



Keeping Sabbath

About this Faith Practice

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

Let's Begin...

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

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



Discovery



Scripture



Discipleship



Christian Tradition



Context and Mission



Future and Vision

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

- ② Locate the Exploration you've chosen

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

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

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

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

Use of Art, Music, and Scripture in Faith Practices

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

Ordering Posters

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

Art

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

From Imaging the Word Poster Sets:

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

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

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

From AllPosters.com:

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

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

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

Music

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

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

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

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

Scripture

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

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

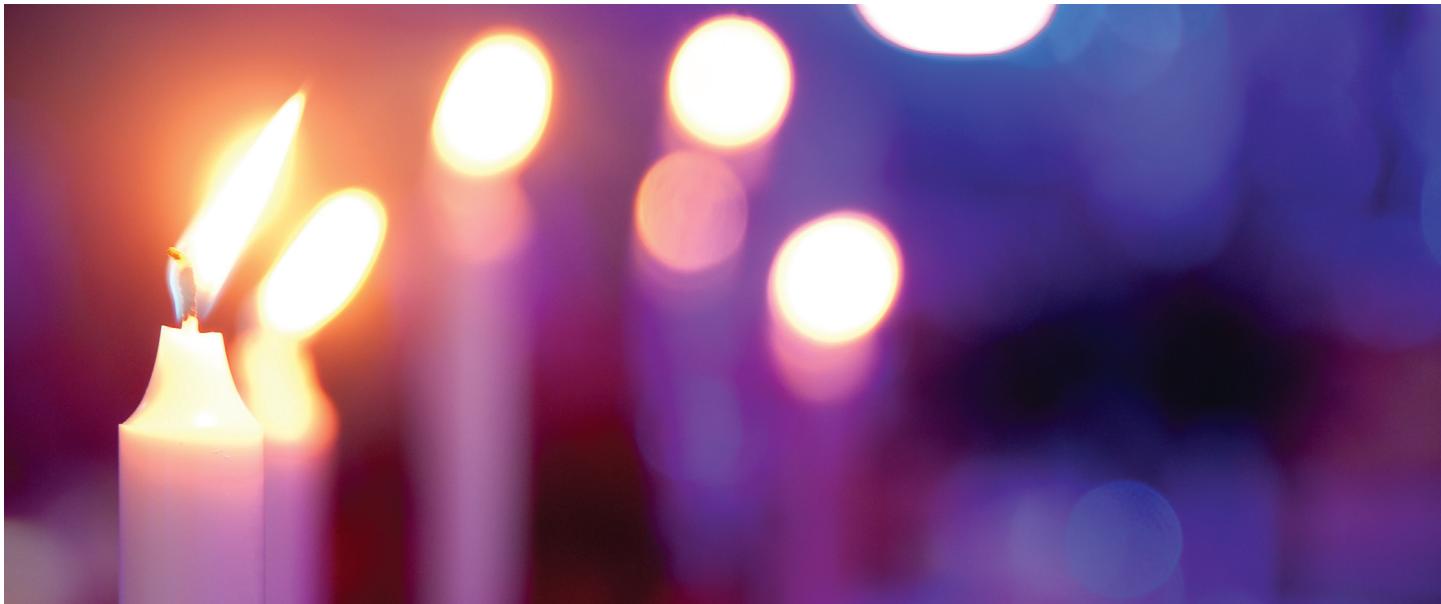
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ADULTS

Keeping Sabbath



Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

God invites us to learn to live in total trust, without anxiety or stress, resting in God's total abundance and provision. As we discover the faith practice of Keeping Sabbath we explore texts about and interpretations of Sabbath. These activities help the leader and adult participants create time and space for Sabbath (and therefore for God), increasing opportunities for creativity, and considering ways to include family and community in Sabbath time.

About this Exploration

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



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Genesis 2:2-4
Luke 12:22-32

Leader Preparation

In the days preceding each session, sit quietly for a few moments. Focus on a meditation candle and meditate on the scriptures. Consider how to assist busy participants in this hurry-up world to rest, refresh, and restore themselves and the rest of God's creation without worry, without burning themselves out. How might you encourage them to set specific times to savor God, family and friends, nature, and beauty?

Prayer: O holy and creative Spirit, thank you for giving us a day of rest. Be with us in our time together and in our personal Sabbath time, and bless our Sabbath time. Help us truly to worship you and count our blessings. Restore your creativity and restfulness within us. Then bless the world through our humble actions and attitudes so that we may bring glory to your name. Amen.

Session Development

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



① Sabbath as Creative Rest (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Genesis 2:2-4 and meditate on it during the week. Invite the participants in the group to do the same. In your personal preparation time, jot down any ideas, aspects, or perceptions that God brings to your attention. Journaling on these might help you be prepared to stimulate your group's discussion later. Have a candle and lighter ready.

Supplies:

- candle and lighter
- Bibles
- whiteboard or newsprint and markers
- meditation music (optional)

Begin by reading aloud Genesis 2:2-4 and Luke 12:22, then light a candle in the center of the group. If available, softly play meditative music on a "creation" theme, such as "All is Well" by Michael Smith, <http://tinyurl.com/yjlx3d9>, or selections from "The Creation" by Franz Joseph Haydn, <http://www.tinyurl.com/367cah5>. Invite individuals to sit quietly and meditate on these scripture passages, reading them in their Bibles and being open to the Spirit. After an appropriate time (before people begin to lose concentration or get fidgety) invite those who are willing to share any insights or perceptions they gained in this meditation, any "Aha!" moments about Sabbath. List on a board or newsprint their responses.

Ask: What types of creation have you participated in, in home and family, career, or hobbies? How do you rest from creating, organizing, or facilitating day-to-day activities? For example, homemakers and parents may share how they stimulate or notice creativity in their children or homes and how they practice Sabbath time as a family and as an individual. Artistically creative folks may describe how they rest and refresh after completing a quilt, musical composition, or poem. Those thinking about creativity in business or organizations may talk about a creative effort, project, or solution and tell how they relax and recoup. How do you catch your breath and revive your spirit after completing a creative endeavor?

What does the idea of God resting from creation suggest to you? What might God be doing during that rest? How might you extend these ideas into Sabbath time for yourself?

② Discovering Sabbath

Leader preparation: Check out the website <http://www.jewfaq.org/shabbat.htm>. Read Genesis 2:2-4 and the following description.

Sabbath Traditions

Muslims, Jews, and Christians all take their ideas of Sabbath from Genesis, but their practices of Sabbath vary widely. Christians may or may not devote an entire day to Sabbath practices, and these practices differ among congregations and individuals. Many celebrate Sabbath worship on either Saturday or Sunday and may feel very strongly about this. For many Christians, Sabbath is a time to worship together in Christian community, with a service of worship on Saturday or Sunday morning and perhaps another service in the evening. Youth group activi-



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

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

ties are often held in the evening. A family meal may be crucial for many. Often leisurely activities, naps, reading the newspaper, visiting, walks or long drives may mark the rest of the day.

Most Muslims celebrate Sabbath on Friday, and its distinguishing feature is noon prayer led by an imam (prayer leader). On Friday, noon prayers differ from those during the rest of the week. Muslims pray five times a day while facing Mecca. The Friday noon prayers include times of standing, bowing, kneeling, prostrating, reciting verses from the Qur'an, and reciting the opening chapter of the Qur'an. The prayer ends with the statement of faith, and the greeting "May the peace, mercy, and blessings of God be upon you." (from MSN Encarta)

Some Jews may or may not practice Sabbath, depending on their tradition (Orthodox, Conservative, Reformed). Traditionally, Jewish Shabbat began at sunset on Friday. Usually people leave work around 2 or 3 p.m. to prepare for Shabbat by cooking food, cleaning the house, dressing up, etc. They attend a short service, and then return home where Shabbat candles are lighted by the woman of the house. A blessing is recited, and the man of the house recites the Kiddush over wine/juice and prays over challah (bread). Then the gathered family eats a festive cooked dinner that was prepared earlier in the day. This meal is followed by a grace and/or joyful singing, with time left to study Torah, talk, and sleep. In the morning on Shabbat, services begin at 9 a.m. and last until about noon. At home, another Kiddush is said and another festive family meal prepared in advance and warmed is eaten. After this, family members were free to study Torah (the first five books of what Christians call the Old Testament or Hebrew scriptures), talk, take a walk, play checkers or other quiet pursuits, nap, and then eat a light meal in the late afternoon. Shabbat ends at nightfall, about 40 minutes after sunset or when three stars are visible in the sky. A concluding ritual, the Havdalah, is conducted with blessings over wine, spices, and candles, and another blessing is said to divide sacred from secular in preparation for the work week.

Supplies:

- candle and lighter
- Bible

Light the meditation candle, read Genesis 2:2-4 to the group, and ask them to meditate on this passage for several minutes. Then summarize the material you gathered from the description above and discuss their impressions and insights. After all have had a chance to participate in the discussion, invite them to continue to think about, journal, or draw ideas for Sabbath-keeping in their own lives during the week.

Offer a blessing, thanking God for the gift of Sabbath rest, for the joy of community, and for guidance as to how Sabbath can become more meaningful, refreshing, and joyful.

**③ Sabbath as Release from Work and Worry**

Leader preparation: Read and meditate on Genesis 2:2-4 and Luke 12:22-32. Find a Kooshy or other soft ball to bring to the group. Read the article "Faith and Ecstasy" from the *Smithsonian* magazine, from December, 2008 <http://www.tinyurl.com/429664>.

