about special services, such as baptism, installation, ordination, funerals, weddings, and so forth. What parts of the body are engaged in those services?

Conclude your time of reflection by prayerfully singing "Take My Life and Let It Be."



③ What We Thirst For

Leader preparation: This activity would be great to begin a time of worship that focuses on John 4:1–42 (or any worship event that addresses our thirst; perhaps also a good activity for baptism), as it invites worshipers to consider the thirst of their own bodies. It could be used as a meditative time early in worship that calls us into the time of worship, or as a time of response after the reading of scripture or the sermon. The effect of this activity could be increased by setting up a fountain with flowing water at the front of the sanctuary. This activity may help worshipers make a connection between their own physical and spiritual thirst and the physical and spiritual thirst of people around the globe.

Supplies:

- artwork: "The Public Fountain," by Manuel Alvarez Bravo, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1401636333?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37962&store_id=1401
- a small fountain that can be positioned at the front of the worship space
- Bible
- "Litany of Thirst," Attachment: Activity 3
- (optional) hymn: "Come to the Water," by Ray Makeever, <http://www.sixmaddens.org/?p=225>

As the sound of the flowing water from the fountain fills the background, display or project the artwork "The Public Fountain" by Manuel Alvarez Bravo. Invite worshipers to reflect on the art using the following prompts:

- I wonder what made this young boy so thirsty.
- What does it feel like to be deeply, desperately thirsty?
- For what do you thirst as you come to worship this day—in your body and in your spirit?

After several of moments for silent reflection, read John 4:6–15. Then invite the congregation to join you in the "Litany of Thirst," Attachment: Activity 3. You may also wish to join in singing "Come to the Water," or a similarly themed worship song.

**Discerning & Deciding Activities****④ Body and Spirit (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: This activity would work in a committee, in a small group setting, or in a worship setting if your congregation is informal enough to be open to discussion as part of worship. By connecting God's care for Elijah's body in a time of spiritual need to the ways people have cared for us physically in times of need, participants are reminded that body and spirit are not that far apart—and that both lie within God's circle of concern and care. When dividing the people into small groups, you may want to begin them with an example of how you would respond to the question they are discussing by sharing an experience of a time someone brought you food after an illness or death or performed another act of physical service for you when you were in distress.

Supplies:

- Bible

Read 1 Kings 19:4–8 together as a large group. After allowing silence for reflection, pose this wonder statement and invite reflection: I wonder why God addressed Elijah's deep spiritual despair by attending to his physical needs for food and rest. Allow participants to offer their ideas. Then divide into groups of three or four and invite participants to share stories of an experience when someone helped care for their bodily needs in a time of spiritual or emotional distress. How did they find that such care of their bodies also nourished their soul? Follow up with a communal discussion about in what ways your congregation cares for people in both body and spirit. Is your congregation better at one than the other?

**⑤ The Woman at the Well: A Monologue**

Leader preparation: Allow worship participants to experience the physical and spiritual experience of the woman at the well, as told in John 4:1–42. Using the monologue, we can hear this from her perspective. Invite a congregant with gifts in drama to come to worship dressed in a robe and headscarf, carrying a heavy water jug, to deliver this monologue as much from memory as possible. The more it can be offered as a spoken piece rather than read off a sheet, the more effective it will be!

Supplies:

- costume for monologue reader: robe, headscarf, jug
- “The Woman at the Well: A Monologue,” Attachment: Activity 5

As part of the scripture reading or sermon time, have someone offer the monologue of the woman at the well. You may wish to conclude by singing a hymn or worship song that uses water in inviting ways. Some suggestions are: “Come to the Water,” by Ray Makeever (see link in Activity 3); “When, Like the Woman at the Well” (words, Edith Sinclair Downing; tune CRAVEN C.M.); or “As Pants the Hart for Cooling Streams” (words, paraphrase of Psalm 42 by Nahum Tate and Nicholas Brady; tune MARTYRDOM C.M.).

**⑥ The Song and Silence of Sensory Celebration**

Leader preparation: The classic hymn “To You, O God, All Creatures Sing” (alternately known as “All Creatures of Our God and King,” based on a thirteenth-century text by St. Francis of Assisi) is a celebration of God that invokes



all five senses—sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. The adaptations made to the hymn by Miriam Therese Winter, who crafted a familiar version of the text, invite the singer to reflect on the many gifts of God that we encounter with our physical faculties. As worshipers mix the singing of the hymn with periods of silent reflection, they are invited to offer praise to God for those things for which bodies are grateful, for the places bodies fall short, and for those things for which bodies are in need.

Supplies:

- hymn: “To You, O God, All Creatures Sing,” words by St. Francis of Assisi, adapt. by Miriam Therese Winter (tune: Lasst Uns Erfreuen); also known as “All Creatures of Our God and King”
- “A Five-Fold Prayer of Sensory Celebration,” Attachment: Activity 6

When your congregation typically does the Prayers of the People or another sort of pastoral/congregational prayer, try this prayer of silence and song that offers thanks to God for the ways we encounter God using the body’s five senses. Weave opportunities for silent reflection and gratitude for our various bodily senses in between the lyrics of the hymn. A suggested structure for this time of prayer is found on Attachment: Activity 6.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Offertory Prayers (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Use the focus scriptures (1 Kings 19:4–8; John 4:1–42) as an opportunity to connect your congregation’s giving to the stories of God’s abundant gifts not only to our spirits, but also to our bodies. These stories may reinforce the hope that the offerings we give are used not only for buildings or programs, but also for human bodies all around us that in deep need of being recognized and cared for.

Supplies: None

Before or after collecting your congregation’s offering, offer a prayer of blessing of the offerings based on this Exploration’s focus scriptures.

Prayer from 1 Kings 19:4–8:

Gracious God, when we are weary and worn and feel abandoned, you find us and feed us and bring us rest. May these offerings find those in our community and world who are in most desperate need and feel most forsaken, strengthening them with nourishment and compassion necessary for the difficult journeys ahead of them. Help us not only to feed them from afar, but also to walk closely with them as you promise to do with us. In the name of Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Prayer from John 4:1–42:

Holy One, open our eyes to those around us who have been disappointed by everyone else and left alone with their questions. As Jesus offered living water to the woman at the well, may we extend through these offerings the cold cups of thirst-quenching love, relationship, and provision that are desperately needed by so many around us. May these gifts help us engage with those who are hungering and thirsting in body and spirit, longing to encounter you. Amen.



⑧ Musical Benediction

Leader preparation: The hymn “I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say” contains rich allusions to both the story of the woman at the well and the kind of deep rest for which Elijah’s body and spirit longed. Singing this hymn, along with a litany of blessing, can send worshipers into the world filled with the hope that God goes forth with them, inviting tired bodies to rest and broken spirits to a fountain that can heal. Pastoral and musical staff can coordinate to make this a meaningful way to blend spoken and sung word into a rich blessing for body and soul.

Supplies:

- hymn: “I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say,” by Horatius Bonar (tune: Kings-fold), <http://www.oremus.org/hymnal/i/i066.html>
- “Benediction Litany,” Attachment: Activity 8

When you come to the closing song/benediction portion of worship, invite worshipers to join in singing the verses of the hymn “I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say,” as the leader speaks the interwoven lines of blessing. Let this be the last activity of your gathering/worship time.



⑨ Prayer of St. Patrick (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Both Elijah and the woman at the well were surprised by God’s presence above and beside them in moments of darkness. Use a portion of the ancient Saint Patrick’s Breastplate prayer to remind worshipers of God’s presence all around their bodies and within them in this day and whatever darker days may come. Legend says this prayer was written by St. Patrick as a prayer for protection during his ministry in Ireland in the fifth century, though the earliest records of it come from the eighth century. Invite worshipers to pray this prayer using words and actions, virtually surrounding their bodies with the presence of Christ as they go forth into the world. Learn the suggested motions ahead of time so you may teach them to the congregation; if there are other motions you find more fitting, feel free to adapt.

Supplies:

- “St. Patrick’s Breastplate,” Attachment: Activity 9
- (optional) hymn: “The Deer’s Cry,” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_GHWiAGpI0&feature=related

This prayer will work well as part of the Prayers of the People or as a benediction for sending forth. Invite worshipers who are able to stand and to follow as the leader guides them through the motions for each line of this excerpt of St. Patrick’s Breastplate. Read the prayer once, demonstrating the motions, and then offer prayer a second time with all worshipers joining in. (If you have access to it, “The Deer’s Cry” is a beautiful musical version of this prayer that has been adapted and set to music; it could be offered with similar motions to those described in this activity.)

Following the Church Year

The focus scripture passages for this Exploration—1 Kings 19:4–8 and John 4:1–42—both appear in the Revised Common Lectionary. Elijah’s encounter with God is explored in Ordinary Time of Year C (Proper 7 [12], Fifth Sunday after Pentecost), while the Woman at the Well is the chosen passage for Lent 3 in Year A.



The Year A Lent passages could lend themselves to an interesting exploration of the body throughout the season in which we remember Jesus' bodily suffering.

- Lent 1, Jesus' Temptation, shows that he had real physical needs.
- Lent 2–5 could contribute to honoring different bodily needs of Jesus' disciples and point to how honoring our bodies is part of learning to follow a Christ who was embodied.
- Nicodemus's story in Lent 2 (John 3:1–17) could produce a sermon around "Honoring Our Birth" or "Honoring Our Age."
- The Woman at the Well in Lent 3 (John 4:1–42) could be "Honoring our Thirst."
- Jesus healing the man born blind in Lent 4 (John 9:1–41) could be "Honoring our Sight."
- Lazarus's raising in Lent 5 (John 11:1–45) could be "Honoring our Death."

All of these explorations could lead to an interesting encounter with the physicality of Jesus in Holy Week and the way his body was honored and dishonored by his friends and enemies before his death (the cloaks and palms before him on the street, the anointing at Bethany); in his dying (the beating he endured before crucifixion; with his thirst, stabbing him with a spear rather than breaking his bones); and after his death (the care taken for his body by Joseph and the women who came bringing spices).

Attachment: Activity 3

Litany of Thirst

Leader: Creator God, 70 percent of our bodies and this earth on which we live are made up of water;

People: You created us unable to live more than a few days without this water you have placed in and around us.

Leader: Water helps our blood circulate, carries the nutrients we need, and maintains our body's balance;

People: Water gives us life, surrounding us in our mother's womb and marking us by baptism for inclusion in your family.

Leader: Yet your people remain thirsty, O God—and our thirst runs deep.

People: We thirst for justice, for peace, for mercy.

Leader: We thirst for acceptance, for love, for grace.

People: We thirst for comfort, for knowledge, for security.

Leader: We thirst for you, O God, along with a world profoundly thirsty—

People: A world where more than a billion people live without access to clean water, where thousands of children die each day from its lack.

Leader: A world where we easily turn on our taps while, not too far from here, a woman spends an entire night walking to a distant pump, waiting her turn to fill her water container.

People: We need your water not just to flow through our veins, but through this world like rivers of justice and restoration.

Leader: Our hearts and flesh cry out for the water only you can give.

People: Let us drink deeply of your living water, that none of your children might thirst again.

**Attachment: Activity 5**

The Woman at the Well: A Monologue

It was a horrible time of day to go to a well: sun beating down, heat so thick you could barely breathe. But it was the time I made the journey each day—a time I knew I could draw the water I needed to live in solitude, without having to deal with the whispers and stares and rejection of the other townspeople. It did not matter that much of what had befallen me in life was not my fault. When you've been through five husbands, everyone invents their own idea of the "real" story behind your past. Maybe I was promiscuous, some murmured; maybe I was infertile; maybe I was impossibly demanding; maybe I was just cursed. Whatever the reason, I was utterly alone. Yet, when I traveled to the well each day, alone was what I preferred to be. It was better to be beaten down by the sun than beaten down by my neighbors' looks once again.

On this particular day, however, I found that I was not alone. There was a man sitting beside the well—someone I didn't know. He was a Jew, and not a Samaritan like I was, and he looked tired—like he'd traveled a long way. I did my best to avoid meeting his gaze, but I could feel his eyes. They were even more intense than that sun above, almost burning a hole through the back of my bowed head as I lowered my jar into the well.

"Can you give me a drink of water?" His voice was calm, as deep and full as the well between us. My response, however, was flustered: "You are a Jewish man, and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" I intended this to be a rhetorical question with an obvious answer: Jews and Samaritans don't even share air to breathe, let alone let their hands and lips touch the same cups and utensils.

I dared steal a peek at the man's face, and his eyes looked sad. "If you knew the generosity of God and who I am," he replied, "you would have asked me to give you a drink, and I would have given you living water." My face wrinkled up in confusion as I took in his empty hands and parched face. "But sir, you have no bucket, and though this well does have nice water flowing at its bottom, it's awfully far down there. How do you presume to draw it out?" The man gazed at my jar and at the well. "If you drink this water, you'll keep having to make this noonday journey to draw it each day. Such thirst always returns. But the water I give . . . it becomes a continual spring within you. You take in that water and you never have to thirst again, ever."

**Attachment: Activity 5 (Continued)**

I couldn't imagine not being thirsty—thirsty from the sun, thirsty from the long walk to the well, thirsty from a lack of human contact, thirsty from countless loves that never seemed to last, thirsty for something I could count on. Could there be something more to life than this endless, paralyzing thirst? My response rose up within me like a fresh spring of something I had not seen in years—hope. "Sir, please—give me this water so I don't have to keep coming here like this every day, so that I don't have to be thirsty all the time."

The man and I spoke for a long time—about my past with all its pain, about my desperate present, and about a new future God hoped to bring. This man spoke beautifully of a future where we would not be divided by where our bodies worship, but united in spirit in truth—where we would not be driven just by our stomachs, but by a hunger for the work of God. I was so filled by his words that when I ran back to town, I left my water jug behind—suddenly, I wasn't thirsty anymore. I raced into the town square I hadn't dared visit in years. "Come and see," I told my neighbors gathered there, ones I had not spoken to in years. "Come and see this man who told me everything I've ever done . . . who didn't just whisper behind my back, but looked me in the eye. He cannot be the Messiah . . . can he?"

When I made my way back to the well, I was no longer alone. I was surrounded by my neighbors. We found our well now surrounded by Jews from whom we'd been divided for years, in whose presence we normally would not dare to tread. But when they heard the flowing voice of the man who had spoken to me, my neighbors could not help but agree. "This," they said, "is truly the Savior of the world." This man by the well—he had power to bring ultimate healing, to mend the world, to be the salve our dry and aching earth deeply needed to live. His living water could save even me.

**Attachment: Activity 6**

A Five-Fold Prayer of Sensory Celebration

(for use with the hymn “To You, O God, All Creatures Sing”)

Congregation sings Verse 1.

Leader: To you, O God, we offer thanks for the ways your beauty fills our eyes, and for the sounds of joy that ring in our ears. In our silence, God, hear our prayers . . . (pause for one minute)

Congregation sings Verse 2, which celebrates the senses of sight and sound.

Leader: To you, O God, we offer thanks that you are not remote, but close enough to touch. We give you thanks for the ways we can feel your presence with us, like a hand on our shoulders. In our silence, God, hear our prayers . . . (pause for one minute)

Congregation sings Verse 3, which revisits sound and also adds touch.

Leader: To you, O God, we offer thanks for the chance to taste and see that you are good, to breathe in your goodness that fills our nostrils like incense. In our silence, God, hear our prayers . . . (pause for one minute)

Congregation sings Verse 4, which brings in taste and smell.

Leader: To you, O God, we turn for grace, and for help; for we fail to see you, to hear you, to touch and see and taste your goodness as we should. Bless our sometimes broken bodies, our fading eyes and distressed ears. Remove the bitter tastes from our mouths and foul smells from our noses; let our touch become tender in the places it tends to be wounding or withdrawn. In our silence, God, hear our prayers . . . (pause for two minutes)

Congregation sings Verse 5, which petitions God for help.

Leader: O God who shaped and formed us, reshape and reform us still; that our sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell might all be enlivened by your presence, breathing life and light into us once again that we may know the wholeness of your shalom. Amen!

**Attachment: Activity 8****Benediction Litany**

(for use with the hymn “I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say” by Horatius Bonar)

1. I heard the voice of Jesus say, “Come unto me and rest;
lay down, O weary one, lay down thy head upon my breast.”
2. I came to Jesus as I was, so weary, worn, and sad;
And there I found a resting place, where Jesus made me glad.
3. I heard the voice of Jesus say, “Behold, I freely give
the living water; thirsty one, stoop down and drink, and live.”
4. I came to Jesus, and I drank of that life-giving stream;
my thirst was quenched, my soul revived, and now I am redeemed.
5. I heard the voice of Jesus say, “I am this lost world’s light;
look unto me, your morn shall rise, and all your day be bright.”
6. I looked to Jesus, and I found my guiding Star, my Sun;
and in that light of life I’ll walk till traveling days are done.

Leader: Go forth into this world in the name of the God who made us, who formed your body for rhythms of work and rest, who nurtures you with all you need.

Congregation sings stanzas 1 and 2.

Leader: Go forth into this world in the name of God our Savior, who invites you to feast at an abundant table and drink deeply of water that brings life.

Congregation sings stanzas 3 and 4.

Leader: Go forth into this world with a body enlivened by God’s Holy Spirit, who fills your being with light and guides your feet in paths of beauty and grace.

Congregation sings stanzas 5 and 6.

Leader: Go forth knowing that this God who shapes, saves, and sustains you goes with you, whispering in your ear and inviting you to draw near, this day and always. Amen!



Attachment: Activity 9

St. Patrick's Breastplate

Saint Patrick (attributed), translated by Cecil Frances Alexander (8th century)
Full text available at en.wikisource.org

Christ be with me (*let arms hang down at sides*),
Christ within me (*point fingers towards heart*),
Christ behind me (*reach arms behind self*),
Christ before me (*stretch arms in front of self*),
Christ beside me (*extend arms out to side*),
Christ to win me (*draw hands together in a fist at chest*),
Christ to comfort and restore me (*take each hand and rub opposite arm, as if to soothe self*),
Christ beneath me (*bend low and wave hands over feet*),
Christ above me (*reach high and wave hands over head*),
Christ in quiet (*place index finger over lips*),
Christ in danger (*hug self tightly*),
Christ in hearts of all that love me (*place both hands flat over heart*),
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger (*touch fingertips to lips*).

Honoring the Body



Exploration: Scripture

About this Setting

Throughout scripture we encounter people worshiping God not only with their thoughts or their hearts or their voices, but also with their whole body and beings. From the detailed instructions in Leviticus for how priests are to prepare their bodies before leading the people in worship, to King David dancing wildly before the Ark of the Covenant, to Mary bursting into a song of praise upon realizing what child was taking form in her body, to the worshipers of the vision of Revelation taking up musical instruments and physically encircling the throne of the Lamb—scriptural worship involves the whole body. Scripture also invites us to consider the body as worthy of praise and celebration and as a metaphor for the kind of unity that comes among people when the Spirit binds them together in common worship.

About this Exploration

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



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Genesis 2:1-25**Romans 12:1-8****Leader Preparation**

Read Genesis 2:4–8 slowly and prayerfully. After reading this beautiful account of creation, sit silently for a few minutes listening to the rise and fall of your breath. How might our human breath be a reminder that it was the Spirit of God that breathed life into our lungs and continues to move throughout us, animating our every move? After giving this question some thought, read Romans 12:1–2 while remaining attentive to your breath. As you breathe in, ask God to work transformation by God's Spirit in your body and soul; as you breathe out, consciously present your God-crafted body as a living sacrifice before God, wholly devoted to God's worship and praise.

Prayer: O God, was it with the gentle breath of a whisper or the forceful punch of a wind gust that you first filled my lungs and called me forth into life? Continue to breathe in me, Holy God, in whatever way is needful to transform me more and more into the likeness of you I was intended to be, linked to you with my every breath. Amen.

**Exploring & Engaging Activities****① Songs of our Creator (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: In both lofty and very tangible language, scripture and song alike praise the One who created our bodies. Singing songs of God as Creator—particularly less familiar ones that use innovative images—can invite worshipers to think in new ways about what it means to be created in the image of this God. Coordination between church musicians and other pastoral staff can meaningfully link these songs to various components of worship or possible scripture readings.

Supplies:

- hymnals
- "Hymns with Bodily Metaphors for God," Attachment: Activity 1

The hymns on Attachment: Activity 1 use bodily metaphors to speak of the nature of God as well as highlight the connection between the human body and the God who created all things. Use them at various points in your worship to help worshipers celebrate the connection of their bodies.

② The Whole World in God's Hands

Leader preparation: "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands" is a much loved and well-known American spiritual that celebrates God's creation of and care for the world and every human body in it. Singing this song with motions is a great way for worshipers of all ages to use both voices and bodies to celebrate God's creation and care for them. Words can be adapted to be gender inclusive and also to incorporate whatever concepts you would like to emphasize with your congregation. See suggestions in the activity description. Thinking of creative motions to go with each verse enables worshipers to embody the song. This would work great as an opening song or as something that could be taught at the children's sermon and then sung by the whole congregation.

Supplies:

- hymn: "God's Got the Whole World in God's Hands," http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xscZeFD2m_o

Invite the congregation to stand and sing together "God's Got the Whole World in God's Hands" as an opening worship song or as part of the children's time, if you have a particular moment geared toward children in your worship. Suggested lyrics and motions to this song (whose lyrics and tune are readily available and in the public domain) are as follows.

- Verse 1: God's got the whole world in God's hands . . . (hold hands out in front of you, as if holding a ball)
- Verse 2: God made the whole world with God's hands . . . (move hands in front of self as if shaping clay)
- Verse 3: God's got every newborn baby in God's hands . . . (cradle arms as if holding an infant)
- Verse 4: God's got you and me, sister . . . (pat a female nearby on the shoulder)
- Verse 5: God's got you and me, brother . . . (pat a male nearby on the shoulder)
- Final Verse: God's got everybody here . . . (join hands across the sanctuary)



For every verse, sing each line three times and end each time with refrain of “God’s got the whole world in God’s hands.”

Add more verses as you think of them, and devise fitting motions to celebrate God’s creation of different bodies and different parts of our bodies.

③ Progressive Creation

Leader preparation: One of the focal scriptures for this Exploration is the Genesis 2 creation account. Most worshipers have greater familiarity with the sequence and progression of the Genesis 1 account than Genesis 2. Genesis 2, however, provides powerful possibilities for how one can visually and physically enter into this creation account as well. Try reading the scripture while adding objects to the communion table or other “altar” at the front of the church; these additions should be items that represent God’s creative work. For dramatic effect, these items may be brought in and walked to the front of the church where the table is as each respective piece of the scripture is being read.

Supplies:

- Bible
- two clay figures, one of a man and one of a woman
- plants and small trees
- long piece of blue fabric, or a small portable fountain
- a few pieces of fruit that grow on trees
- figurines of birds and land animals
- tan tablecloth
- communion table or other altar-like table that can be placed at front of sanctuary

Begin with a bare communion table, perhaps covered with a tan tablecloth to represent the dryness and dustiness of the earth.

- Read Genesis 2:4–7: add a simple clay figure of a man to the communion table
- Read Genesis 2:8–9: add a variety of plants/small trees around the clay figure to represent the garden
- Read Genesis 2:10–14: add a representation of a river—either a long piece of blue fabric or perhaps a small fountain of flowing water
- Read Genesis 2:15–17: add some pieces of fruit to the table
- Read Genesis 2:18–20: add small figurines of birds and animals to the table
- Read Genesis 2:21–25: add a simple clay figure of a woman alongside the man on the table

Close with a prayer of thanksgiving or a hymn/worship song that celebrates the beauty of the world.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ Breath Prayer (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: “Breath prayer” is one of the simplest and, therefore, most challenging ways to pray. The word “breath” in Hebrew is the same word as “wind” or “Spirit,” a word rich in meaning. Breath prayer involves no words, only



a practice of observing and following one's breath as it leads toward the God who first breathed life into us. The prayer is meant to move in and out on the wind of your breathing, reminding the one praying of the Spirit of God that moved over the face of the earth at the dawn of creation and of the breath of God that filled the first human lungs. This form of prayer could be used as part of congregational worship, or even as a time of centering and awareness that begins and ends small group and committee meetings. It will require practice, and it is best to begin with a short period of time, perhaps three to five minutes of silent prayer, before building up to longer stretches. Remember, it is okay if your mind wanders in this practice; just gently bring your attention back to your breath.

Supplies:

- Bible
- something with which to keep time

Slowly and meditatively read Genesis 1:1–2 and Genesis 2:5–7. Then invite those gathered to shift their bodies into a comfortable position, sitting up straight with their eyes closed. As much as possible still all the noise in the room so participants can attend only to the sound of their breathing. Invite participants to silently express their longing to experience God in this time of prayer. Then they should let go of their expectations and simply breathe. Encourage them to breathe through their noses slowly, finding their breath's own natural rhythm and focusing their attention on either their inhaling as they receive God's presence, or their exhaling as they release whatever they are holding within them. After a few minutes, express gratitude to God for the breath of life and encourage worshipers to open their eyes.

⑤ Formed and Transformed

Leader preparation: This activity can provide a tactile way to connect the Genesis reading of human formation and Romans' call for transformation. Throughout scripture God is spoken of as a potter, forming God's people from clay and from dust; here, worshipers may step into that role as they work with clay to imagine God's hopes for their formation and their transformation. They may experience both the power of being the potter and the vulnerability of placing oneself totally as clay in the hands of the Maker.

Supplies:

- clay (enough for each person present to have a ping-pong or tennis-ball size lump); Play Dough can work as well
- Bible
- (optional) hymn: "Change My Heart, O God," by Eddie Espinosa, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cUjUvoynGMM>

Place clay in the hands of each person present in worship. Encourage them to work with the clay as they listen to the words of Genesis 2:4–7 and Genesis 2:21–21, the account of God's formation of man and woman. Invite them to imagine what God might have been thinking as God shaped the first human beings and how it would feel to be the lump of clay being formed into something out of nothing. Allow this initial working of the clay to continue for three to four minutes. Then read Romans 12:1–2 and ask, "How is God calling you to present your entire embodied self to be transformed?" Encourage worshipers to meditatively rework the clay into a symbol of the transformation that they long for. It may be effective to conclude this time by singing a song such as "Change My Heart, O God."



⑥ Eyewitnesses to Transformation

Leader preparation: In the Romans focus passage, Paul speaks of our need for “transformation,” a word that often has an ambiguous definition. What would it look like to present one’s whole body as a living sacrifice to be transformed and renewed? Perhaps nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the life cycle of the transformation of a butterfly. Consider this description from www.monarch-butterfly.com:

[Monarch butterfly] eggs are laid on milkweed plants. They hatch into baby caterpillars, also called the larvae. It takes about four days for the eggs to hatch. Then the baby caterpillar doesn’t do much more than eat the milkweed in order to grow. After about two weeks, the caterpillar will be fully grown and will find a place to attach itself so that it can start the process of metamorphosis. It will attach itself to a stem or a leaf using silk and transform into a chrysalis. Although, from the outside, the ten days of the chrysalis phase seems to be a time when nothing is happening, it is really a time of rapid change. Within the chrysalis the old body parts of the caterpillar are undergoing a remarkable transformation, called metamorphosis, to become the beautiful parts that make up the butterfly that will emerge. The monarch butterfly will emerge from the pupa and fly away.

By placing butterfly larvae at the front of your worship space for the three to four weeks of this incredible cycle of transformation, the visual image can challenge worshipers to reflect on their own need for transformation and their willingness to submit their entire selves to it. This would be a great project or worship visual for the Eastertide season that celebrates Christ’s resurrection.

Supplies:

- a complete butterfly kit with needed cage, larvae, and feeding/care supplies can be easily and rather inexpensively ordered from a website such as <http://www.nature-gifts.com/live-butterfly-kits.html> or <http://educationalscience.com/monarchkits.htm>
- (optional) video: “Complete Life Cycle of the Monarch Butterfly,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7AUeM8MbaIk&feature=related>

Spend three or four weeks watching a caterpillar transform into a butterfly right in the midst of your worship space. You may wish to display the printed words of Romans 12:1–2 by the cage: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed . . .” When the butterfly/butterflies emerge(s), end the time of worship by going outside and releasing the butterfly into the sky, offering a prayer that we might continue to offer our bodies to God for transformation. (Remember, however, that the butterfly needs some time for the wings to dry and strengthen before release.)