Supplies:

- Kooshy or other soft ball or bean bag
- Bible

Light a candle in the center of the group, and read Genesis 2:2-4 and Luke 12:22. Invite the participants to meditate in silence for a few minutes on these texts. If they need a mantra for their meditation, suggest that they silently repeat the word "rest" as a focus. Remind the group to breathe slowly and relax their muscles as they do this.

After meditating, ask group to stand (or sit, if standing is difficult) in place. Gently toss a large, soft ball (a Kooshy is fine) back and forth to one another. As they toss the ball, have them call out a word that brings joy or laughter to them.

Reread Luke 12:22 and use this prayer or one of your own: *Creator God, you bless us with joy and with rest. Keep us carefree and unhurried during the coming weeks. Help us become aware of your abundance and creativity in our play and our work. Remind us that you are God and that your love fills and enables us to live in confidence and peace. We praise you and want to do your work without worry. Touch and refresh our minds, bodies, and spirits as we go our way. Amen.*

Share the highlights you gleaned from reading the *Smithsonian* article, "Faith and Ecsasy." If possible, distribute copies for each person to read. Allow time for reading.

Discerning & Deciding Activities**④ Sabbath as Creative Peace**

Leader preparation: Read Genesis 2:2-4 and Luke 12:22–28, meditating on these passages throughout the week.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- whiteboard or newsprint and markers
- paper or index cards and pencils/pens

Individually read Genesis 2:2-4 and Luke 12:22-28. Invite the group members to brainstorm creative ideas about Sabbath peace, such as rest from creating, letting go of a sense of being driven, enjoying community, or other ideas they suggest. In what ways can they relate this to their daily activities in home and family, career, or hobbies? What are some nontraditional ways to extend creativity, such as considering a creative process or solution to congregational or family conflict? Invite the participants to name ways to release worry and stress from these activities.



On the newsprint or whiteboard, list their key words and ideas. Distribute paper or index cards and ask each person to choose one or more of the group's ideas to practice in the coming week.

Prayer: Creator God, thank you for modeling how to work and how to rest. Keep us on track with this balance you have established for us. We invite your restful, joyful, creative Holy Spirit to remind, empower, and energize us in this coming week. Bless us and keep us focused on your joy and peace and possibilities. In the name of Christ we ask it. Amen.

⑤ “The Dance of Youth”

Leader preparation: Download or ask your church musician(s) to record “I Woke Up This Morning” (tune: WOKE UP THIS MORNING). See <http://www.tinyurl.com/37m2ztb>.

If you plan to have the group sing along, print the words large enough for everyone to read, or display it with a projector. Display the poster so that everyone will be able to see it.

Supplies:

- poster “The Dance of Youth” by Pablo Picasso,
<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters7>
- the hymn “I Woke Up This Morning”

Invite the participants to sit in a circle and study the poster “The Dance of Youth” by Picasso. These or similar questions may stimulate creative discussion: What feelings does this stir in you? If you were painting a similar picture, what colors would you use? What might have stirred these figures to dance? How might that feeling be incorporated into Sabbath? In what ways could corporate worship be more joyful for you? (Share these suggestions later with your pastor, worship leader, or music director). In your individual or family Sabbath time, how might you experience more freedom and exuberance? Where might God be in this picture?

Play the hymn “I Woke Up This Morning” <http://www.tinyurl.com/37m2ztb>, and invite the group to create their own verses and movement or dance steps as they sing along. It would help to provide the words in large print. It might be helpful to have them close their eyes if they are self-conscious about moving joyfully in front of others. Encourage them to loosen up any tight muscles, raise hands in praise, smile, etc., as they dance.

After the music, sit in a circle and invite everyone to name one or two occasions when they felt very relaxed, playful, and stress-free.

Pray together the Prayer of Jesus.

⑥ One Boy’s Sabbath

Leader preparation: Get a copy of the book *Leaving Church: A Memoir of Faith* by Barbara Brown Taylor (HarperOne, 2006) <http://www.tinyurl.com/23kcnn9>. Read the story of basketball player David from pages 136–37. Reread Genesis 2:2-4 and Luke 12:22-32. Journal or meditate on how this Sabbath-type attitude can penetrate our entire week, as well as giving a model for Sabbath.

**Supplies:**

- Bible

Tell or read Barbara Brown Taylor's story in *Leaving Church: A Memoir of Faith*, page 136, <http://www.tinyurl.com/23kcnn9>, about a school classmate who was a talented basketball player, but refused to play on Shabbat. He welcomed team members into his home after the game on Friday nights, but did not play, as Shabbat was always honored. This so impressed her and her classmates that she never forgot his devotion and joy. There is a similar story line in the 1981 movie *Chariots of Fire*, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2vpk536>, about two young British sprinters competing for fame in the 1924 Olympics. Eric, a devout Scottish missionary, runs because he knows it must please God. Harold, the son of a Jew, runs to prove his place in Cambridge society. In a warm-up 100 meter race, Eric defeats Harold, who hires a pro trainer to prepare him. Eric, whose qualifying heat is scheduled for a Sunday, refuses to run despite pressure from the Olympic committee. How can we be that firm in our Sabbath time designation? This incident happened many years ago, and the world has changed dramatically. Could a modern David or Eric even survive on a sports team today? How can we practice Sabbath in our culture today? Do we experience David's joy and fulfillment as part of it?

Joy is one hallmark of Sabbath. Invite the group to respond to this statement. What feelings do you associate with Sabbath? Then invite them to share their personal Sabbath memories from the past and their current practices. How might we re-create Sabbath to reflect more joy and less rigidity? What practices might emphasize the break from the "secular" week that precede Sabbath, and then help us prepare for the hectic work week to come? Do we need more ritual, or less? Do you celebrate Sabbath with family or friends, or just relax by yourself? Allow plenty of time for discussion. The participants may come up with ideas about how the congregation could incorporate communal Sabbath time, as well as personal Sabbath rest and celebration.

Close with sentence prayers offered by group members.

Sending & Serving Activities**7 Our Church, Local Sabbath (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Review the history of your congregation. If you are a newcomer, a long-time member might provide valuable stories. (Many churches have a printed history that was prepared for an anniversary celebration.) Consider inviting the church historian to participate in this activity. Your congregation may not have an appointed church historian, but there is someone in the congregation who informally holds that position.

Supplies:

- whiteboard or newsprint and markers

Invite the group to recall some events in the history of the congregation. What were the most significant celebrations or events? What challenges has the congregation faced? How were those resolved? What challenges do they think still lie ahead? If they came to this congregation from another church, what has touched them there and here? How does this congregation honor Sabbath? Ask a volunteer to record responses on the whiteboard or newsprint. You may want to copy



these for the pastors or worship leaders. If there is time, ask the participants how they would like to influence or shape the church's future.

Examine your congregation's rituals of welcome. Invite the group to recall the first scene or moment a stranger finds when entering your community. In what ways is hospitality obvious? How can hospitality be made obvious in these moments of first entry?

Closing prayer: Invite the group to offer sentence prayers about the future of the church and of blessing for the Sabbath.

❸ Your House, Your Sabbath

Leader Preparation: To enhance your understanding of this activity, check out the website <http://www.tinyurl.com/293lxh8>. Read and meditate on Genesis 2:2–4 and Luke 12:22–32.

Supplies:

- paper and pencils
- candle and lighter

Light a meditation candle and very slowly and softly say something like: "We celebrate Sabbath at church in the service of worship, but we also honor Sabbath in our homes. Close your eyes and picture where you live, each room, the way the residents (or pets) interact in these spaces, and how you spend time individually and communally there." Give a few minutes for reflection.

Distribute pencils and paper. Ask people to draw a rough floor plan of their current living quarters including all the rooms as well as any outdoor space. Note in each room the number of minutes each day they estimate they spend there. Label that time with a "P" for personal and "F" for family time. How much time do they spend working in each space?

When the group finishes the task, invite individuals to share any surprises or discoveries they made. Ask: How important are reflection, reading, napping, family, and friends time and other "Sabbath" pursuits? How might you incorporate these ideas in various parts of your home? What changes might you make in the way you spend your time? Encourage them to share their reflections with those with whom they live.

Blessing: *God, be in our hearts and homes this week. Show us how to celebrate, sanctify, and enjoy our homes without being stressed over them, and to be thankful for all we have. Bless each room in our homes, and bless each of us as we practice Sabbath there this week. Amen.*

❹ Being Sabbath to a Hectic World

Leader preparation: View the story of "Johnny the Bagger," <http://www.tinyurl.com/37z3gev>.

List ideas about how to incorporate your day-to-day activities into mini-Sabbaths, quietly bringing peace, joy, and God's love to those you meet.

Supplies:

- white board or newsprint, and markers
- computer access to view "Johnny the Bagger"

View the video story of "Johnny the Bagger." If you do not have the capability to project the video, just tell the story. Ask: How might each of us "do Sabbath"



in quiet, unobtrusive ways throughout our daily life? How might we be God's love to each person we meet? How might our attitudes and actions reflect Sabbath peace? How might our day-to-day life touch others? How can we experience moments of Sabbath blessing and joy in these daily events? Have you met any "Johnny" types in your daily life? Discuss how Christ's life modeled union with God and congruence of God's law and God's grace in new (and often startling) ways. How can we bring God's love and healing into daily life in nonjudgmental, nonintrusive ways? Invite the participants to name at least one activity to try during the following week.