Sending & Serving Activities



⑦ Offering Our Offering (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Most congregations have worshipers remain seated during the taking up of the offering. How might this act of worship feel different if we “presented” our offerings before God as Paul encouraged the Romans to



present their bodies? Take a Sunday to invite worshipers to physically bring their offerings forward rather than just waiting passively for the plate to be brought to them. In addition, provide pieces of paper in bulletins or chairs on which the worshipers may write a nonmonetary gift they wish to offer to God and to the community—a gift like those mentioned by Paul at the end of the Romans passage. In addition to encouraging worshipers to think of offerings that go beyond money, this way even those who are not contributing financially on this day will have something to bring forward.

Supplies:

- slips of paper and writing utensils for all gathered
- baskets in which to collect offering at front of sanctuary
- Bible
- hymn: “Take My Life and Let it Be,” by Frances R. Havergal (tune: Hendon), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXy2MmMLjGQ&feature=related>; lyrics, <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/t/m/tmlalib.htm>

Begin by reading Romans 12:1–8. Share with worshipers that today they will be given the opportunity, as Paul pleaded, to present themselves and their offerings to God in a slightly different way. Distribute paper and writing utensils, if these are not already available, and encourage worshipers to write one offering other than money that they wish to bring to God, a gift they have to share or a way they wish to serve. Then invite all participants to bring forward these offerings together with their tithes and financial offerings physically and place them in the basket at the front of the sanctuary.

Sing “Take My Life and Let It Be” during this time of offering, reminding all gathered of the need to offer our entire selves to God—silver, gold, hands, feet, and whole lives all mingled together.

❸ Mirror Images

Leader preparation: The very first chapter of scripture tells us about the creation of humanity in the image of God. This is the foundation for our scriptural story: this intimate connection to the Creator in body and in spirit. Take the opportunity to remind your congregation of this as they go forth into a world that more often looks like a broken reflection of God’s desires than it does any sort of mirror image.

Supplies:

- a variety of mirrors (both square and full-length) positioned near the exits to your worship space
- Genesis 1:27 printed and hung above each mirror: “So God created mankind in God’s own image; in the image of God, God created them; male and female, God created them.”

As worshipers are leaving, have a multitude of mirrors positioned by the exits where they cannot be avoided by those departing. Encourage worshipers to take a moment to stop on their way out, look into the mirror, and read the words printed above it, thinking about their implications for the week ahead. What does it mean that we are created in the image of God, that we have God’s likeness and breath dwelling within us—and within each person around us?

❹ One with Each Other; One with God

Leader preparation: As we disperse into the world, our bodies do not go forth alone; we go forth remaining connected to one another and to the God who created



us all in God's image. Conclude worship time by singing a song that connects worshipers to the passages from Genesis and Romans and to the idea that their bodies exist in continued community with other bodies as well as their Creator, whose image they go forth to bear into the world.

Supplies:

- hymn: "Imago Dei," by Jill Kirsten Warner, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2duLAakNyuw>
- (optional) bongo drums or other simple rhythm instruments
- (optional) hymn: "The Body Is One," by Andrew Donaldson, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0jphqeQUIM>

If you focused this day on an account of creation, conclude your worship time by singing together "Imago Dei (Image of God)." This song takes on a particularly joyful feel when accompanied by bongo drums or other simple rhythm instruments. If you wish to focus more on the unity of all created bodies into Christ's one body, you may wish to also sing "The Body Is One." This song accompanies the Romans reading suggested for this Exploration quite nicely. Either of these songs could also follow well after the celebration of communion.

Following the Church Year

There has been a movement in some liturgical traditions in recent years to designate a portion of Ordinary Time (or the Season after Pentecost) as the "Season of Creation" or "Creationtime." This might be an idea worth exploring with your congregation as we consider God as the Maker, Creator, and Sustainer of our bodies. The season, observed from September 1 ("Creation Day") to the October 4 (Feast day of St. Francis of Assisi) or the Sunday after October 4, may be a good time to focus on the Creator, who has made us into God's own image and likeness. Such a season addresses a component of Trinitarian life often neglected by the lectionary.

As the useful resource seasonofcreation.com points out, "In the seasons of Advent, Epiphany, Lent, and Easter we celebrate the life of Christ. In the season of Pentecost we celebrate the Holy Spirit. Now, in the season of Creation, we have an opportunity to celebrate God, the Creator." In Year A, the lections focus on the work of the Spirit in creation and include Genesis 2 as the reading for the first Sunday. In Year B, the lections focus on the Word in creation. In Year C, the focus is on Wisdom in creation. A wealth of resources and further insight into this new season can be found at seasonofcreation.com, and alternate lections and insights for this season are also available at the ecumenical preaching and worship planning website www.textweek.com.



Attachment: Activity 1

Hymns with Bodily Metaphors for God

Hymn title	Words, tune	How used in service	Possible scripture connections
"Creating God, Your Fingers Trace"	Jeffrey Rowthorn, HANCOCK L.M., http://www.hymnary.org/text/creating_god?tab=about	Opening hymn or response to scripture	Psalm 148, Romans 12:1-8 (one body), 1 Corinthians 13:12 and Revelation 22:4 (seeing God face to face)
"The Weaver's Shuttle Swiftly Flies"	James Gertmenian, ST. MATTHEW C.M.D., http://books.google.com/books?id=mGVVshlytNMC&pg=PA582&lpg=PA582&dq=%22The+Weaver%27s+Shuttle+Swiftly+Flies%22&source=bl&ots=vS4T9kSnyb&sig=bJST7K7Ycc8UxAuwpMt9RBU5ixg&hl=en&ei=i—QTseYFpHAtgfQgeWfDA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=3&ved=0CDMQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=%22The%20Weaver's%20Shuttle%20Swiftly%20Flies%22&f=false	Hymn of response or going forth	Psalm 139 (being woven/knit together in mother's womb), Ephesians 2:10 (humanity as God's workmanship, crafted by God)
"Mothering God, You Gave Me Birth"	Julian of Norwich, adapted by Jean Janzen, ANDREW 8.8.8.8. http://rockhay.tripod.com/worship/music/motheringgod.htm	Hymn of thanksgiving or praise; could also be used as a communion hymn reflecting on body of Christ	Ecclesiastes 11:5, Isaiah 46:3-4, Isaiah 49:14-15, Luke 22:15-20
"O God, As with a Potter's Hand"	Herman G. Stuempfle, Jr., WINSTON-SALEM C.M.D., http://www.northminster-indy.org/mediafiles/bulletin-for-sep-05-2010.pdf	Response to scripture (ties closely to Genesis 2 creation text)	Genesis 2:4-7, Isaiah 29:16, Isaiah 64:8, Jeremiah 18:1-6
"O God, We Bear the Imprint of Your Face"	Shirley Erena Murray, http://www.hymnary.org/text/o_god_we_bear_the_imprint_of_your_face	Gathering hymn, or with creation text that speaks of humanity in God's image (Genesis 1:27-31) or calls humanity to unity even in diversity(Romans 12:1-8)	Genesis 1:26-31, Romans 12:1-8

Honoring the Body



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Setting

Think of all the ways we use our bodies to express our intentions to follow Christ—discipleship—in worship. We allow our bodies to be sprinkled or covered in water as an expression of our desire to be part of Christ's family of disciples. We gather at a holy table with other disciples to eat the meal that Jesus shared with those who followed him first in discipleship. In some communities a physical walk to the front of the church can be the way one expresses a desire to begin the discipleship journey at a certain church—or perhaps for the very first time. How can worship engage our bodies in the act of discipleship and prepare our bodies to continue worshiping as we live out their discipleship journey in the world? This Exploration encourages worshipers to consider how their bodies—no matter their age, health, or life stage—are crucial components of their discipleship as they follow God not only with soul, but also with mind, heart, and strength, indeed, with one's entire embodied self.

About this Exploration

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



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Psalm 71
Mark 5:21-43

Leader Preparation

Think back to your first conscious decision to follow Christ—to be a disciple. What is your earliest bodily memory of this? How did you express your desire to begin the discipleship journey not only internally in a hidden way, but also externally in a physical or visible way? Did you undertake any particular actions in worship? Did you begin to use and treat your body in different ways? Today how do you express your discipleship through the use and treatment of your body?

Prayer: *O God, again I give to you not only my heart, but also my hands and feet; I give you also my knees and thighs and arms and ears and lips and shoulders and elbows. Help every way I honor each part of this body you have given me to express my worship of you and my commitment to follow you wherever you may lead. In the name of Christ, who came among us in embodied form and honored our bodies by calling us to follow him, we pray. Amen.*

Exploring & Engaging Activities



① Invocation (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Use the focus scriptures for this Exploration to invite God's presence to be among your bodies and among you as a Body in this time of worship. Depending on which focus scripture you might use that day in worship, choose the invocation that connects with the passage your congregation will encounter.

Supplies: None

Use one of the following invocations as a prayer to enter into your time of worship:

From Psalm 71:

Be present to us, O God. Be our refuge, our fortress, the one on whom we can lean in each season of our lives. Whether we come to you today in the energy of youth or the weariness of age, fill us with your Spirit that we may praise you yet more and more with our mouths and our lives. You who have known us from our mothers' wombs, make yourself known here, that we may speak of your power and presence to all generations to come. Revive us again, O Christ; revive us even this day. Amen.

From Mark 5:

We call to you in our fear, God. Come quickly to us that we may live. We reach out to you in our brokenness; let us touch you that we may know we are made well. We cry to you in our grief; take us by the hand that we may be raised up once again. Be present, O Christ, that in death and in life we may know this day that we belong utterly to you. Amen.

② Touching the Robe

Leader preparation: The woman who meets Jesus, as recorded in Mark 5:24–34, reaches out to him from her deepest and most secret shame and woundedness, believing fully that he has the power to heal her in ways she cannot heal herself. What similar desperate needs do members of your congregation carry with them into Christ's presence in worship? How might we help them know Jesus' touch? By inviting worshipers to place themselves in this story and have the tactile experience of touching a garment, they may be invited to bring the needs of their bodies and souls into Christ's restorative presence.

Place a robe or garment like one that could have been worn in Jesus' day on the communion table or other central location in your congregation to be used as part of this prayerful invitation to reflection and healing.

Supplies:

- a robe or similar garment that could have been worn in Jesus' day
- Bible
- (optional) fabric-cutting scissors

Read aloud Mark 5:24–34 slowly and prayerfully. Then invite worshipers to close their eyes and imagine themselves in the story. Say something like this: "Imagine that you are among the crowds pressing in on Jesus, and you are desperate to be near him. Why? What great need do you need Jesus to heal for yourself or someone you know? What particular pain is in your life that you cannot take care of on your own? Imagine reaching your hand toward Jesus' robe. For what are you praying? For what do you hope?"



After a time of silent reflection, invite any who so desire to come forward and touch the hem of the robe as a tangible act of discipleship in seeking Christ's presence amidst our pain. They may come to touch the robe to silently pray for healing and help for themselves or for someone else in need in their lives. If the robe is one you do not need back after the worship experience, you may even invite participants to snip off a piece of the robe's hem to carry with them as a reminder of God's healing presence in their midst.



③ Songs of Healing

Leader preparation: In a service where a passage like Mark 5:21–43 or a similar story of a disciple's pursuit of healing for themselves or someone else is read, choose one—or several—songs of healing as part of worship. There is a list provided with this activity, but there may be others that fit your worship community better. Coordinate between pastoral staff and music leaders to discern the songs that fit your congregation's needs most fully. Some of these songs may also work well with Activity 2 (Touching the Robe) as a time of musical reflection after the invitation to pray.

Supplies:

- hymns you select
- "Hymn Suggestions," Attachment: Activity 3

Choose from among the hymns/songs on "Hymn Suggestions," Attachment: Activity 3, to use in a congregational setting to reflect on the search for healing for human bodies, or let these songs remind you of other ones in your tradition that you might use!

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ Laying on of Hands (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Since the days of the early church, the laying on of hands has been practiced as a way to set people apart for a particular act of discipleship. This embodied act is a visible and tangible sign of the sharing of the Holy Spirit among believers; it is also a sign of one believer blessing another believer for whatever lies ahead on his or her spiritual journey. Jesus placed his hands on people to bless them or heal them (see Mark 8:23, Luke 4:40). In Mark 5:23, Jairus begged Jesus to come lay his hands on his daughter that she might be made well. There was power in Jesus' touch, and there is power in the touch we offer one another, as evidenced by the apostles' practice of laying hands on the sick and those called to leadership (see Acts 6:6, Acts 9:17, Acts 13:1–5, 2 Timothy 1:6). It is also seen in our continued practice of laying hands on those being ordained to ministry or commissioned for a task. How might the laying on of hands be practiced as part of your congregation's worship as a way to strengthen disciples with the reminder of God's Spirit?

Supplies:

- Bible

After reading at least one or two of the verses mentioned above and sharing a bit of the background of the practice of laying on of hands, invite members of your congregation to participate in this practice. There are a few ways you could do this. If you have a more intimate congregation that regularly shares prayer requests,



make your corporate prayer time a time when people who so desire can share a concern in their lives and be surrounded by others who will place their hands on their heads and shoulders and offer prayers for them. If you have a larger congregation, or one where people may not be comfortable speaking out in this way, try a congregational laying on of hands by encouraging everyone to reach out to their sides and place their right hand on the shoulder of person to their right, and their left hand on the shoulder of the person to their left, and to offer silent prayers for God's Spirit to be at work in the life of each of these people.



5 Responsive Prayer and Song

Leader Preparation: The congregation is one of the few remaining places of truly intergenerational gathering in our society—a place where old and young together seek the guidance of God. This prayer, woven together with the hymn “I Was There to Hear Your Burning Cry,” provides an opportunity for you to celebrate the various points on the discipleship journey at which your worshipers find themselves—as well as God’s presence in all of those places. Even if your congregation lacks some of these demographics, you may still pray for disciples of all ages and stages who are part of the church universal.

Supplies:

- “Responsive Prayer for the Discipleship Journey,” Attachment: Activity 5
- hymn: “I Was There to Hear Your Burning Cry,” by John Ylvisaker (tune: Waterlife), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYnmtQI50ic>

Use the provided prayer litany with the hymn “I Was There to Hear Your Burning Cry.” You may intersperse verses of the hymn between prayer stanzas, as suggested in the attachment, or you may pray the complete prayer and then sing the complete song at the end. You may wish to ask a congregant from each age group to read one of the “leader” pieces to have a variety of voices lifting up the prayer.



6 Balancing Act

Leader preparation: In this reflection through art and music, your congregation will be encouraged to consider the various challenges that impact our bodies and spirits as we attempt the balancing act of following Christ in radical discipleship. Invite worshipers into reflection using the compelling “Man in a Wheelchair on a Tightrope,” an art print that can lead them to consider the challenges they and their neighbors face.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Man in a Wheelchair on a Tightrope,” http://www.art.com/products/p13951106-sa-i2746744/man-in-a-wheelchair-on-a-tightrope.htm?_sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=c5dd66dac7d541809fb8256c7daa3064&searchstring=wheelchair+and+tightrope
- musical arrangement of Psalm 71, such as http://metricalpsalms.homestead.com/psalm71_1_14.html
- Bible

Encourage worshipers to contemplate the artwork “Man in a Wheelchair on a Tightrope.” Invite reflection around the following questions:

- How would you describe this man’s body language?
- What thoughts do you imagine are going through the man’s head at this moment?



- I wonder how this man ended up on this platform?
- What might have inspired the artist to paint this picture?
- I wonder how our own journeys of following Christ could relate to this picture.

After time for silent meditation on these questions, if your worship space and time permit, encourage people to share brief reflections with three or four people around them. Conclude this time of sharing by singing together a musical version of Psalm 71 (suggestions for where to find one are offered in Supplies). If the musical version is unavailable, you can read the psalm in unison from <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2071&version=MSG>.

Sending & Serving Activities



⑦ Songs of Physical Discipleship (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Jesus' call to the disciples to follow him required them to leave behind their old ways and move into a new life, one that would be spent wandering from village to village and going where they were sent. Singing some of the suggested songs that highlight the physicality of discipleship may remind your congregation that as their bodies move out of worship into a new space—the world where they are at work, at rest, and at play—Jesus goes with them on the journey of discipleship.

Supplies:

- hymnals (or copies of the hymns)

Spend several weeks of worship singing the following songs (or other songs that reference the physicality of discipleship) as a closing songs that highlight the movement of our bodies into the world for service.

"I'm Pressing on the Upward Way"

<http://www.hymnal.net/hymn.php/h/396>

"Take My Life, God, Let It Be"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXy2MmMLjGQ&feature=related>

"Precious Lord, Take My Hand"

<http://hymntime.com/tch/htm/p/l/t/pltmhand.htm>

"Awake, My Soul, Stretch Every Nerve"

http://www.hymnary.org/text/awake_my_soul_stretch_every_nerve

"Guide My Feet"

<http://www.hymnsite.com/fws/hymn.cgi?2208>

"Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love"

<http://www.oremus.org/hymnal/j/j015.html>

"If You Say Go"

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRQuZ_oX-8



⑧ Healing Prayer Points

Leader preparation: Prayer does not have to be only an act of our minds and lips; as we pray for our bodies, we can also pray *with* our bodies. The practice of "Pointed Prayer" combines prayer with ancient Eastern practices of acupressure, bringing relief to the body even as it deepens the connectedness of your body to your prayer. Pointed prayer has been used not just for physical maladies, but also to pray for healing from emotional turmoil. You may wish to read and learn more



about the practice of acupressure by consulting a website such as <http://www.acupressure.com/> or <http://pointfinder.org/>.

Supplies:

- “Acupressure Points for Prayer,” Attachment: Activity 8

Invite worshipers to read Attachment: Activity 8 and think about where they, like the hemorrhaging woman in Mark 5, are in need of healing this day. Then ask them to use a thumb or a finger to apply pressure to that point by either rubbing it in small circles or applying gentle, steady pressure. Encourage them to apply pressure for one minute while focusing their attention on God and opening themselves to God’s divine healing presence. After a minute, invite worshipers to continue prayer for the same healing or to choose a new pressure point and offer prayers for healing while massaging that location, refocusing prayers on that situation.

⑨ Enter My Heart (and Body!)

Leader preparation: Songs often lend themselves to new lyrics that can increase their meaning and power in shaping us as disciples. Use the new praise song by James F. D. Martin, “Enter My Heart,” and encourage worshipers to add different parts of their body to the song, inviting God’s Spirit to animate our whole bodies for faithful discipleship.

Supplies:

- hymn: “Enter My Heart,” by James F.D. Martin, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/43314210?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=25181&store_id=1401

Sing the first verse of “Enter My Heart” as printed. Then sing the first verse several times while substituting the following words (or other words you find fitting) for the word “heart”: hands, eyes, feet, arms, mouth. Conclude by singing verses 2 and 3 as printed.

Following the Church Year

Psalm 71 appears a whopping five times in the Revised Common Lectionary: as the selected Psalm for Holy Week Tuesday in Years A, B, and C, as well as for Epiphany 4 and Proper 16/Ordinary 21 in Year C. In the Ordinary Time and Epiphany appearances, however, only the first six verses are assigned, neglecting some of the beautiful language of God’s presence with us throughout the bodily struggles of the entire life span. On the Sundays when this psalm appears, consider using the entire 24 verses. Also of interest is that both Epiphany and Ordinary Time pair this text with the story of Jeremiah’s call and God’s declaration that God knew Jeremiah from the womb (Jeremiah 1:4–10)—another beautiful passage from which to think about God’s call to discipleship that reaches out to us through all life stages, even before we are aware of embodied life itself.

The Mark reading appears in Year B, where Mark is the focus gospel, on Proper 8/Ordinary 13. An interesting series of sermons could be crafted on Jesus’ interaction with and call to human bodies using this lection and the Gospel lection for the following week (Mark 6:1–13), which speaks of how to adorn the



body and what to carry when sent out on a journey of discipleship. The story later in Mark 6 of Jesus trying to care for the disciples' need for rest while also caring for the people's spiritual and physical hunger, found in the lectionary in ensuing weeks, also could fit well in such a series.

Epiphany is the season when we read the stories of Jesus beginning his mission of teaching and healing and calling out the disciples to come and follow. This could be a particularly poignant season to use some of these activities as worshipers begin a new year of committing themselves body and soul to following Christ, learning to see again the manifestations of God in the ordinary and extraordinary around them.

Attachment: Activity 3

Hymn Suggestions

Song title	Words, tune, where found	Where might fit in service order	Themes	Scripture connections
"O Christ, the Healer, We Have Come"	Fred Pratt Green, TALLIS' CANON L.M., http://www.hymnary.org/text/o_christ_the_healer_we_have_come?tab=about	As an opening hymn Around time of intercessory prayer	Christ as healer Things physical and emotional that threaten wholeness	Matthew 8:5-13 Mark 5:24-34 Luke 9:37-43
"We Have the Strength to Lift and Bear"	Thomas Troeger, TALLIS' THIRD TUNE C.M.D., http://www.hymnary.org/text/we_have_the_strength_to_lift_and_bear?tab=about	Around time of intercessory prayer At end of service in going forth	We participate in Christ's work of healing. In celebration of those who care for others, particularly those in physical distress.	Matthew 9:2-8 Mark 2:1-12 Luke 5:18-26
"We Yearn, O Christ, for Wholeness"	Dosia Carlson, PASSION CHORALE 7.6.7.6.D., http://www.missionstclare.com/music/epiphany/we_yearn/yearn.html	Around prayers of petition or intercession	Christ's healing presence Our need for one another on the journey of healing	Matthew 9:9-13 Luke 17:11-19 John 5:1-11 Acts 3:1-10
"Here, Savior, in This Quiet Place"	Fred Pratt Green, CHATHAM C.M., http://www.hymnary.org/text/o_savior_in_this_quiet_place	Around prayers of petition or intercession	Confidence in Christ's healing power	Mark 5:21-43 Mark 9:14-29 James 5:13-16
"For the Healing of the Nations"	Fred Kaan, WESTMINSTER ABBEY 8.7.8.7.8.7, http://www.hymnary.org/text/for_the_healing_of_the_nations?tab=about	Offertory (claiming the gifts we bring as working for wholeness and healing)	Healing across the world Our partnership with God in works of healing	John 10:1-10 Revelation 22:1-2

Attachment: Activity 5

Responsive Prayer for the Discipleship Journey

(for use with “I Was There to Hear Your Borning Cry”)

Leader: Gracious Creator who knit us together in the womb, travel each moment of this journey with us. Christ, you know what it is to be born fragile and vulnerable; protect those new to our world as they learn speech and movement and their first ideas of who you are. Be with children who, as you did as a boy in the Temple, are growing in their curiosity about the world and their curiosity about what it means to know and follow you. Be with our teenagers as they begin to claim their independence, that even as they wander and wonder they may always know you as the one on whom they may depend. For all these young disciples—

People: **Lord, hear our prayers.**

Congregation sings verse 1 of “I Was There to Hear Your Borning Cry.”

Leader: Loving Christ, we pray for new disciples among us, those just embarking on the pilgrimage of following you. We pray, likewise, for those yearning to see your face, but finding you hard to uncover. Be with those who work through changing relationships—those married, those brokenhearted and lonely, those who seek companionship among friends, family, and community, just as you knit a community of disciples around yourself so you would not travel this earth alone. For all these disciples—

People: **Lord, hear our prayers.**

Congregation sings verse 2 of “I Was There to Hear Your Borning Cry.”

Leader: Guiding Spirit, who hovers in and around us, rest upon those who labor long hours and confront endless to-do lists, struggling to serve you in relentless lives of responsibility. Rest upon those facing the rigors of aging and changing health. Even as our minds and bodies fail us, remind us you are near and working your purposes in us. For disciples whose days grow short, and disciples left behind whose grief is deep—

People: **Lord, hear our prayers.**

Congregation sings verse 3 of “I Was There to Hear Your Borning Cry.”

Leader: In all our days and all our stages, remind us of your presence O God—challenging, comforting, encouraging, exhorting, loving and listening to our cries, this day and always. Amen.

Congregation sings verse 4 of “I Was There to Hear Your Borning Cry.”

Attachment: Activity 8

Acupressure Points for Prayer

Which pressure point you massage during your prayer time should be linked to where you need healing. Choose a pressure point of your body based on your particular emotional or physical needs at this time. Though the list below is brief, there are hundreds of pressure points.

Some Facial Pressure Points:

- Temples (outside of each eye): Sadness, sleeplessness, uncontrollable anger
- Under the eye: Stomach, eye strain, headaches, anxiety
- Inside corners of eyebrows (either side of top of nose): Sinus inflammation, sneezing, anger, bitterness
- Upper lip: Stomach, hunger control, fever, sinus pain or congestion, stress, worry, irritability
- Lower lip: Teeth and gum pain, mania, shame
- Cheekbone underneath nostril: Large intestine, abdominal pain, sore throat, runny nose
- Jawbone below ear: Lower abdomen pain, sore throat, hearing problems, depression

Some Hand Pressure Points:

- Underside of thumb: Lungs, respiratory issues, sore throat, cold, cough, intolerance
- Top side of index finger, just under fingernail: Abdominal pain, sore throat, bowel problems, guilt
- Top side of middle finger, just under fingernail: Circulation, angina, irritability, regret, jealousy

Pinky finger, rubbing on both sides of fingernail: Heart, cardiological issues, resentment

Honoring the Body



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Setting

Through the centuries the Christian tradition regarding the body's engagement in worship is as varied as human worship. As early as the writing of the New Testament letters, there was concern about the appearance of one's body when one gathers for worship—though this concern for the body has often become a means of oppression, particularly for women (see 1 Timothy 2:8–10 for an interesting example). Through the years, Christians have developed worship that appeals to the senses of the body, from icons and beautiful worship spaces that stimulate the eyes, to music to fill the ears, to the taste of bread and wine, the smell of incense, and the touches of blessing, baptism, and anointing. How can we reclaim Christian tradition's incorporation of the body into worship without falling into the many ways it has tried to cover or shame the body as part of its practice? What is the place of the body in Christian worship today?

About this Exploration

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

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

Leader Preparation

What is your own tradition regarding the body? What were you taught at home about your body, its beauty and abilities—or lack thereof? At school? In faith communities? What teachings about your body have you held onto as you have grown older? What early teachings have you had to overcome? Read Song of Solomon 4:1-7 and 5:10-16 as hymns of praise to the magnificence of the human body, including yours. How can you hear these words of blessing from deep in our religious past as words of blessing to you today?

Prayer: *O God, so many voices in history and culture feed us so many messages about our bodies. Is my flesh good or evil? Should I dance or be still? Am I beautiful or broken? O God, quiet my questions with your words of truth—that in me, you have done a beautiful thing, and that beauty shall not be taken away from me. Thanks be to God! Amen.*

Exploring & Engaging Activities



① What to Wear (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This would be a great activity to undertake with your worship committee or other group of mixed laity and clergy as you reflect on your congregation's worship practices. This could be an interesting conversation to open a gathering by stimulating thought about both your congregation's tradition for adornment of the body and what this says about your theology and worship practices.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

As you gather, pose these questions: If you had to describe what the average person in your congregation wears to worship, what would you say? What does the “average” adult male wear? What about the “average” adult female? What about the “average” teenager, or the “average” child? Give people time to discuss and describe; then you may wish to address some of the following follow-up questions:

- In what ways has what people wear to church changed over the course of your church’s history?
- Was it hard to identify an “average” person in your congregation?
- How diverse is your congregation in terms of what they wear to worship? What variety is present?
- If you had to describe what we believe about God and about worship based solely upon our external bodily adornment when we gather to worship, what would you say?
- How does the way we adorn our bodies reflect or not reflect our theology?

② Picturing Jesus

Leader preparation: This activity could work in a worship or small group meeting setting. Although we have no photographs of Jesus, artists through the centuries have given a great deal of ink, canvas, marble, and clay to depicting Jesus in physical form. How have our pictures of Jesus changed? Invite your congregation to reflect on works of art that convey ideas of Jesus’ physical appearance and honor Jesus’ body in different ways. Do an Internet search for cultural images of Jesus, such as Asian, African, Indian, Russian, Spanish, and so forth. Also do a search for ancient and contemporary images.