Prayer: God of joy, righteousness, and peace, help us to reflect your justice, mercy, and compassion this week, and to be light to those whose lives we touch. Help us to notice others and to see the blessings you provide in small ways each day. Let our lives bring you glory. Amen.

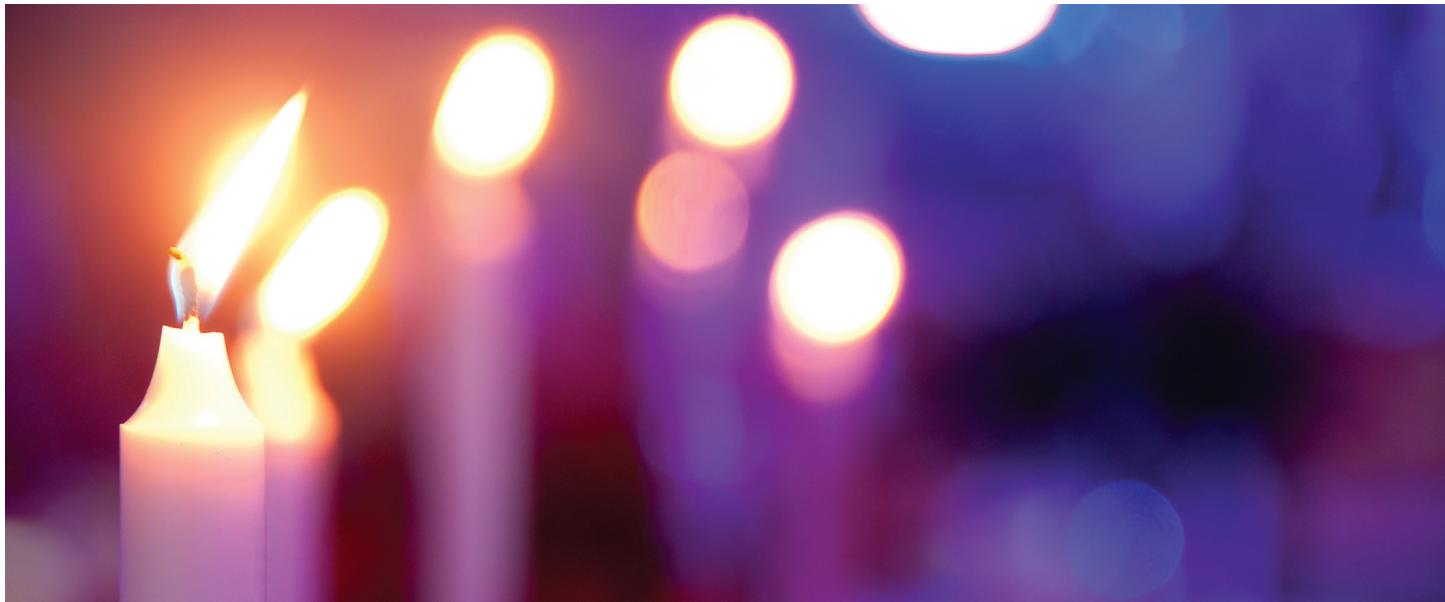
Reflect

Meditate on the questions and scriptures in this session. How do we enact both "inner" and "outer" Sabbath practices? In our too-busy world, is it even possible to honor Sabbath moments? What creative practices and activities might witness our dedication to Sabbath? How might we deepen our inner life and allow Spirit to "flow"?



ADULTS

Keeping Sabbath



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

Adults yearn for moments of rest. When we study the scriptures that command, allow, and encourage us to actually live these times, we are refreshed and more open to living, in the ways of Jesus Christ, and the Bible becomes a relevant and exciting guide. We are invited to become authentic living beings in a world that desperately needs Christ's light and life, and the Bible shows us practical, simple ways to do so.

About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Exodus 20:1-17
Mark 2:23--3:6

Leader Preparation

Adults desire meaning in their lives and in the lives of others. Ponder how we can discover and grow the deeper meaning of our personal existence and open paths to allow and assist others in doing this, too. Meditate on these questions as you prepare this session. Become aware of taste, touch, scent, and sound. Appreciate how God supplies, touches, and embellishes us through the senses. Consider how each person learns differently, experiencing life in very specific nuances, and how God reaches us in very personalized ways. Explore God's world, incorporating creative play and awareness in your day-to-day life. Ask God to guide you to see practical, stress-free ways to love and serve the world around you, and bring your insights into the group.

Prayer: O God, we repent of ways we have not hallowed and honored your Sabbath in the past. Help and guide us to holier and more creative ways to celebrate your Sabbath and to accept and treasure its gifts. Give us courage to see and understand this lovely and immortal gift and to long for the day when our Sabbath will be an eternal joy. Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from 9 activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from Exploring and Engaging, at least one from Discerning and Deciding, and at least

Exploring & Engaging Activities**① Envisioning Holiness/Wholeness (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Read Mark 2:23--3:6 and Exodus 20:1-17. Ponder these and list any questions or points that stand out from your study. This activity may help the group members consider Sabbath as a communal practice as well as an individual practice of piety.

Supplies:

- whiteboard or newsprint and markers
- tripod with paper or poster board that can be mounted in front of the group
- candle and lighter
- Bibles

Light a candle in the front or center of the room. Gather the participants into groups of three or four. Ask each group to read the scriptures silently, then to take turns sharing what questions, insights, or other points arise from their reading. Ask a volunteer in each group to write down these ideas for further discussion when the groups come together.

After everyone has had a chance to share in the small groups, bring the small groups together. Ask for a reporter from each group to share succinctly their points with the larger group.

Discuss how these stories from the scriptures were given and lived out in community, rather than alone. How might your group honor Sabbath today? How might your congregation? What new practices/openness/worship might become part of communal Sabbath? How might the group incorporate your points on the lists into community Sabbath? From this discussion you may want to set a date to create a mini-drama based on these ideas to present to the congregation.

Close with sentence prayers from the participants asking for insight and guidance in shaping intent into action.

② God's Gift of Sabbath Time

Leader preparation: Read Exodus 20:1-17 in both the New Revised Standard Version and *The Message*. Obtain a copy of Abraham Joshua Heschel's book *The Sabbath* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), <http://www.tinyurl.com/33elpag>, and read the short section "Thou Art One," pages 51-55; a brief section starting at the bottom of page 81 and continuing through the top of page 83 on "Holiness in Time"; and the great discourse on time on pages 98-101 in the Epilogue. Meditate on these readings throughout the week preceding the session, noting any questions, ideas, or insights that occur to you. This activity may help the group members enrich their understanding of Sabbath and may introduce the ideas of Sabbath as time, rather than just activity.

Supplies:

- candle and lighter
- Bible

Light a meditation candle after everyone is seated, preferably in a semicircle or an arrangement where the group can face one another. Read aloud Exodus 20:1-17,



one from Sending and Serving. The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation using supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

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

and invite the participants to meditate on this for a few minutes. Invite comments or perceptions from the group. If they need a starting point, share some of your own insights. These or similar questions might be helpful: Notice how God begins the passage and stresses, “I am the Sovereign your God.” Why do you think this is stressed? In the first seven verses, God emphasizes God’s holiness, but verses 8–11 are a lengthy discourse on the Sabbath. Why the transition? (Notice how the chapter transitions after that into direct commands designed to protect and mature the people of God.)

Discuss the meaning of Sabbath to Old Testament historians, then note (or read) a bit of Heschel’s essay about Sabbath as bride, queen, holiness, resurrection, gift, and the continual process of creation. Invite further comments on Sabbath as bride or gift.

③ Sabbath Serving Those in Need

Leader preparation: Study Mark 2:23—3:6. Also read the story of David and the holy bread from 1 Samuel 21:1–6. Eat one meal of only bread (whole grain if possible) and water during the week preceding this session, recalling the hunger of David, Jesus, and the disciples. Notice how Jesus does not even touch the hand of the man he heals in the Mark 3 passage. This session may help the participants open up to in-depth understanding of real-life experiences of fear, physical hunger, and need and link this understanding to meeting some needs around them.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- white board or newsprint and markers
- candle and lighter

Light a candle. Distribute Bibles. Ask the group to read Mark 2:23—3:6 and ponder the passage for a few moments in silence. Then ask them to read 1 Samuel 21:1–6. Put this reading in context by reminding them that it occurs just after Jonathan warns David that King Saul is intent on killing David. David and his small band of followers are hiding, without time for any provisions, running for their lives. List key words or ideas that these readings evoked such as panic, hunger, desperation, risk, decision.

Turn back to Mark 2:23–28. Invite the group members to discuss this passage in the context of the 1 Samuel background and again list key ideas or words, such as traveling in a strange country, hunger, need.

Invite them to discuss Jesus’ statement that “the Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath; so the Son of Man is sovereign even of the Sabbath.” What does this mean to them? How is Christ sovereign of Sabbath in this day and age? Who in our community might be hungry for food or thirsty for good news?

Read Mark 3:1–6, and discuss the desperation of a devastating medical challenge, the importance in Jesus’ time of the Pharisees’ interpretation of and emphasis on the law, and how that interpretation limited people’s concept of God, individual potential, compassion and service to one another. Who do you know that is facing a medical challenge? Who might feel alienated or unwelcome in church? What might your group do about these situations? Invite the group during the coming week to consider activities that might be expedient or beneficial on the Sabbath, and how the group might take first steps to address one or two of these situations.