Supplies:

- variety of paintings and sculptures of Jesus from artists over the course of Christian history; a great gallery of suggested works to consider can be found at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Depiction_of_Jesus
- computer with Internet access and projection capability Bible

Create a slide show of artistic renderings of Jesus. Arrange them from most ancient to most recent, and include images of Jesus from a variety of cultures. Move slowly through the pictures. Ask worshipers for observations about how our physical depictions of Jesus’ body have changed, and if anything seems to remain consistent or prominent in the way we portray Jesus throughout history. Ask which pictures of Jesus most fit the way worshipers tend to picture Jesus when they imagine him. For a biblical comparison for how the Messiah is



pictured, read Isaiah 53:2–3 and Revelation 1:12–16. Which of these descriptions is closer to more of the images you see?



③ Bodies Called to Worship

Leader Preparation: In the book of Acts—perhaps our earliest record of Christian tradition—bodies are honored. Also, persons seek to honor Christ in a variety of powerful ways through the use of their bodies. Through speaking, healing, trades, baptism, sacrifice, and service, Christianity was from its beginning a faith that honored the contributions of the whole person, from head to toe. Beginning your worship service with reminders of this great tradition in which we gather can be a wonderful way to engage the faithful use of our bodies in new ways.

Supplies:

- “An Embodied People,” Attachment: Activity 3

Use the provided Call to Worship litany “An Embodied People” for your opening time. Consider using this on a day when you focus on a story from early Christianity that honors the body, whether the text is from the Gospels, Acts, or the Epistles. You may have one person as the leader, or have each leader part be voiced by someone different.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ One Scene, Three Lenses (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Luke 7:36–50 gives us insight into the actions of various characters involved in this intense scene, but what might have been going on within each of the character as this most unorthodox event was unfolding? Select three people—two men, one woman—who can bring out of this story the viewpoints of the Pharisee, the Woman, and Jesus using the script on Attachment: Activity 4. How did their ideas vary as to what was appropriate or not appropriate for bodily interaction in this social setting?

Supplies:

- “Luke 7:36–50: One Scene, Three Lenses,” Attachment: Activity 4

Begin by reading Luke 7:36–50. After a period of silence, invite the person portraying Simon the Pharisee to stand and read Simon’s viewpoint as if the person were Simon. Allow at least a minute of silent reflection before inviting the person portraying the Woman to stand and read the story through her lens. After another minute of silent reflection, ask the third reader to share a possible view of the story from Jesus’ perspective. Allow an additional minute of silent reflection, then offer a prayer in response to Jesus’ words, giving thanks for a God who honors our bodies just as they are and who also honors what lies within in our souls.



⑤ Beloved and Beautiful

Leader preparation: The Song of Solomon is such an exquisitely—and occasionally *explicitly*—crafted song of delight in the human body. Because of that it almost did not make the canon of scripture. What, after all, does speaking of the human body have to do with God? Well . . . *everything*, if we truly believe we are a good and unconditionally loved creation and that we love one another as embodied creatures. The Song of Solomon is a work that instills these



reminders of our intrinsic beauty and, hence, one that belongs more centrally in our understanding of God and of our selves. After reading the focus passages from Song of Solomon, choose a male and a female voice from your congregation to share this choral reading that reflects on how this passage highlights God's intricate love for every inch of every one of us. It could be used in conjunction with the offering time—a reminder of how our bodies are a gift from God—or perhaps even as a sending forth with blessing around the benediction, blessing bodies for their life in the world.

Supplies:

- Bible
- "Choral Reading," Attachment: Activity 5

Read aloud Song of Solomon 4:1–7 and 5:8–13. Though 4:1–7 is spoken by a male and 5:8–13 by a female, it may actually be more interesting and effective to have a female read 4:1–7 and a male read 5:8–13, so that each gender can hear these words about their own beauty in their own gender's voice. Then have a male and a female reader share the reading on Attachment: Activity 5 that can help people make connections between the poetry of Song of Solomon and God's deep and unflagging love for each human body and soul.



⑥ The Labyrinth

Leader preparation: Since the early centuries of Christianity, Christians have chosen to pray by walking a labyrinth, a practice that dates back to early Greek culture. As the body physically winds towards the labyrinth's center, it is believed that one's spirit is brought more and more into unity with the Divine. If there is a labyrinth near your church (there is a World Wide Labyrinth Locator online that can help you find one: <http://labyrinthlocator.com>), plan a trip there that can allow any who desire to physically walk a labyrinth. In a worship setting, however, a small labyrinth that one may trace using the tip of one's finger can be a wonderful substitute that provides a hint of what a full-sized labyrinth walking experience would be like.

Supplies:

- "Prayer Using a Labyrinth," Attachment: Activity 6

After offering a brief introduction to the labyrinth, using the information on Attachment: Activity 6, offer at least five to eight minutes for participants to use the labyrinth as a tool for prayer, each following its path slowly with a finger on the copy provided. You may wish to follow up with a few simple reflection questions after everyone has had a chance to trace the labyrinth's twists and turns:

- Why do you think the labyrinth has endured in Christian practice for so many centuries as a meaningful form of prayer?
- In which movement did you feel God's presence most fully—moving inward? Pausing at the center? Moving outward?
- How is the labyrinth similar to or different from other forms of prayer that are meaningful to you?
- How could the labyrinth be a symbol for the spiritual journey?



Sending & Serving Activities



7 Praying with the Saints (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Since early Christianity both famous and everyday Christians have written prayers that call upon God's presence with the whole body and acknowledge the Spirit's work in our physical beings. Praying a prayer by a Christian from 2000 years ago, of a community from 500 years ago, or of an anonymous brother or sister living in another country can remind us of the ways in which our bodies are all connected to one another and to their Maker.

Supplies:

- "Prayers Honoring the Body from Saints Old and New," Attachment: Activity 7

Incorporate one or several of the suggested prayers into your worship time as ways to connect your congregation with prayerful Christian language about the body from many generations and contexts. You may wish to use one prayer a week over a long period of time. You might also work all of the prayers into a single focused service. These prayers could be encountered in times of silent reflection, Offertory Sentences, Prayers of the People, or Benedictions.



8 Reflections on "Margot Embracing Her Mother"

Leader preparation: Song of Solomon focuses on the adoration of the body in human relationships. But how are our bodies important in relationships beyond romantic or sexual ones? How do we honor our bodies in platonic relationships, friendships, or family relationships? Mary Cassatt's painting "Margot Embracing Her Mother" can invite reflection on how we take joy in our bodies in some of these other relationships, such as that between parent and child.

Supplies:

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

As you engage the reading from the Song of Solomon, note how the Song of Solomon, though a celebration of human love and bodies, focuses primarily on romantic relationships between people who have physical attraction to one another. Invite worshipers to think of relationships beyond sexual ones where they interact with and show honor or disrespect for the bodies of others: relationships with parents, siblings, children, or other family; relationships with co-workers or with people they serve or are served by; friendships; and other face-to-face relationships. How do we honor our bodies in these settings?

Display the artwork "Margot Embracing Her Mother," and invite participants to think of particular ways that children show physical love for others. How would they describe the interaction occurring in this picture? What do the actions of the child depict? How about the actions of the mother? If Jesus says we must be like a child to enter the realm of heaven, what might we learn from children about honoring the body in our relationships with others?



9 Anointing

Leader preparation: Anointing has been a faith practice since the early days of Israel, when fragrant oil was often poured out on a person's head to mark that one as chosen for something special or as a sign of God's particular blessing. In early church traditions anointing was often used as part of prayers for healing, as an act of extravagant care and hospitality, and as a way to honor the body as it faced death. Though we may not anoint our dinner guests as in Jesus' day, anointing is still practiced in the church in many traditions as part of baptism and often plays a role in special services of healing. How might an opportunity for anointing enhance your congregation's worship and connect them to this rich stream of tradition?

Supplies:

- fragrant oil that can be used for anointing
- Bible

Introduce this activity by sharing a passage of scripture that speaks of the practice of anointing—perhaps Psalm 23, Psalm 133, or Luke 7:36–50. Then encourage worshipers to participate in the practice of anointing. There are many ways you could do this, but some options include these:

- Have a time of prayer where people in need of healing or a sense of God's presence with them may come to a designated area in your worship space to receive the sign of the cross in oil on their foreheads.
- Have oil by the door as people leave, and use it to mark them as God's chosen and blessed ones as they go into the world.
- Pass small jars of oil or something oil has been poured upon throughout the congregation, allowing people to smell and touch and reflect on God's blessing on them or on ways they could honor Jesus with gratitude and love as the woman who anointed him did.

Following the Church Year

The beautiful words of the Song of Solomon are incorporated into the Revised Common Lectionary only once—a passage from Song of Solomon 2:8–13 appears in the lectionary during Ordinary Time of Year B, almost as an afterthought rather than a purposeful inclusion. Is this dearth of passages from this poem expressing the beauty of human bodies a sign of our modern day unease or dis-ease with matters of the body as part of our worship? Consider places you could bring Song of Solomon into your worship practice more than once every three years. Christmastide or Eastertide are seasons where these scriptures in praise of the human body's miraculous formation could be linked to a celebration of Christ's body incarnate and Christ's body resurrected—both signs that God, again, has pronounced God's creation of human flesh as a good thing.

The Luke reading of the woman who anointed Jesus appears in the lectionary during Year C on Proper 6/Ordinary 1, though John's telling of a similar event is the featured Gospel text for Holy Monday in all three lectionary years, as well as for the Fifth Sunday of Lent in Year C, and Mark's account is part of the Passion narrative read on Palm/Passion Sunday in Year B. This is a story that shows up all over the lectionary in one form or another, leaving us to ponder even more deeply the significance of this woman's act of showing honor to Jesus' body.



Certain days in the church year also lead us to reflect on Christian tradition's understanding of the body as it relates to worship. Many churches around the world celebrate World Communion Sunday on the first Sunday in October, a day when bodies of believers in all nations agree to partake of communion and remember their connectedness to one another physically as well as spiritually. All Saints' Sunday, usually the first Sunday in November, is a day to remember that those who have died in the body surround us yet in the Spirit and worship around the throne of God. Honoring our physical and corporate bodies has become an important part of the liturgical tradition of many denominations in our day.

Attachment: Activity 3

An Embodied People

A Call to Worship Drawn from the Book of Acts

(Acts 2:1-21, Acts 3:1-10, Acts 6:1-6, Acts 8:36-38, Acts 9:36-39)

Leader: As the first believers used their tongues to declare your praise in every language,

People: So we bring our bodies this day to declare your praise.

Leader: As Peter and John gave not just coins to a beggar, but a chance at wholeness,
taking him by the hand and raising him to feet strengthened for the first time,

People: We come this day to seek justice and wholeness for the bodies of all God's forgotten people.

Leader: As the disciples laid hands on a new generation of leaders to bless them for the ministry of feeding hungry stomachs,

People: We gather to offer our bodies and lives this day in service to those who hunger and thirst.

Leader: As the Ethiopian leapt from his chariot to let his body be baptized,

People: We pray that our actions will reflect our eagerness to know you in our every pore, muscle, nerve, and cell.

Leader: As Dorcas gave her life to weave clothing to shelter the bodies of others,

People: May we share the skills of our hands and feet to bless the hands and feet of others.

Leader: As you called your first followers to continue your embodied work on this earth,

People: Knit us together this day, that in our worship and our living, we may help you be seen, heard, and felt in this world.

Attachment: Activity 4

Luke 7:36-50: One Scene, Three Lenses

Reading 1: From the perspective of Simon the Pharisee

What is she doing here? She thinks no one sees her coming into the room—that she's invisible—but her curvy form and flowing hair make it impossible not to be aware of her presence breathing beside us in this robed-and-bearded crowd. I keep thinking maybe she'll realize she is in the wrong place—that she doesn't belong here—but no. She positions that body of hers so close to Jesus that she can touch him, and touch him she does—pouring ointment on his feet that we all know she can't afford; washing those same feet with an embarrassing torrent of tears, and then letting that uncontrolled hair of hers wind its way around his feet like a towel, drawing her nearer to him than ever.

What a disgrace—here, in my house of all places, a house kept clean and pure now messed up by this strange body among us! And what is Jesus, my honored guest, doing all intertwined with a woman like this—a woman who doesn't observe boundaries, who makes herself vulnerable, who makes an utter fool out of herself with such a lavish display?

Reading 2: From the perspective of the Woman

Jar in hands, I tremble. This is not a house where people like me are welcome—people who have been sullied by life, both because of the works of their own hands and the hands of others. But I cannot stay away—it is like a magnetic force draws me silently toward the table's lively cacophony of food and drink and deep baritone voices engaged in conversations in which someone like me would never be given a voice. I think I may have made it to Jesus without anyone noticing, but the room falls suddenly silent as the rich smell of the perfume permeates the air. The only noise is sobs I cannot control, tears that begin deep within me and wrack my body from my core. I let the salty tears fall between his toes as I stoop my body over, wrapping my wavy locks around his feet like an ebony turban.

I can feel the men around the table tensing—Jesus alone does not pull away, remaining pliable in my shaking hands. When I rest his feet back on the ground again, I catch the end of a story he was telling Simon, whose house I had invaded with my

Attachment: Activity 4 (Continued)

unwanted presence; a story of forgiveness that sounds so familiar, like a lute's song lilting through the air. I do not see Simon's reaction this time, however; all I see are the eyes of Jesus, intensely focused now on mine as he cups my chin in his hands and speaks the words I need to hear most. "Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you; now go in peace."

Reading 3: From the perspective of Jesus

When I was invited to dine in the homes of religious leaders, I always noticed who was absent: the bodies around the table were always the proper ones, the clean ones, the holy ones, the rule-abiding ones, the educated and groomed ones. When I gathered people to eat, the crowd was always a little less predictable and a little more controversial. But Simon would not have considered allowing into his respectable home some of the riffraff I had befriended.

I sense her presence at the table before everyone else does—way before the ointment overwhelms our senses with its potent richness. I can feel the grief and joy and fear and hope she carries in every inch of her body the moment it enters our sphere; I feel all of these things settle at my feet, be poured out upon me in action that expresses what words cannot. I feel them flow in salty rivers across my skin and wrap themselves around me in silky strands. What is happening here is an act of body and soul unlike any I have seen while walking this earth.

Beyond her stooped shoulders, I see the need—to be healed, to be forgiven, to be made whole. To be blessed extravagantly, to have grace poured upon her head as she has poured her hope into my feet. Few times have I been more grateful to have a voice that can be heard by human ears than in the moment when I get to speak words that raise her eyes up to look me in the face for the first time: "Forgiven. Saved. You. Go in peace, my sister; go now in peace."

Attachment: Activity 5

Choral Reading
in Response to Song of Solomon 4:1-7 and 5:10-16

Male Reader: Beloved—you named us beloved.

Female Reader: Beautiful—you called us beautiful.

Male Reader: You see the light that shines out of us, the carved details of our features that set us apart from others.

Female Reader: You see even the parts of us we try to hide and call them forth to be recognized and named as lovely.

Male Reader: You see us as creatures of overflowing value. Were we made of jewels and perfume and gold, we could not be more priceless.

Female Reader: You see the places we are strong and the places we are soft, and adore both unequivocally.

Male Reader: You know every inch of me and find no part repulsive.

Female Reader: Where I see only imperfection, you see flawlessness.

Male Reader: You have always called me Beloved.

Female Reader: You have always named me as Beautiful.

Both: Beloved and beautiful, perfect and priceless, we are yours forever, and you, forever, are ours.

Attachment: Activity 6

Prayer Using a Labyrinth

What is a labyrinth? A labyrinth is an ancient prayer practice involving a winding path that leads ultimately to a center and then winds back out to the point at which it began. It is not difficult to walk—there are no dead ends as there are in a maze. The path is physically symbolic of the journey inward toward God’s illumination and then outward, grounded in God and empowered to act in the world.

Where did labyrinths come from? Labyrinths were first simple designs embossed on Greek pottery, coins, and occasionally on the walls of buildings. Around 1800 BCE a labyrinth was constructed on the island of Crete that became a popular symbol throughout the Mediterranean. The first Christian labyrinth was believed to be constructed sometime around the year 350CE, and during the thirteenth century many cathedrals inlaid labyrinths into their floors. For centuries this practice of discernment and prayer was lost, not regaining popularity until the late twentieth century.

So, how do you pray the labyrinth? Most people choose to move slowly, but everyone’s pace will differ—walk, dance, crawl at the pace at which you feel comfortable and at peace. Although labyrinths are used to pray in many different ways, the Threefold Mystical Path is believed to be one of the most ancient:

1. *Purgation* As you slowly begin to move towards the center of the labyrinth, consciously repeat a desire to empty yourself and make room for God’s Spirit to move within you. As you wind towards the center, allow your thoughts, anxieties, stresses, and worries to slip away, purging your mind and spirit of unhealthy thoughts, concerns, and attitudes.
2. *Illumination* When you reach the center, stop and be completely still, focused on being fully present to God in the moment. Remain at the center for as long as you like, silently praying and listening.
3. *Union* As you begin to retrace the path back out away from the center, reflect on what you have heard from God and how you may carry it into your life. Thank God for God’s unending presence with you on the journey.



Attachment: Activity 6 (*Continued*)



Attachment: Activity 7

Prayers Honoring the Body from Saints Old and New

We beg you, Lord, to help and defend us. Deliver the oppressed, pity the insignificant, raise the fallen, show yourself to the needy, heal the sick, bring back those of your people who have gone astray, feed the hungry, lift up the weak, take off the prisoners' chains. May every nation come to know that you alone are God, that Jesus Christ is your Child, that we are your people, the sheep that you pasture.

—St. Clement of Rome, c. 100

Christ, be with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ where I lie, Christ where I sit, Christ where I arise,
Christ in the heart of every one who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of every one who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.

—St. Patrick, 389-461

Blessed are all thy Saints, O God and King, who have traveled over the tempestuous sea of this life, and have made the harbor of peace and felicity. Watch over us who are still in our dangerous voyage; and remember such as lie exposed to the rough storms of trouble and temptation. Frail is our vessel, and the ocean is wide; but as in thy mercy thou hast set our course, so steer the vessel of our life toward the everlasting shore of peace, and bring us at length to the quiet haven of our heart's desire, where thou, O our God, are blessed, and livest and reignest for ever and ever.

—St. Augustine, 354-430

God be in my head, and in my understanding;
God be in my eyes, and in my looking;
God be in my mouth, and in my speaking;
God be in my heart, and in my thinking;
God be at my end, and in my departing.

—Old Sarum Primer (thirteenth-sixteenth century Catholic prayer book)

Lord,
I sing your praise
The whole day through until the night.
Dad's nets are filled,
I have helped him.
We have drawn them in,
Stamping the rhythm with our feet,
The muscles tense.
We have sung your praise.

—A Ghanaian Fisherman's Prayer

All prayers drawn from The Oxford Book of Prayer, ed. George Appleton Oxford (University Press, USA, December 12, 2002).

Honoring the Body



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Setting

Worship is one of the key opportunities that faith communities have to shape their members for mission. Worship both reflects the world from which we are gathered and prepares us to be sent back into the world to live out the gospel in our particular contexts of work, home, and play. How can the way we worship shape the way our bodies live and interact with other bodies beyond the walls of the church in our communities?

About this Exploration

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



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

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

Leader Preparation

The commandment that God gave us with the most insight and instruction—and perhaps the commandment to which God returns as frequently as any other—has to do with the care of our bodies and the bodies of those around us. Exodus 23:10–12, one of the focus passages for this Exploration, clearly states God’s desire that all created bodies observe a Sabbath rest on the seventh day of each week. Think for a few moments about how Sabbath is observed in your community. Do the people you interact with find regular opportunities to rest from bodily labor and acknowledge God? How accessible is rest to the poor of your community? What about the “foreigners” among you?

Prayer: God of Work and God of Rest, open my eyes to those around me whose weary bodies are in desperate need of the rest only you can bring. Help me find your rest, to feel it deep in my bones and to carry it into the world around me as I respect and care for the neighbors you have given me. This is my prayer in the gracious name of Christ. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



① Blessing of Bodily Labor (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: It is amazing how much of our everyday labor—often what we are paid to do for a living!—is work that requires sacrifice from our bodies, putting our bodies at risk. We often pray for the bodies of people going on mission trips, but what about blessings upon the bodily missions we undertake each day? Use the provided prayer to bless those who use their bodies or honor the bodies of others in their particular vocations. There may be other jobs in your congregation that are not represented but belong on this list; adapt or add to the prayer to fit your particular context. The prayer also has some language links with 2 Corinthians 4:13–5:1 and could be used as a compliment to that reading

Supplies:

- “A Blessing of Bodily Labor,” Attachment: Activity 1

Begin this time of prayer with either silent reflection or sharing aloud (if you have a more intimate, interactive congregation) about ways you use your body in your everyday vocation at work or at home. Where do you need God’s blessing upon your body in your work in the upcoming week? Then pray together the prayer “A Blessing of Bodily Labor,” Attachment: Activity 1.

② Local Bodies, Local Needs

Leader preparation: This activity may give worshipers an opportunity to consider the needs of bodies in their local context, hopefully sparking prayerful reflection on ways the congregation can be further involved in honoring bodies in need. Prior to this activity, you will need to do some research about your community. Consult resources such as the Census Bureau (<http://www.census.gov/>), your state’s Department of Social Services, or local nonprofits or city government office websites to see if you can come up with answers to the following questions:

- What percentage of children in your county or city are on free or reduced-price lunch programs because they cannot afford adequate nutrition?
- How many people in your city/county are believed to be without shelter on any given night?
- How often is violent crime reported in your area—domestic violence, rape, or physical assault—that endangers the integrity and safety of bodies?
- How available is health care in your community for those who lack adequate insurance?
- How available is safe shelter for those who are being abused in your community?
- How many families are served by your nearest food pantry or food bank each month?
- How much assistance does your church provide people each year who cannot afford basic necessities such as water, heat, groceries, rent, or electricity? How many people have to be turned away because there are not enough resources?

Compiling such information may require time and effort but will result in an important sense of where bodies are being cared for—or forgotten—in your



community. You may also learn additional things to add to this list specific to your community.

Print this prayer on newsprint or a whiteboard, or make copies to distribute: May we be Christ's light in this world so that no body may be forgotten. May we honor our neighbor's needs as the love of God shines through how our bodies show compassion and remember them.

Supplies:

- information about bodily needs in your community (see list in Leader preparation)
- votive or pillar candles (one for each fact you share with your worshiping community about your surrounding community)
- matches or lighter
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- (optional) hymn: "Jesu, Jesu," by Tim Colvin (tune: Chereponi), <http://www.oremus.org/hymnal/j/j015.html>

Print the facts about your community that you compiled, and assign them to be read aloud by different people in your congregation. As a time of prayer, or perhaps in response to/preparation for scripture or a sermon that addresses Christian mission, give a short preface to these facts about your city or community and the ways bodies around you are in need, being cared for, or being neglected. As each fact is shared, light a candle on the communion table in response to the reading. When all the candles are lit, pause for a few minutes of silent reflection, and then have the congregation join together in the prayer you printed on newsprint or a whiteboard. You may also wish to conclude by singing a song such as "Jesu, Jesu" or a well-known song of witness and mission, such as "This Little Light of Mine."



3 Art Reflection

Leader preparation: Spend time with the art piece "Out of Work" by Käthe Kollwitz. What do you see in this picture—what emotions and what needs? Does knowing that its title is "Out of Work" color your interpretation of it? Being attentive to the figures in this piece can help us move toward seeing anew the needs and realities of the bodies in the community around us, helping us consider what our mission toward them might be. When you use this piece in worship, coordinate with your age group leaders to make sure people encounter the work here first, *before* they learn its name—otherwise this exercise will lose some of its impact.

Supplies:

- artwork: "Out of Work," by Käthe Kollwitz, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401

Display or project the artwork "Out of Work" where it can be seen by all, but without revealing the name of the piece. Pose the following questions, allowing a silence to pass between each question for reflection. If you wish, and your setting is conducive to it, you may invite verbal responses.

- What emotions seem to emerge from the canvas?
- Why do you think these colors were chosen by the artist?
- I wonder what the artist was trying to convey about the figures in this painting, or what response the artist was hoping to evoke from the beholder.

- Do the people in this painting remind you of anyone you know? Why or why not?
- Finally, announce that the title of this painting is “Out of Work” and ask if this information changes their interpretations of or responses to this piece of art.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ Sabbath Rest (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Sabbath was meant to disrupt the normal rhythms of our bodies in order to remind us that the world continues when we are still and to give all people a chance to marvel in the presence of their Creator. For most Christians, the Sabbath is kept on Sunday in honor of the resurrection, yet the principle of Sabbath continues. We worship on the Sabbath, but our practices of worship are seldom a rest for all. Consider whether your Sabbath worship is a chance for *all* people to be in God’s presence—leaders and laity alike. This activity may rattle you and your people a bit, but it may help demonstrate the way Sabbath shakes the normal order of things and heightens our everyday awareness.

As you plan a day of worship with “Sabbath rest” as a theme, build into it a time of rest every seven minutes (that is, for every six minutes of activity in your worship you take a full minute of total rest by everyone in the congregation—musicians, pastors, ushers, *everyone*). Then consider whether you would like to shape your worship elements and sermon so that there is a natural break point occurring every six minutes or so, or whether you would like for this Sabbath pause to just break into the midst of whatever you are doing. Also, be sure someone keeps an eye on the clock to hold you to this practice, perhaps signaling the passing of six minutes by ringing a bell.

Supplies:

- Bible
- bell

Begin your worship time by reading Exodus 23:10–12. Share with worshipers that today your worship will incorporate Sabbath rest into its flow. Every six minutes everything will come to a total stop for one minute and *all* worshipers—every person in the worship space—will be still and rest in God’s presence, not reading or doing anything for a full minute. Encourage people to be attentive to their breathing, to the beating of their hearts, to the presence of their neighbor beside them. After the minute passes, resume your “ordinary” worship, stopping again after the passage of six more minutes for a full minute of rest for all worshipers. Continue this all the way through your normal course of worship. It may be good to build in some reflection time at the end of the service to consider how this changed your worship; you may wish to add some of your own reflections on the importance and its disruption of such a pause to the normal rhythms of the work of worship.

⑤ Do You See?

Leader Preparation: In place of an account of the Lord’s Supper, the Gospel of John shares a powerful tale of Jesus leaving the dinner table he shared with his disciples to perform one of the most menial yet intimate bodily tasks of his day: washing the feet of the dinner guests. Since most people walked everywhere



wearing sandals as they traversed dusty streets that were far from sanitary, washing the feet of your guests was an essential act of hospitality, but one usually reserved for the lowest servant in the household. When Jesus finished washing their feet, he said to the disciples, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." This practice of foot washing, sometimes practiced in churches on Maundy Thursday but rarely done otherwise in mainline congregations, is a meaningful way to honor another person's body while also remembering one's own mission as a servant to others. This practice will take some background and careful explanation, but can be incredibly meaningful in the proper worship context.

Supplies:

- Bible
- two very large bowls (big enough that feet can rest inside/over their circumference)
- two pitchers filled with lukewarm water
- small hand towel for each person expected to participate
- two chairs
- two low stools that can be sat upon

Before inviting your congregation to offer this service of humility and love to one another as a way of remembering their call to humbly love and serve the world around them, read John 13:1-17.

Position two chairs at the front of the worship space with a basin and a stool directly in front of each chair. Place a pitcher and a stack of towels beside each basin. Have two people begin by washing each other's feet. The one having his or her feet washed first may sit in the chair, while the one washing sits on the stool. After the one being washed has removed shoes and socks, the washer should take one foot and hold it over the bowl. Carefully pour a small amount of water over the foot, allowing excess water to run off into the bowl. Dry the foot gently with one of the towels. Repeat this process with the other foot. Then have this first pair switch places, with the one who did the washing before now having the opportunity to let the other wash their feet. Perhaps a staff team could model this first.

Once this first pair has reciprocated, invite the second person to the second stool. Worshipers may then approach either station to offer their feet to be washed. After their feet have been washed, they may choose to return to their seat or to take the place of the person who washed their feet and wash the feet of the next person who comes. Continue this until all who so desire have had a chance to practice foot washing.