Blessing: *Thank you, God of Sabbath and all that is, for the abundance and peace these words of scripture offer us. Help us to see the real human needs around us, as well as the hunger and thirst and brokenness in ourselves. We ask your blessing and strength and healing as we minister to ourselves and others this week. Amen.*

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ How Do We Celebrate Sabbath? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Mark 2:23--3:6 and Exodus 20:1-17. Meditate on the scriptures and the book passage, noting any insights or questions you might share. If possible, attend a Shabbat service or share a meal with Jewish friends to enhance your own understanding. If weather and location permit, hold this session outdoors in a warm but shady area of green space – perhaps the church lawn, a meditation garden, or even a nature center if available. This activity may help the group members shift from Sabbath-doing to Sabbath-being, and will be especially helpful to type-A overachievers who may be burning themselves out in good works. (Optional: Obtain the book *Leaving Church: A Memoir of Faith* by Barbara Brown Taylor (HarperOne, 2006) <http://www.tinyurl.com/23kcnn9>, and study the section on “Losing,” especially pages 134 [last paragraph] through 142.)

Supplies:

- Bibles

When everyone is seated, preferably in a semicircle facing a scenic or colorful vista, hand out Bibles. Invite everyone to read the scriptures silently. Invite the participants to close their eyes and let the readings sift through their subconscious as they become conscious of breathing slowly and regularly, in and out, relaxing minds and muscles. After a few minutes, invite the participants to open their eyes and share anything that stood out, impressed, or restored them during these few minutes or during the readings.

Invite them to really *look* at their surroundings. Consider how Jesus used seeing, touching, and tasting as well as words to grow his disciples' knowledge of God. Ask: What colors, textures, sounds, and scents do you notice? Is this a place that helps you *feel* Sabbath? (Some people are afraid of wide open spaces.) Do you feel God's presence more strongly here than in other places? Discuss comments. Invite them to concentrate and visualize the places, activities, people that help them feel God's holiness and joy.

Close with sentence prayers celebrating the day and God's Spirit in it.

⑤ Sabbath Supper

Leader preparation: Read Exodus 20:1-17 and download the Shabbat Evening Home Ritual from <http://www.jewfaq.org/shabbat.htm> for your own study. The purpose of this activity is to acquaint the participants with a traditional Shabbat ritual meal and to use the senses, especially taste and scent, to heighten awareness of the Holy. Invite a Jewish family or rabbi to lead this service or at least advise you. Arrange for volunteers to bake challah bread (see Activity 9) and prepare a slow-cooked stew such as cholent (a historically Jewish Sabbath stew). Have grape juice, water, and eating utensils ready for the group. (You might also do this on a larger scale for the entire church, beginning the service with the prayers, having the regular service, then breaking for the meal -- prepared by volunteers potluck-style -- and final blessings.)

**Supplies:**

- food listed above
- a basin and pitcher of water and a towel, or a faucet and towel
- the final blessing, the *birkat ha-mazon*, on an overhead or printed on cards
- two candles and lighter

Invite one of the women in the group to begin by lighting the two candles and reciting the blessing over the candles. Choose someone with a strong dramatic voice, or in responsive reading format alternating phrases read the Kiddush while holding a cup of grape juice. Ask everyone to wash their hands. Read the washing hands blessing after all have finished. Remove the cover (napkin or wrap) from the challah loaves, break the loaves, and ask each person (communion-like) to take a piece. Begin to serve and enjoy the rest of the meal after saying the *birkat ha-mazon* blessing together. When everyone is ready to leave, close with a brief prayer of thanks and sending. Encourage the participants to enjoy the rest of the day as Sabbath, to eat a light supper, and to say a prayer or blessing by candlelight at home when three stars are visible, the sign of the close of Sabbath.

⑥ Discerning Sabbath through Taste and Touch

Leader preparation: Study Mark 2:23–3:6 in several translations if possible, and bring these translations to the session. Note ideas or questions that come to you as you meditate on these scriptures. Find some untreated grains of raw wheat to share with the group. If this is unavailable, substitute tiny cubes of whole grain bread. You will also need something old, wrinkled, or damaged, such as a shriveled prune or a dried pig's ear, something to simulate the feel of a "withered hand." The purpose of this activity is to introduce the element of surprise into Sabbath practice (as Christ so often did) and to incorporate taste and touch to make the Scriptures come alive.

Supplies:

- Bibles in several translations
- grains or raw wheat or tiny cubes of whole grain bread
- prune or dried pig's ear
- candle and lighter

Light a meditation candle and read Mark 2:23–3:6. Pass out the other translations, asking for volunteers to read the passage from each of these. Invite everyone to focus on the candle, asking the Holy Spirit to illumine these texts as they meditate.

After a few minutes, blow out the candle and invite the group members to share their questions and insights. Then ask: When have you ever been surprised by God? When has God answered a need in a way you did not expect?

Pass out the grains of untreated wheat or cubes of bread, inviting the participants to taste them, noting the taste and texture. Would this make a filling meal? Note that Jesus provided this for the disciples, as nothing else was apparently available. Discuss how God provides for our real needs, but usually not with a brand-new Ferrari when a used pickup will do.

Pass around the prune or dried pig's ear and invite the group members to focus on the feel. Imagine what it would be like to have a hand that felt like that and that was probably useless. How hard would it be to unbutton clothes, hang a bird feeder, use a tool, or hold a wiggly toddler with the use of only one hand? If someone in the group is handicapped, he or she may be willing to share frustrations. Ask in advance.



Point out the statement in the scripture: "The Pharisees had their eyes on Jesus to see if he would heal him, hoping to catch him in a Sabbath infraction" (Mark 3:2, *The Message*). Discuss this with the group, especially the idea that a trap was set for Jesus; no one seemed to care about the man's need. Ask: When have we been so focused on doing or being "right" that we missed an opportunity to help someone? Or ignored our own need?

Use this prayer or one of your choosing: *God of healing, nurture, and truth, forgive us when we neglect our own needs or the needs of others. Help us shift our focus from "being good" to doing your work and spreading your healing touch and words of truth. Forgive us when we complain that our hunger and need have been satisfied with grains of wheat rather than a full-course banquet. Thank you for all the good things you have given and done for us, especially for the gift of Jesus Christ. Help us to be more mindful of blessing and opportunity in each day. In the name of Christ we ask this. Amen.*

Discuss: What would be different if your congregation adopted this thinking? How would you approach a newcomer? What would the conversation look like? What sensitivities would you need to be aware of and how would you honor God's presence in the midst of a possible enemy or threat? Consider how you would share this story with your congregation. Discuss how you can work together to make your church more welcoming.

Invite the group to name refugees in your community. Be as inclusive as possible. Challenge the group to go beyond naming people from other countries.

Sending & Serving Activities



⑦ Paying Attention (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: If possible, find a location where the group can meet outdoors, such as the church lawn, in an accessible but woodsy path or nature trail, in someone's garden (with permission), or some other location where there is greenery and/or flowers. Provide small drawing pads and pencils/pens for each participant. The purpose of this activity is to encourage the group members to appreciate, experience, and hold sacred God's creation in nature, and to enter into this creation in a unique and meaningful way, to become really aware.

Supplies:

- drawing pad (or paper and book for hard support)
- pens or pencils

Lead the group to the outdoor setting and hand out drawing pads and pencils/pens. Open with a prayer of thanksgiving for Sabbath and for all of God's creation. Mention how many times Jesus and his followers met outdoors and retreated to gardens and outdoor places. Invite the group members to walk down the path or around the garden and to select a spot where they can focus their entire attention on one flower, fern, weed, small bush or sapling, etc. For a few minutes pay complete attention to this one item, excluding other sights/sounds/thoughts, attempting to become part of it.

Now turn completely away from this plant and, without looking at it, sketch it from memory. This does not have actually to resemble the plant (though it often looks surprisingly like it), but the idea is to draw the essence and basic form of it.



Gather the group together, and invite them to share their feelings, their discoveries or frustrations, etc. Ask those who are willing to share their drawings. Discuss the broader aspect of paying attention, to God and one another, especially on Sabbath, and how much time Jesus and the disciples (as well as many former generations) spent outdoors. Encourage them to schedule time to be in nature, either alone or with family or friends, during the week.

Pray, asking guidance in paying attention to what is in front of us each day.

⑧ Singing Sabbath Peace

Leader preparation: Learn the song "I've Got Peace Like a River" (Tune: PEACE LIKE A RIVER) so you can lead the tune (or find someone with a good strong singing voice or keyboard talent to do this). See <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong9>. Read and ponder Exodus 20:1-17. This activity may help the group members appreciate this spiritual and develop their own creativity in writing a verse and developing a dance or movement that can be presented in church or in another setting, if desired.

Supplies:

- copies of "I've Got Peace Like a River" <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong9>
- white board or newsprint and markers
- paper and pencils

Open with a prayer for creativity and celebration during this time. Read the Exodus passage; then discuss briefly the holiness and celebratory spirit of Sabbath in the Old Testament. Pass out the hymn and either sing the first stanza for the group or have it played so that those who do not know it become familiar with the tune. Invite the group to sing all stanzas.

Divide into groups of three to six people. Assign each group the task of creating another stanza for the hymn. Gather the group back together to sing the new stanzas. You may need to copy the words on a whiteboard or newsprint so all can see them. If there is time, invite the group spontaneously to suggest motions to accompany each stanza, including the new ones, such as doing side-to-side arm waves to imitate a flowing river, pointing to their grinning faces to show joy, and making falling water motions for fountain, etc.

As the session ends, say to one another "May God's peace go with you."



⑨ Baking Challah Bread

Leader preparation: Print copies of the recipe for Challah Bread. This is actually a two-or-three-part activity that requires several hours to complete. The purpose of this activity is to immerse participants in communal bread baking and the actual work of creating Sabbath.

Supplies:

- recipe for Challah Bread, Attachment: activity 9
- ingredients for making challah bread
- oven

Invite everyone to participate in making the bread. If you have a large group, make several batches. As the bread rises, read and discuss Exodus 20:1-17. Talk about how Sabbath commemorates God's provision and blessing, God's gifts to us. In the Jewish tradition the Exodus story is the root of thankfulness and re-



membering, especially at Sabbath. Ask for personal stories about God's provision and/or gifts to individual members to enrich your sharing time. When the bread has finished baking and has cooled, wrap it and distribute to families from the group, but also to those in need or those too fragile to bake their own.

Blessing: Dearest God, thank you for the gift of Sabbath and for the gift of daily bread. Bless these loaves and through them nourish both soul and body of those who enjoy them. May your Holy Spirit bubble up through us as yeast in the world this week. Amen.

Reflect

Reflect on the ideas, insights, and hopes that were mentioned during these activities, and imagine how they might be put into practice or adapted in your congregational life. Use imagination as well as all the senses in celebrating Sabbath in unique and personally meaningful ways, and try to incorporate these ways into personal, family, and community life. Have you noticed anything new or unusual or felt God's presence in more depth during these experiences? How might you include one simple activity into your daily prayer or meditation time? Consider practical actions that may serve the needs of people in your family, congregation, or community and enact one or two small ones this week.

Attachment: Activity 9

Challah Bread

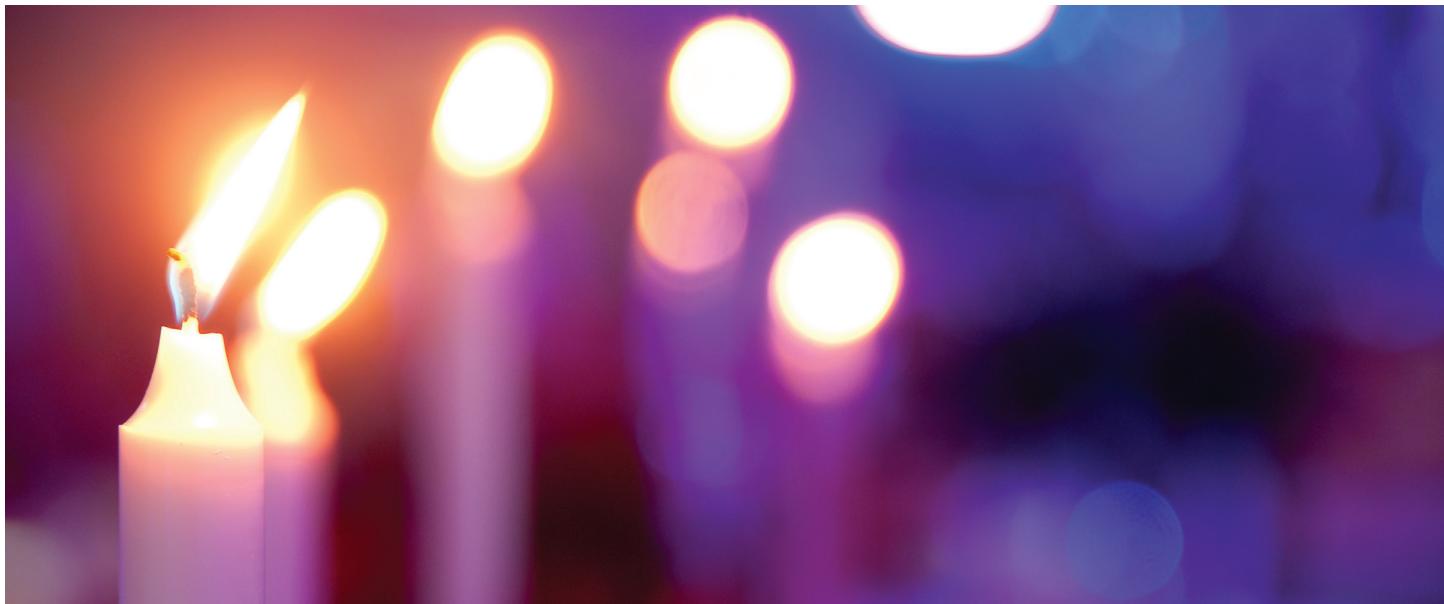
Ingredients

- 2 1/2 cups warm water (110 degrees F/45 degrees C)
- 1 tablespoon active dry yeast
- 1/2 cup honey
- 4 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 3 eggs
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 8 cups unbleached all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon poppy seeds (optional)

Directions

1. In a large bowl, sprinkle yeast over barely warm water. Beat in honey, oil, 2 eggs, and salt. Add the flour one cup at a time, beating after each addition, graduating to kneading with hands as dough thickens. Knead until smooth and elastic and no longer sticky, adding flour as needed. Cover with a damp clean cloth and let rise for 1 1/2 hours or until dough has doubled in bulk.
2. Punch down the risen dough and turn out onto floured board. Divide in half and knead each half for five minutes or so, adding flour as needed to keep from getting sticky. Divide each half into thirds and roll into long snake about 1 1/2 inches in diameter. Pinch the ends of the three snakes together firmly and braid from middle. Either leave as braid, or form into a round braided loaf by bringing ends together, curving braid into a circle, pinch ends together. Grease two baking trays and place finished braid or round on each. Cover with towel and let rise about one hour.
3. Preheat oven to 375 degrees F (190 degrees C).
4. Beat the remaining egg and brush a generous amount over each braid. Sprinkle with poppy seeds if desired.
5. Bake at 375 degrees F (190 degrees C) for about 40 minutes. Bread should have a nice hollow sound when thumped on the bottom. Cool on a rack for at least one hour before slicing.

Keeping Sabbath



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

Disciples follow their leader. In this exploration we learn more about what discipleship means, how it can be understood, and what faith communities can do to be more faithful disciples of Christ. Through exploring and engaging the texts, by sharing our understanding and vision, and by applying what we discover, we can begin to change ourselves and the world. Adults can relate to many perceptions and experiences and may have a depth that brings richness and meaning to these texts. Most will enjoy sharing and even debating their perceptions and insights, and all will learn from one another.

About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Deuteronomy 6:1-9
Luke 6:1-11

Leader Preparation

Adults often love a challenge, and these activities present new ideas, new ways of thinking, and new possibilities. Think through and meditate upon these activities before bringing them to the group, and pray for personal and group insight. These activities invite the participants to chew on some tough questions, so prepare by asking yourself: What is justice? Righteousness? Freedom? Be prepared to share with your group what you have discovered, and to challenge them gently to share, too.

Pray this prayer from Thomas Merton:
My dear God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. I give my day to you and trust you with my future. Amen.

Session Development

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



① Old and New Covenants (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Study Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Mark 6:30-34, 51-56, and Hebrews 8:1-11. Consider the expansion of the covenant in Deuteronomy 6 with Jesus’ actions under the new covenant he was instituting. Think about how Jesus was criticized by some of those who considered themselves guardians of tradition and about their fear, pride, and ignorance in refusing to believe the good news. Prepare a list of ideas and questions you might present to the group to aid their discussion. Arrange the chairs and tables in three small groups for the reading. Prepare to deal with any anti-Semitism that might potentially be a challenge in this activity, and be prepared to use examples, such as Paul in the book of Acts, of Jews who became Christians, and to remind the participants of Christ’s law of love.

Supplies:

- Bibles

As people enter, guide them into three groups and assign one of the texts to each group. Ask the first group to read aloud Deuteronomy 6:1-9, the second to read aloud Mark 7:30-34, 51-56, and the third group to read aloud Hebrews 8:1-11. Invite the groups to work out a dramatic, contemporary enactment showing how a person under the old covenant might have reacted when presented with the new covenant in the two later texts, and how some of them began to listen to Jesus to explore this new look at God’s reign. Following a brief (and probably hilarious, if they can get into the spirit of astonishment that would have been part of that time period) dramatization, allow time for discussion of any emerging insights and emotions.

Offer a prayer about opening our eyes and hearts to God’s revelations and to ways we might allow healing and meet hunger in ourselves and in the larger world.

② Knowing God

Leader preparation: Look up as many names of God as you can in scripture this week. For example, I Am (the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob), Exodus 3:6; Holy One of God (Messiah), Isaiah 1:4 and 55:3-5; Almighty, Genesis 17:1; Shepherd, Psalm 23:1; Father, John 17:1b; Alpha and Omega, Revelation 1:8, and many more. An interesting reference site is <http://www.rosepublishing.com>, which offers free e-charts and other reference works. Also read Deuteronomy 6:1-9 and Luke 6:1-11. Notice that in Deuteronomy 6, God is “the God of your ancestors,” and in Luke 6, Jesus, “the Human One (traditionally, Son of Man) is sovereign of the Sabbath.”