In Jesus' day, foot washing was an essential expression of hospitality. In our contemporary context hand washing may replace foot washing. While some of the significance may be lost in the substitution, worshipers may be more comfortable with washing one another's hands rather than feet.

⑥ Reflection on 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

Leader preparation: This passage from Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth is full of language that falls beautifully upon the ears, language worth hearing many times to give it a chance to sink in. By hearing this scripture repeatedly as you meditate using the contemplative practice of *lectio divina* ("Divine Reading"), it can be experienced not only as a source of information, but also of formation, shaping and challenging the hearer to action and to change.



Supplies:

- Bible
- way to keep time (watch, clock, and so forth)

Tell worshipers that you will read the passage four times. Each time, invite them to be attentive to God's word for them in a different way. Observe times of silence between readings to allow a chance to reflect and listen for God's voice. Use the following script:

In this first reading, listen for a word or short phrase that catches your attention. You don't have to know why; simply hold onto whatever word or phrase strikes you. (Read 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1; and then observe thirty seconds of silence.)

In this second reading, reflect on what emotions, thoughts, or questions the word or phrase that caught your attention brings up for you. On what levels is it resonating with you? (Read the passage again; and then observe a minute of silence.)

In this third reading, respond to God in prayer: how might God be challenging you or speaking to your life through this text? What might God be inviting you to do or be? Take time to talk to and listen to God around these questions. (Read passage again; observe a minute and a half of silence following.)

In this last reading, simply rest and hear God's word to you. Let the words strengthen you and sink deep into you. Be content simply to be in God's gracious presence. (Read passage a final time; observe two minutes of silence, and then close with a brief prayer of gratitude.)



⑦ A Neighborly Sabbath (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: How many people fail to practice Sabbath regularly not only as a matter of choice, but also because of their position in life? The Sabbath commandments from Exodus always call Israel to take special care to ensure that their most often oppressed neighbors—poor, slaves, strangers far from home, those living among them who come from other countries—have an equal chance to practice Sabbath rest and find restoration. Most likely, your congregation worships on what we now observe as the “Sabbath Day” (Sunday). How can you challenge them to help make Sabbath possible for neighbors who may not even realize Sabbath is a possibility?

Supplies:

- Bible

Read Exodus 23:10–12 and invite your congregation into a time of reflection around the following questions:

- God seems particularly concerned that those most often neglected, abused, and forgotten in society have a chance to observe Sabbath rest. As you leave worship and go forth into this Sabbath day, how might you help ensure that the poor around us—those making minimum wage, those working multiple jobs to make ends meet, those struggling to keep a roof over their heads or seeking shelter, those scavenging for food for rumbling stomachs—get an opportunity for Sabbath rest this day?



- God was concerned for the entirety of God's creation—animals and fields are named here in addition to humans—to know Sabbath rest. How might we offer a different rhythm of rest to God's creation as we go forth into the world on this Sabbath?
- God was concerned for those who had no choice about working—who were "household slaves" with tasks that knew nothing of working hours, for they were always on their master's "clocks." On this Sabbath, how might we bring Sabbath rest to those whose work seems inescapable? (For instance, those who care for small children, the sick, or the elderly around the clock)
- God was concerned that even foreigners—those not "part of the covenant people"—be included in Sabbath rest. As we go forth into the gift of Sabbath, how can you extend the gift even to those living here from other countries as well as those whose backgrounds in faith or history are vastly different than our own?

❸ Take, Eat—This Is My Body

Leader preparation: One of the key ways we proclaim the significance of the body is through sharing communion regularly in worship. As we declare the words of Jesus, "This is my body, broken for you," and respond by feeding our own bodies, we are reminded of how deeply bodies matter. Congregations participate in communion in different ways—some remain seated while servers bring communion to them, passing trays; others come forward to share a common loaf and common cup, actually moving their whole body to a different part of the worship space. Changing the way one does communion, even for one Sunday as suggested in this exercise, can help us think differently about the participation of our bodies in worship and mission. It can also be confusing for worship leaders and laity used to particular movements around this practice. Before trying this exercise, take care that as many people as possible are briefed on the way you will share in the meal and how it is different from your normal practice.

Supplies:

- loaf of bread (if moving), or small cubes of bread in trays (if remaining stationary)
- single cup of wine/grape juice (if moving), or trays of small cups of grape juice (if remaining stationary)

If your normal way of doing communion is by having worshipers come forward, invite worshipers to remain in their seats for communion. Have lay leaders pass trays of bread, instructing all to remain seated and hold their piece of bread until all have been served, and then to eat together. Then do the same with serving, holding, and drinking the individual cups of grape juice/wine.

If your normal way of doing communion lets worshipers remain stationary, this Sunday invite them to come forward, break off a piece of bread of a common loaf, dip that piece of bread in the cup, and eat it—this is a form of communion called intinction. Servers may still bring the bread and cup to those with mobility issues.

If your congregation doesn't have a "normal" way of doing communion, try to make some change in how worshipers' bodies move in sharing the meal for one Sunday—maybe have them serve one another or come to the back of the sanctuary instead of the front to receive. The point is to alter your way of sharing in communion in some other way your worship team dreams up in order to help worshipers focus on this vital practice.



9 Prayer Rope

Leader Preparation: Since the fifth century Eastern Orthodox Christians have used prayer ropes to help them focus their prayers. For each prayer they offer or each person or situation they remember, they move their fingers to touch a different knot on the rope. Such a tactile act keeps their attention on God. Most prayer ropes are made in monasteries in Greece and come with 33, 50, 100, or even 1000 knots to guide prayer. Giving worshipers a chance to create their own prayer rope, however, can help them physically connect with their prayers for the physical needs present in their community.

Supplies:

- three to four feet of very thin rope
- seven beads with holes large enough to thread two strands of rope through (optional: if you do this finishing touch, you may wish to select an even thinner rope material)
- “Prayer Rope,” Attachment: Activity 9

Share with worshipers a brief background of the Eastern Orthodox tradition of the prayer rope, and invite them to participate in making a prayer rope for your congregation. Set aside time in the worship service where worshipers may voice concern for an individual, situation, or struggle in your particular context. When the concern is voiced, that person may either come forward to add a knot to the prayer rope, or a designated person who stays at the front with the rope may repeat the concern and add a knot to represent it.

When the time of prayer is over, place the rope somewhere in your church where others may come use it as part of their prayer practice, offering a different prayer for each knot they touch as they work their way down the rope. You may wish to type a list of the things that were voiced to post with the rope for continued prayer. You may also wish to finish off the rope by bringing it together in a loop with a beaded cross at the end. To do this, follow the directions on Attachment: Activity 9.

Following the Church Year

The Exodus 23 passage never appears in the lectionary, though commands to Sabbath rest are given as part of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1-20 (part of which is the suggested text for Proper 22/Ordinary 27A and Lent 3B). A more extensive description of Sabbath is found in the reading of Deuteronomy 5:6-21 on Epiphany 9B and Proper 4/Ordinary 9B. Yet, in spite of these two nods to the Sabbath, which is one of the most frequently issued imperatives from God to the people (it appears nearly two dozen times in the book of Leviticus alone), it remains one of the most heavily avoided in the readings of the church year. One way to address this dearth may be to focus on Jesus’ actions toward human bodies in need on the Sabbath and how this grated against people’s ideas of what the Sabbath rest was intended for. Ordinary Time may be a good time to undertake a focus such as this, with lessons such as Mark 2:23-3:6 (Proper 4/Ordinary 9B), or Luke 13:10-17 and 14:1-14 (the focus Gospel lessons of Proper 16/Ordinary 21 and Proper 17/Ordinary 22 in Year C).

The 2 Corinthians focus passage, meanwhile, is the second of three successive readings from this letter of Paul to begin Ordinary Time in Year B. All three passages reference the body and the work of God’s Spirit within it, so all three



could provide opportunities to consider how we honor the body in light of the resurrection of Christ's body.

Beyond the lectionary, the seasons of Advent and Christmas are a time where our focus is honoring God's decision to come among God's people in a human body, born as a baby from a young woman's body and growing up in the particular embodied context of Nazareth and Galilee. This annual anticipation and celebration of God's incarnational mission among us provides a rich opportunity to consider our incarnational mission to honor the bodies in need in our context.

Attachment: Activity 1

A Blessing on Bodily Labor

O God, in our rest and in our toil, our bodies belong to you. Bless those among us this day who work each day using their bodies, or to care for the bodies of others.

Bless the bodies of those who labor in fields, nurturing and harvesting produce from the ground so that it may find its way to others' tables.

May their weary hands find strength.

Bless the bodies of those who swing hammers and haul bricks to build the shelter others need, whose bodily labors construct spaces in which to gather and learn and worship.

May their weary backs and shoulders find relief.

Bless the bodies of those who treat our bodies when they grow ill, who dispense medicine and wisdom and healing that can help us continue to live.

May their weary eyes and ears remain perceptive and attuned to each patient in need.

Bless the bodies of teachers, hotel clerks, retail workers, and restaurant servers whose jobs keep them running and standing on their feet all day that others may be fed, clothed, housed, taught.

May their weary feet be made light again and find rest.

Bless those whose bodies face rigorous demands in order to create works of beauty in which others may delight: dancers, athletes, performers, carpenters, artists.

May their weary arms and legs know at the end of the day that their work is what fills our lives with texture and wonder.

Bless the bodies of those whose work is to care for small children or aging parents, nursing and feeding and cleaning and carrying.

May their weary bodies and souls be filled by the love found in human relationship and in you, by the sustaining power of your Spirit.

Bless us all, O God, as we use our bodies in work that serves you and your children;

When we grow weary, send your creative spirit through our bodies once again, that we may know that even if our outer nature feels like it's wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day, and that you who raised Jesus will raise us also with him. Amen!

Attachment: Activity 9

Prayer Rope

To finish off Prayer Rope in a loop with a cross at the bottom:

1. Bring both ends of your rope together and thread both ends of your rope through three beads.
2. Thread each end through a separate bead. These beads will be the horizontal bar of the cross.
3. After you thread one end through one bead, go back and put the thread through the top of third bead you double threaded. The third bead will be in the center. Repeat with the other side. Now the third bead that was double threaded should have a bead on either side of it and will have been threaded four times.
4. Double thread two more beads at the bottom to finish off the cross.
5. Knot each end a number of times to ensure that the beads will not come off.



Honoring the Body



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Setting

Where is vision cast more beautifully than in the act of worship? It is not coincidental that the most future-focused piece of scripture—the concluding book of Revelation—is permeated from start to finish with scenes of worship, which demonstrate the way human bodies are meant to weave together with one another and their Creator. So many visions of bodies are given in our culture—bodies exploited, disregarded, or respected only for their age or appearance. What different vision of what it looks like to honor the body can be cast by the way our bodies worship together?

About this Exploration

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



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Ezekiel 37:1-14
Matthew 22:34-40

Leader Preparation

Think about your body ten years ago. How was the way you thought of and treated your body different than the way you regard and respect it now? What about the way it was honored or dishonored by others? Then consider what your body may be like ten years from now. How do you imagine it might have changed? What do you look forward to about the future in your body? What do you dread?

Just as our bodies change over time, so do our attitudes toward the body. What future attitude should we as Christians take toward bodies of all ages and stages? How might we shape our vision to live out a different future in terms of how we look at the bodies of those around us and the bodies we live in?

Prayer: God, remind me that in youth and old age, in the past and in the future, I am shaped in your image—and that though my body may change, you never do. Help me honor your agelessness as I honor the bodies around me as temples of your presence and image expressed in myriad beautiful ways. Amen.



Exploring & Engaging Activities

① Resurrection Prayer Litany (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: In Jesus' resurrection we get a possible glimpse of the future of our bodies—what our bodies may become like as they are raised with Christ into newness of life. This prayer could work during the Eastertide season, or perhaps especially on Ascension Sunday, as a reminder that our bodies are moving toward this vision of resurrection “sneak previewed” for us in the mysterious resurrection of Christ.

Supplies:

- “Resurrection Prayer Litany,” Attachment: Activity 1

Responsively pray the prayer on Attachment: Activity 1 as part of worship (it could work well as an opening litany). The congregation reads the boldface parts. Alternately, you could assign the lines to various people and pray it in a reader’s theater format.

② Songs of Anticipation

Leader preparation: Weave together a worship time marked by songs that anticipate future possibilities for our bodies in interaction with one another and in God’s interaction with them. How can the songs we sing in worship, woven together with focus scriptures, help us begin to discover and envision new possibilities for ways to honor our bodies and to honor God with them? These simple songs convey complex ideas that have the possibility to chart a new course.

Supplies:

- hymn: “Waiting for the Touch of God” by Ruth Sandburg, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1990004210?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=27281&store_id=1401
- hymn: “Dance into Joy” from https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1093776042?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=29701&store_id=1401
- music and lyrics to “Dem Bones,” <http://kids.niehs.nih.gov/games/songs/childrens/bonesmid.htm>, and “They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love,” http://tabs.ultimate-guitar.com/m/misc_praise_songs/they_will_know_we_are_christians_by_our_love_crd.htm
- Bible

Begin your time of worship by singing “Waiting for the Touch of God,” including the optional final verse of “I got wounds that need a healing . . .” Follow this with a prayer inviting God to be physically present in and around your bodies in this time of worship.

For the Old Testament lesson read Ezekiel 37:1-14. Allow a moment of silence after the reading, followed by a chance for people to voice what hope this reading gives them for the future. Follow this by singing the spiritual “Dem Bones,” the melody of which was written by African American songwriter James Weldon Johnson.

For the New Testament lesson, read Matthew 22:34-40. Allow a moment of silence after this second reading, followed by a chance for people to voice what hope this reading gives them for the future. Follow this by singing the folk tune



"They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love," written in the 1960s by Catholic priest Peter Scholtes.

This may be followed by a meditation or time of prayer. You may also wish to share in communion or a simple love feast. Read about this tradition of the Moravian church at <http://www.moravians.org/Christmas%20Lovefeast%20and%20Candlelight%20Service.htm>. It is a simple meal shared during worship during a time of singing, usually consisting of a warm beverage and some sort of sweet wafer, bread, or cookie.