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper and pens or pencils
- concordance

Ask: How did you get your name? Were you named for someone? What story is associated with your name? After a few minutes of sharing, ask participants to read silently both Deuteronomy 6:1-9 and Luke 6:1-11 and to ponder the names of God and Jesus in the texts. Now invite them to skim through the Bible to find as many names for God throughout Old and New Testaments as they can and write



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

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

them down on paper. To facilitate this activity, print out copies of the references you have discovered, download one of the e-charts above, or provide a concordance. Ask people to share the names they discovered. What do these names tell us about God? How do these names describe God? How did our understanding of God change as Jesus began preaching? Challenge them to continue exploring and discovering more about God and Christ in the weeks to follow.

Blessing: *May Jesus Christ protect, uplift, and strengthen you this week and forever. Amen.*

③ Walking toward New Vision

Leader preparation: Locate an outdoor site that has plenty of natural beauty: leafy or needled trees, greenery, bushes, flowering plants or wildflowers, water, mountain or fields in the background. Be sure the site is accessible for your group with walking paths. Walk the paths yourself in advance, if possible, to check things out. Study scriptures that depict Jesus showing how to honor Sabbath in this world, including Luke 6:1-11 and John 5:1-18, and others you know. Think about how Jesus enacted and opened up the concept of Sabbath time and what God's kingdom should be like, infuriating the religious leaders who were worried about laws.

Print copies of this quote by Mother Teresa for each member to take home: "Let us remain as empty as possible so that God can fill us up."

Supplies:

- Bibles
- copies of Mother Teresa quote

Lead your group on a nature walk. Invite the participants to empty themselves, to become still inside, to breathe deeply as they walk, to let go of all concerns/responsibilities, and to become aware of the beauty around them, inviting God to inform and quiet their spirits and minds. Ask them to soak up the colors, fragrances, sounds, to reach out and gently touch leaves of trees or flowers or sand, depending on your terrain, really feeling what is around them. Letting go of cares, being present to the moment and to God, feeling our feelings, and noticing what is happening in this moment are all part of being Sabbath people. Invite the participants to be, rather than to do, on this walk, and to enjoy themselves and God in nature.

After the walk, discuss any insights/revelations/perceptions people want to share. Remind the participants that Sabbath people "need to be calm, the eye of the storm" to serve others and to be clear about God's direction for their own lives (from Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives* [New York: Bantram Books, 1999], page 183). Being present, noticing, listening, and honestly knowing our own emotions are all crucial. It is in our Sabbath moments that we can become more like Jesus Christ. Jesus constantly opened people's minds to new beginnings and new possibilities. What awareness, what new things might God be leading you into?

Pray this prayer from Thomas Merton: *My dear God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. I give my day to you and trust you with my future. Amen.*



Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ Caring as Jesus Did (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Study Luke 6:1–11 and consider how Jesus spent quite a bit of time serving and healing others as well as preaching and teaching. Think of examples you have encountered (or actions you have taken yourself) to “go against the grain” and do good. Look for nontraditional actions or “unsung heroes” this week who might be “God in disguise.”

Supplies: None

Ask: Within the last week, what person in your day-to-day activities modeled Christ-like caring and gentleness to you? Allow a few minutes for brief discussion, and then invite the participants to name times when Jesus shocked religious leaders. Discuss the threat he presented to the status quo and power, and then ask for current examples of those “doing good” or “doing what seems necessary” to bring justice, healing, freedom, and forgiveness and to meet needs. Now invite the group to think of those “unsung heroes” whom they have seen or experienced in action, doing God’s work, making a difference. Discuss the ways our smallest efforts can help others and be portals for God’s love. Then ask the group to make an effort to do one caring deed this week for people they meet in their day-to-day lives and to think of ways to “be Sabbath” to others.

⑤ Walking the Labyrinth

Leader preparation: Locate a labyrinth near you by searching the Internet. Some churches and retreat centers have constructed them. Download the diagram of a labyrinth from <http://www.tinyurl.com/28yd5cj> and make copies for the group. Read and ponder Deuteronomy 6:1–9. Plan transportation to the labyrinth. You might want to walk the labyrinth alone before the group activity and meditate on any insights or feelings that surface.

Supplies:

- means of transportation to labyrinth
- copies of a labyrinth

Before you go, give each person a copy of the small labyrinth and say a little about the purpose of a labyrinth. If there is no labyrinth near you, use the small labyrinth and the eraser end of a pencil to experience walking a labyrinth.

Travel to and walk the labyrinth. Explain that walking the labyrinth is a tool to open oneself to listen and focus on God, another way of “loving the Sovereign with all your heart.” Invite the group members, as they walk this labyrinth, to focus only on God and to be very open to any insights or “Spirit leading” that may follow. Ask them to remain silent as they walk the labyrinth so as not to interrupt anyone’s concentration.

If you have time, share a light meal or coffee afterward to discuss insights and questions about the walking meditation. Invite the group members to keep a journal this week of insights that may come after this experience. The group may express an interest in constructing their own labyrinth, either outdoors on church property or in the building itself, or creating a smaller model labyrinth.



The website noted above has directions. This would be a good congregational and intergenerational project, or even an interfaith project with other groups.

Leave in silence, perhaps just touching hands gently in blessing.

⑥ Spring of Life

Leader preparation: Display the poster “The Public Fountain” in a prominent place, <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>. Study this poster and read Deuteronomy 6:1–9, meditating on verses 4–5, the Shema, this week.

Supplies:

- Bibles of different translations
- copies of the hymn “Take Me to the Water” (Tune: African American spiritual), <http://www.tinyurl.com/2b5u9hz>
- poster “The Public Fountain” by Manuel Alvarez Bravo, <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>
- meditative background music

Invite the participants to meditate silently on the poster as you play meditative music in the background. After a few minutes, break the silence by reading aloud Deuteronomy 6:4–5. Remind the group that Jesus called himself the “water of life.” We can go without food for a long time, but we have to have water to live. Ask: When you think of water, what else comes to mind? What does the child drinking from the fountain symbolize to you? Invite the participants to read Deuteronomy 6:1–9 from various translations and to compare the wording. What does it mean to “love the Sovereign your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might”? How would our lives change if we did this? How would our world change? If we believe Jesus Christ is the water of life, how can we hold and enact this belief in our everyday life? How can we incorporate meditation moments and times of relaxation within our work days? How might we practice Sabbath moments to refocus ourselves on God?

Sing “Take Me to the Water” (Tune: African-American spiritual).

Sending & Serving Activities



⑦ Giving Up and Opportunities (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Luke 6:1–11 and Deuteronomy 6:1–9. You might also refresh your memory of what Isaiah 58:6–14, Matthew 25:31–46, Matthew 12:1–14, and Luke 14:1–6, 12–14 say about righteousness, justice, and living in Sabbath ways.

Supplies:

- paper and pens or pencils
- Bibles

Divide into groups of three or four, with a Bible in each group. Ask each small group to look up one of the scriptures listed above, or others that you think are applicable. Invite them to read the text silently and briefly summarize what it means. Then ask everyone to turn together and read out loud Paul’s words in Galatians 5:1 about freedom. In light of all these liberating scriptures, discuss what this freedom, this new “kingdom,” means to us in day-to-day life. Ask questions



such as: What does Paul mean about Jesus ushering in a new creation? What does he mean by freedom? From what or whom? What does practicing the Sabbath have to do with this?

After the discussion, remind the group members that doing God's work requires paying attention to God's leading in our Sabbath times. It sometimes requires that we let go of something to make room or time for something better. When we are called to do something or spend time with someone (either for our good or theirs), we have to let go of time or ability to do something else. Remind the group, however, that Sabbath is not to become just as stressful and busy as the rest of the week.

Invite each participant to divide a piece of paper into two columns. Title one column "Giving Up" and the other "Opportunities." In the "Giving Up" column list a few small things they could give up; in the other column list a few helpful things this would make room for. For example, I might choose to give up making dessert on Sabbath so I could play a game with my family, or I might free up money spent on eating out on Sabbath so that I could contribute to a current mission need through our denomination.

Give each person a few minutes to write in these columns. Then have them highlight one small change to make today. Choose an accountability partner in their small group with whom to discuss their progress later in the week. At the end of this session, ask if anyone wants to share the lists, but be prepared for silence.

Pray for strength for each member by name as the group ventures into this new effort.



8 Preserving Shema

Leader preparation: Make copies of the handout of the box template for each person. Reference box template, Attachment: Activity 8a and make a trial model. Read and meditate on Deuteronomy 6:1-9. Make copies of Attachment: Activity 8b so that each person in the group will have a copy. Recall how you, your family, or congregation have remembered this scripture and its directive.

Supplies:

- phylactery instructions Attachment: Activity 8a
- Bible
- Small print copy of Deuteronomy 6:4-5 for each person, Attachment: Activity 8b
- poster paper or other heavy paper or cardboard, cut into small rectangles
- scissors
- twine or fancy string/cord
- marking pens or colored pencils
- glue sticks

Begin with a moment of silent reflection. Then ask members to read in unison Deuteronomy 6:1-9. Invite them to share how they remember and practice these instructions. How do we demonstrate that we "love God ... with all that's in you, with all you've got"? How often do we talk about God's commands, among ourselves and with our children/grandchildren? In what ways are we purposeful and joyful in recalling God's acts and promises, and in the way we spend Sabbath time?

Invite the participants to create a phylactery using the box pattern and the various materials available. A phylactery is one of two leather boxes (one on the arm



and one around the head) worn by observant male Jews who are 14-years-old and older. The phylactery is made of leather and contains four scriptures, one of which is Deuteronomy 6:4-5. Assemble and decorate a phylactery (being sure not to glue on the top, but leave it so you can open and close the box) and tie a length of string/cord so that they can “bind” it on wrist, neck, or door/window at home. Distribute the small print verse from Deuteronomy 6:4-5. Put these slips inside the phylactery, and close the top. Again read together the scripture from the Bible. Invite discussion about how these phylacteries might be used, for instance, as a tool to discuss God with other family members or as gifts for the children’s ministry.

Invite sentence prayers from all who choose to participate.



9 Visioning Opportunity

Leader preparation: Learn the song “Open Our Hearts” Attachment: Activity 9.

Supplies:

- music for “Open Our Hearts”
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Ask the group to sit quietly in a semicircle, preferably away from tables. Invite them to get in a comfortable position and to relax their minds and bodies. Then lead them in the song, singing it once for them, and teaching them the tune and the words. Repeat this with them several times until they feel comfortable with the song. Now ask them to close their eyes and to hum just the tune as they visualize God as Spirit and light, coming into them. If they feel comfortable doing this, invite them to raise their arms and move with the tune as they keep their eyes closed.

Invite the group gently back to the present. Ask if anyone would like to share any insights, pictures, presence that they experienced. Ask: How might God be leading us individually and as a group to use visualization to open ourselves to God’s revelation? How can we do acts of helpfulness that really make a difference in our community while still allowing rest during our Sabbath time?

Invite ideas for simple ways the group and/or individuals might make a difference in the community around them. List these on the newsprint or whiteboard. Select one or two ideas that the members would be willing to try as a group, perhaps gathering food for a food pantry or working on a set day at a local mission or service center. Set a future date to carry out this activity.

Close by singing “Open Our Hearts.”

Reflect

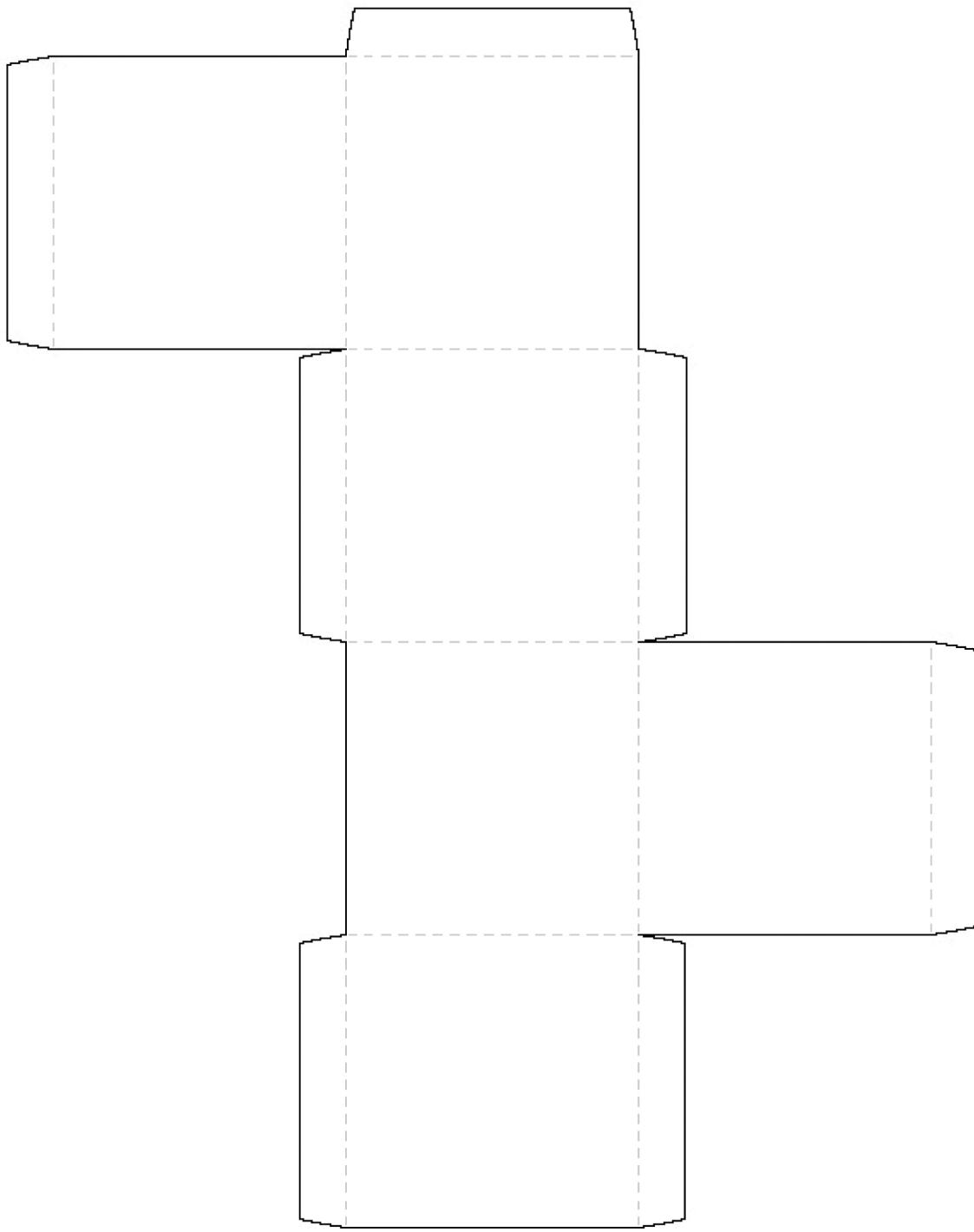
These activities lead us to expand and open ourselves, individually and then as a community, to what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. What new perceptions, questions, or paradoxes do these activities stir up in your spiritual journey? Does working in a small group help you sort these out and/or arrive at new enlightenment? What future activities might you do to help others live into Sabbath?

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Attachment: Activity 8a

Print this template onto a full sheet of heavy paper, cut it out on the black lines, fold on the dotted lines, and then glue the flaps to the inside of the box so no one can see them. Do not glue the top flap if you want the box to be able to open and close.



Attachment: Activity 8b

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.—Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.—Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.—Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.—Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.—Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.—Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.—Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.—Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.—Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.—Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.—Deuteronomy 6:4-5



Attachment: Activity 9

Open Our Hearts

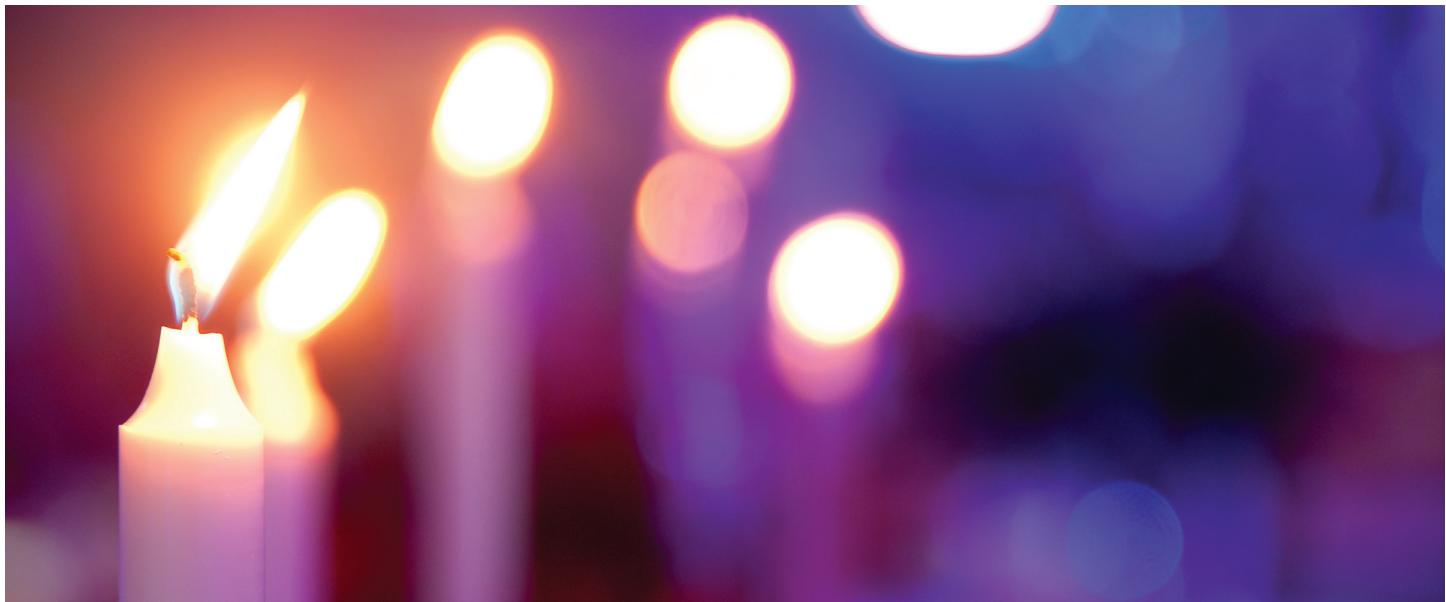
L-152

The musical score consists of two systems of music. The first system starts with a vocal line and three instrumental parts: Djembe, Claves, and Shaker. The vocal line has lyrics: "O - pen our hearts to the Word of your love," followed by a repeat sign and a section break. The instrumental parts provide rhythmic patterns. The second system continues with the vocal line and the same three instrumental parts, with lyrics: "strength - en our minds to un-der- stand your truth," followed by a repeat sign and a section break. The instrumental parts continue their rhythmic patterns.