Conclude the time of worship by singing "Dance into Joy." Encourage people to move their bodies or move around the worship space while they sing. You may even print this song on sheets people can actually carry with them so they can sing while exiting the worship space into the world!



③ Love for Neighbor

Leader preparation: The look of our neighborhoods is changing in most places—our neighbors are more diverse and varied than ever before. What might it look like to really love our neighbors, body and soul? Norman Rockwell's classic "Golden Rule," though created in a different era, can invite us into reflection on the bodies that surround us and how we offer them the love which Jesus commanded us.

Supplies:

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

Read aloud Matthew 22:34–40. Invite people to close their eyes and envision their neighbors—the people who live around them, meet them at the grocery store, attend their local schools, and work in the next office. Imagine those neighbors' bodies—height, weight, eye and hair and skin color, piercings and tattoos, clothing, facial expressions, how they carry themselves. How much diversity is present among them? How do we love our neighbors as ourselves even when our neighbors are quite different in appearance? Then invite people to reflect on Norman Rockwell's "Golden Rule." This image was painted in 1961—more than fifty years ago. How does it compare to how we imagine our neighbors today? How might a portrait of our neighbors look different fifty years into the future, and how might the changing bodies around us impact how we live out this "greatest commandment"?

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ Confessing Our Past (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Part of moving into a new future is confessing and seeking forgiveness for misguided ways we have lived in the past. As we name practices toward the body that have been damaging, we open the way to a future that can honor bodies differently, in a way closer to God's intentions. This confession employs both spoken word and physical action to invite the corporate congregation and individual worshiper to lay aside the ways they have fallen short in honoring the body and take up more holistic practices.

**Supplies:**

- “Prayer of Confession,” Attachment: Activity 4

Introduce this prayer as one that involves both spoken word and movement. We will begin praying with clenched fists as we offer our confessions to God, then move toward open hands ready to receive new ways and practices God might have for us. Lead the congregation in prayer following the outline on Attachment: Activity 4.

⑤ Embodying Scripture

Leader preparation: How can we encounter the biblical text with our bodies? In the practice of embodying scripture, we allow our bodies to move in response to the text, forming shapes or prayer postures based on the words that fall on our ears. Such movement may allow us to notice things about the text that we would not have become aware of while remaining still. It is important to convey that the point of this exercise is not to pose in ways that “look good,” but simply to let your body respond freely to what you hear. Encourage worshipers not to overthink their responsive poses, but simply to react and let their movements flow as instinctively as possible.

Supplies:

- Bible

If possible, invite worshipers to spread out so they have space where they can move without bumping into one another. Invite them to close their eyes so they can focus on the text and their own movements rather than on what the person beside them is doing. Begin by asking God to be present in your body and in your movements as you encounter God’s word.

Read Matthew 22:34–40 slowly. Invite worshipers to imagine being gathered with Jesus and the Pharisees, watching this conversation unfold.

Reread verse 36, and invite worshipers to move to embody the lawyer’s question to Jesus. Remind them that they may move to this phrase in any way they desire, simply shifting into a pose they can hold for a few moments.

Read the first part of verse 37. Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart.” Invite worshipers to embody this first piece of the command. Pause in silence.

Read the next part of verse 37: “And with all your soul.” Invite worshipers to embody loving God with all of one’s soul. Pause in silence.

Read the final part of verse 37: “And with all your mind.” Invite worshipers to move to embody the love of God with mind. Pause in silence.

Finally, read verses 38–39. Invite worshipers to embody this command to love neighbor as self. Pause.

Invite worshipers to end with a final prayer posture of gratitude to God for the gift of these words intended to shape our lives and our love. You may wish to close out the time with a voiced prayer.



⑥ A Visionary Dialogue

Leader preparation: Find three effective readers who can help tell the familiar story of God's work in the Valley of Dry Bones from Ezekiel 37:1–14. You may wish to place the narrator and Ezekiel where they are visible and to have God voiced from "offstage"; or you may wish to have God and Ezekiel standing side by side to emphasize the partnership that is required for bones to live again.

Supplies:

- "A Visionary Dialogue," Attachment: Activity 6, three copies

Have three readers (Narrator, Ezekiel, and God) offer the rendition of Ezekiel 37:1–14 on the provided script, Attachment: Activity 6. After the reading, offer a sermon/homily or a time of reflection centered on the following questions:

- Where do we see valleys of dry bones in our society?
- What would it mean for us to stand right in the middle of these valleys as God's people?
- How might we partner with God to envision and bring about renewal of the bodies that lie abandoned around us?

Sending & Serving Activities



⑦ Benedictions (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Send your people into the world with a blessing based upon one of our scripture texts that envisions a future where people may be found whole, body and soul, and living together as God intended.

Supplies:

- benedictions listed

Choose one of the following benedictions with which to conclude your time of worship:

Benediction based on Ezekiel 37:1–14:

Go forth into places that have been left for dead bearing the breath of life. Go forth speaking and living the message of One who has not abandoned us to the grave, but who sends God's own Spirit to renew bodies forsaken and forgotten. Go forth believing life can come again and working to bring such life to pass, in the name of Christ our resurrected and resurrecting Savior. Amen.

Benediction based on Matthew 22:34–40:

Go forth to transform the world in which you live, showing love with all your heart, soul, and mind. Go forth to love those living alongside of you as deeply as you love your own God-crafted being. Go forth walking the way of love, knowing that Love itself—made known to us in Christ as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer—surrounds and walks with you as you go. Amen.



⑧ Back Bone

Leader preparation: Before leading this reflection on his art, it would be interesting and helpful to do some background reading about artist Tony Cragg, whose drawing "Back Bone" is the focus of this exercise. Many articles are available that speak to Cragg's unique use of materials, attention to movement,



and devotion to doing all of his work by hand that may help you make further links between this work of art and the ways we think about the human body. (Use an Internet search engine to find that information.)

Supplies:

- artwork: "Back Bone, c. 1997" by Tony Cragg, <http://www.art.com/products/p12210191-sa-i1581812/tony-cragg-back-bone-c1997.htm?orig=cat&sortid=0&dimvals=0&ui=c5dd66dac7d541809fb8256c7daa3064&searchstring=back+bone+cragg>
- Bible

Read Ezekiel 37:1–14, and then invite worshipers to reflect on Tony Cragg's "Back Bone." Encourage reflection using the following questions:

- What is your first impression of this work of art?
- What sense of emotion or movement do you get from this piece?
- What might the artist have been trying to convey in crafting this image?
- What pieces of the scripture we just read echo in your mind as you take in this drawing?
- Where is the hope in this image?

Conclude by reading Psalm 139:13–16 as a prayer of honor for the mystery and beauty of the human body's careful construction.



⑨ *Caim* Prayers

Leader preparation: In Irish Christianity, "*caim* prayers" (*caim* is a Celtic word that rhymes with "time", not "aim") have been used since the fourth century as a way of encircling God's favor and protection around someone's physical body. Historically these prayers were recited aloud while those praying drew a circle in the air around them by slowly spinning, or turning their bodies (usually from east, where the sun rises, to west, where the sun sets). Books of ancient *caim* prayers can be found at the public library, and though there is no particular way to pray for God's presence and protection to encircle you, you may wish to find and offer a few examples of ancient *caim* so people get an idea of the nature of this form of prayer.

Supplies:

- "Formulate Your Own *Caim* Prayer," Attachment: Activity 9
- (optional) book of sample *caim* prayers

As a response to the sermon, before going forth as part of the benediction, or even as part of the prayers of the people, invite worshipers to formulate and pray their own *caim* prayers as reminders of God's protective presence around their bodies wherever they may go and of God's attentiveness to their felt needs. See Attachment: Activity 9 for a guide for leading people through this exercise.

Following the Church Year

Ezekiel 37:1–14, rich in imagery, is also rich in lectionary appearances: it is an appointed Old Testament reading for Lent 5A, Pentecost B, and perhaps most poignantly the Easter Vigil in years A, B, and C. Although this vigil that takes place the night of Holy Saturday and stretches into the dawning of Easter Day



is not celebrated in many traditions, it does provide an opportunity to tell the story of humanity's passage from death into life, from a past of disappointment into a future of hope. It accomplishes this through following the death and resurrection of Christ and God's redemptive work throughout history. Easter Day, which follows the Vigil, marks the beginning of the Eastertide Season—seven Sundays that stretch from Resurrection Morning to the Day of Pentecost.

Eastertide is a particularly poignant season in which to consider the future of the body as we look at the new reality that unfolded once Christ's body was resurrected from the grave. The Acts readings of the Eastertide season, taken together with the embodied appearances of Christ after the resurrection, provide many opportunities to re-envision the church's idea of care for the body in this world, and its continued existence as the embodiment of Christ after his body ascends to heaven.

Matthew 22:34–40 is the appointed reading for Year A Proper 25/Ordinary 30. The original giving of this “greatest commandment” appears also in the lectionary calendar in Deuteronomy 6:1–9, featured on Proper 26B/Ordinary 31B.

Attachment: Activity 1

Resurrection Prayer Litany

O Christ, your body rose from the grave, yet not just as any ordinary body;

You bore your distinctive scars, yet you were hard for us to recognize.

You cooked fish with us on the beach, just like always—

Then you passed through a locked door in a way we'd never witnessed.

You told us we couldn't hold on to you, only to invite us to touch your hands and side.

You promised to be with us always, only to turn around and ascend into heaven, your physical body gone from sight.

But . . . your body *is* still seen—it's right here, among us.

It *is* us.

For you have made us to be your body;

You have shaped us to be the fullness of you who fills everything in every way.

You promised that, though what our bodies will become has not yet been made known,

We will somehow embody your resurrected fullness.

Even now we are the mysterious, beautiful body of Christ; each one of us is part of it.

Let us grow into this new self, bringing honor to Christ's body through the way our bodies live and move and have their being.

Attachment: Activity 4

Prayer of Confession

As you enter a time of prayer, invite worshippers to make fists with both hands. As they do so, encourage them to put all that comes between them and the right love of God and neighbor into their clenched fists. Allow a few moments of silent confession.

God our Maker and Lover, you shaped us in your image to live connected to you and to one another in ways that mirror your beauty, holiness, and grace. Yet so often, God, we live in ways that separate us from one another.

We look upon one another with lust rather than love;
We use the labor of others bodies to get ahead rather than ensuring each person has the opportunity live a whole and sustainable life;
We objectify one another rather than seeking your Spirit within each intricately crafted frame;
We judge appearances rather than looking upon the heart;
We oppress bodies rather than giving them a chance to grow and flourish;
We deprive others by our own consumption rather than working for justice that allows each human body to have enough.

As we unclench our fists and open our hands, we offer to you these and many other places we have fallen short. Forgive us, O God, for our neglect and dishonor of these human bodies with which you have clothed and gifted us.

Allow a few moments of silence for people to unclench their fists and silently open themselves to God's healing and forgiveness.

We open our hands before you, God, asking to be filled with a new way of living—

Bless us with eyes able to behold beauty in places and people society tells us it is absent;
Bless us with hands willing to labor alongside brothers and sisters for a more just and equitable society;
Bless us with minds that can perceive places where what we have always been told falls short, where new ways of understanding and acting need to be imagined and carried out;
Bless us with arms ready to embrace others not for the sake of our own gain or selfish desires, but for the sake of unconditional love.

Receive our prayers, O God, and make our lives new, that we may honor the love that allowed your body to be broken for us in Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray; Amen.

Attachment: Activity 6

A Visionary Dialogue

A Narrative Telling of Ezekiel 37:1-14

Narrator: Picture the most hopeless and forsaken place you've ever seen. Picture the elephant graveyard from The Lion King, or—in more realistic pictures—mass graves from Auschwitz, or killing fields from Cambodia. Picture absolute destruction, the worst of human violence and horror. That's where the prophet Ezekiel was standing when he heard a voice.

God: Mortal, can these bones, so long dead that they've been bleached by the sun, yet live?

Narrator: What do you say in response to a question like that from God? Weary from the impossibility of his prophetic task amidst the total destruction of his people, overwhelmed by the hopeless scene before him, all Ezekiel could do was toss the question back at the One who had posed it:

Ezekiel: (*wearily*) You tell me, O Sovereign God. You tell me. I'm out of faith; I'm out of hope; I'm out of possibility. Only you know what is possible.

Narrator: Ezekiel had been asked to do a lot of really ridiculous things throughout his prophetic career—and most of them with absolutely no visible impact. He lost his homeland, his spouse, everything that mattered to him. But now God asks one more thing.

God: Stand in the middle of this ground zero of faith, Ezekiel, and preach to these bones. Proclaim who I am to the skeletons, the graves, the tombstones. Stand where all visible life is gone, and tell these bones I am raising them up, giving them flesh and sinews and muscle and souls and spirits and the breath of life. Tell them that here, where there is absolutely positively nothing left, is where I am going to show them once and for all that I am God. Tell them that here, in the midst of the most final and profound death, is where I will bring life.

Narrator: As God commanded, Ezekiel opened his mouth to preach hope in this most empty place, confessing faith where faith no longer seemed to matter.

Ezekiel: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.

Narrator: The breath of God came once again into those God had first breathed upon, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. Life amidst death—flesh upon bones—bodies renewed, spirits rushing, bones rattling to movement once again.

Attachment: Activity 9

Formulate Your Own *Caim* Prayer

Consider your need this day. What do you seek from God—Comfort? Courage? Healing? Rest? Protection? Peace? What do you need God to do within your body, and what forces do you desire God to keep outside of your body?

When you have an idea of what you desire God to keep within you and keep from you, stand and close your eyes. Take slow, deep breaths as you find your center.

Raise one or both of your arms to shoulder height so that they/it form(s) a straight line perpendicular to the rest of your body. Point your index finger(s) either toward the sky or toward the ground—whichever you prefer.

Slowly begin to turn your body, drawing a circle around yourself with your arm(s). As you pray for God's presence and protection, envision in your mind the circle that is being drawn around your body as a boundary of protection established by God. Psalm 125 may be prayed as a prayer of God's encircling and protection if one wishes for a model.

You may just draw one circle or complete a second circle as well while prayerfully listening and being attentive to God's presence.

Finish by standing still embraced by this circle, feeling God's love and peace wrapping around your entire being, knowing that this presence goes with you into the world.