Repeat as desired, with increasing intensity.

Words and Music: Joe Rowley. Copyright ©2005. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Keeping Sabbath



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

Christian tradition plays an important part in keeping the Sabbath. In the Old Testament, we are given rules regarding Sabbath and also an imperative to consider and assist those who are poor, powerless, and unable to care for themselves. In the New Testament, Jesus models self-serving and sacrifice, yet encourages his disciples to care for themselves and their physical and spiritual needs. We are to model our Sabbath practices on both of these aspects, and these activities will encourage us to ask hard questions and consider possibilities for our individual and corporate lives.

About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Isaiah 58:9b-14
Mark 6:30-35, 53-56.

Leader Preparation

Read the scriptures well in advance and pray and meditate on them, perhaps listening to the suggested music. Study the artwork to be used, and ask yourself questions such as: How do I “give myself” yet also care for myself, combining the dual tasks of “doing” and “being” God’s light in our dark world? How do I keep from burnout? Think about Jesus’ life, how he regularly took time out to pray and be away from the crowds, yet seemed to be available most of the time. What part does regular Sabbath time and/or prayer time play in my life? Whom do you know that models these patterns well? Think through what it means to be joyful yet self-giving and to share the joy and freedom of Jesus’ life with others who may be limited in their understanding of God, self, and Sabbath.

Prayer: *May the peace of God surround you, may the power of the Holy Spirit fill you, and may the truth and light of Jesus Christ guide you this week. Amen.*

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from 9 activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from Exploring and Engaging, at least one from Discerning and Deciding, and at least one from Sending and Serving. The first activity in each category is designed for

Exploring & Engaging Activities



① Pondering Isaiah (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Study Isaiah 58:9b-14 and note any ideas, perceptions, and insights that come to you.

Supplies:

- Bibles, preferably a variety of translations
- candle and lighter

Light the meditation candle. Invite the participants to sit in a comfortable position, to breathe deeply, and to relax their muscles as they silently release any worries, responsibilities, or burdens into God’s hands for the day. After a few moments, invite several volunteers to each read one verse of Isaiah 58:9b-14. Ask those with other translations to note when there is a difference in the language. Then invite reflections: What were the “Aha!” moments for you? What words or phrases stood out? What questions does this text raise for you? Notice and discuss the “if—then” conditional statements in this passage, and what that might imply for us today.

Invite those who are willing to share any specific direction they may have received, or a specific burden they need the group’s prayers to help them release.

As you close, ask participants to try journaling on this text during the week, and to note any other insights, directions, or leading they sense.

Close with sentence prayers by the group members as they wish to share.



② Life-giving Water

Leader preparation: Read Mark 6:30-35, 53-56. Study the poster, letting its image and insights bubble up in you. Set up a table with a pitcher full of water, a bowl of water, and a glass or cup for each participant.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- poster “The Public Fountain” by Manuel Alvarez Bravo, <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>
- a large bowl, a pitcher, small juice glasses or disposable cups (per your congregational policy)

Invite the group to gather at one table where there is a pitcher and a bowl in the center and glasses at each place. Direct attention to the poster “The Public Fountain,” as you read slowly Mark 6:30-34, 53-56. Note that this incident follows Jesus’ learning of John the Baptist’s execution. Invite the participants to meditate on the poster and this passage for a few moments. Ask: What insights, thoughts, or perceptions came to you?

Ask the group to recall stories of Jesus that involve water. Where was he? Who else was in the story? What did the story reveal about Jesus or God’s reign? You might remind them of these stories: Jesus’ baptism, water into wine at the wedding in Cana, the Samaritan woman at the well, stilling the storm, calling the disciples, washing the disciples’ feet, etc.

Talk about times in our lives when water plays a significant part, such as baptism



"easy preparation" (able to be done with minimal preparation using supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- * To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.
- * To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 using at least one activity from each category.

or christening, cleansing, refreshment, moments of birth or death, etc. Allow time to share these memories or insights. Pour water into each small cup and bless the water. Then invite everyone to take a drink. Notice the feel of the water in your mouth and the taste. Imagine this water as the water of life that Christ gives. Feel it refresh you as you swallow and absorb it. Imagine being parched without this life-giving water.

Invite each person to dip a hand or fingers in the bowl of water in remembrance of his or her baptism. Be aware that there may be some members of the group who have not been baptized. Bless each person by name saying, "God bless you" or "Peace be with you."



③ Dancing into Sabbath

Leader preparation: Study the poster "The Dance of Youth,"

<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters7>,

and read Mark 6:30–35, 53–56 and Isaiah 58:9b–14, preferably in *The Message* translation. What do these verses and the poster say to you? Select music (see below) appropriate for meditation for the final dance invention. Perhaps your church musician could make a recording for your use.

Supplies:

- poster "The Dance of Youth," <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters7> by Pablo Picasso
- joyful music

Display the poster so that all can see it. Softly play some joyful music, such as "I Come with Joy" (tune: DOVE OF PEACE), <http://www.tinyurl.com/387cc3f>. Discuss the figures, colors, and energy expressed in the artwork. Remind the participants that quite often Sabbath practice in the Old Testament included exuberant dancing and great joy. Note the images of "glow in the darkness" and "Sabbath as a day of joy" in the Isaiah 58 passage (*The Message* translation). Ask: How might we include such joy as a practice of holiness in our private and corporate worship? What stirs us to dancing or other joyful movement (walking, tai chi, yoga, etc.)? How might we share the love, joy, and overflowing bounty of Christ with those in need in our community? How might liturgical dance add to the service of worship?

Invite the group to create a dance of joy to the hymn "I Come with Joy," having the dance steps reflect the words of the verses.

Benediction: *Go into the world holding this joy, this spirit of celebration, bubbling up within you and spilling over into the world around you. May God abundantly bless you and those whose lives you touch, and bring you blessings from each of them, too. Amen.*

Discerning & Deciding Activities

④ Improvisational Drama (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Isaiah 58:9b-14 and Mark 6:30-34, 53-56, and review Exodus 20:9-11. Meditate and journal your insights throughout the week comparing Old Testament and New Testament attitudes and activity as one way to broaden your understanding of Sabbath. Brainstorm creative, dramatic ways to visualize and enact these scriptures. Provide several Bible translations, including the NRSV and *The Message*.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- music (optional)

If available, play some upbeat music, perhaps praise choruses you have on hand. Read aloud Isaiah 58:9b-14 and Mark 6:30-34, 53-56 and invite the group to respond to these texts. Focus especially on the attitudes and actions.

Divide the group into small groups of three or four. Assign each small group a section of the scriptures with the instruction to create an improvisational drama to illustrate the text. For example, those assigned Isaiah 58:9b might stage a demonstration of unfair labor or family practices and victim blaming. The group enacting verse 10 might demonstrate preparing a meal at a soup kitchen or handing out supplies to a shelter, or being the ones needing to be fed. The group assigned verse 11 might become a “bubbling spring” or a fruitful garden. Invite the participants to give full rein to their imaginations! Do this with the key verses in both passages.

Have each group present its improvisation. After all the presentations, invite discussion: How did it feel to become actors and creators? How did it feel to watch as well as to participate in improvisational drama? What new or unexpected insights did you gain in this dramatization? What insights did you gain about “being Sabbath” in the world?

5 Sabbath Box

Leader preparation: In his book *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives* (New York: Bantam Books, 1999), Wayne Muller writes, “A Sabbath box holds items Jews can’t use on Sabbath . . . anything that cannot be taken into sacred space.” This is worth reading when you have time, but for this session, check out <http://www.tinyurl.com/256tbat>, where you can find instructions for making a box from heavy foil or paper or cardboard. If you prefer, ask volunteers or each group member to bring a shoebox-size box from home. The box needs either a removable top or a large slit cut in the top.

Supplies:

- a shoebox or box for each participant
- small slips of paper, perhaps an 8 1/2 x 11 sheet cut into eight pieces
- candle and lighter

Light the meditation candle, read Isaiah 58:9b-14, and lead a prayer such as: *O Holy Spirit, guide us now and help us name concerns and worries we need to discard to celebrate Sabbath in wholesome, holy ways. Help us discern what responsibilities we need to put away for Sabbath, how to divest ourselves of burdens and open up space for your powerful, enlightening work. Amen.*

Pose these or similar questions for the participants to consider as they hear the text: What dominates my Sabbath time, activity, thought? What blocks my concentration on, and celebration of, God? In what ways am I sidelined by “shoulds” and “oughts,” by my own striving, or by the demands of others? What can I eliminate from Sabbath time so that I can focus only on God, and open myself to God’s love, power, and joy?

Provide a Sabbath box for each participant. A Sabbath box is a place to put the things that you carry around, and deliberately “let go” of the attendant uses. Place the items in the box, close the lid, and be done with them until it’s time to deliberately pick them up again. Invite the participants to remove anything that



distracts them from Sabbath, such as a watch, iPod, cell phone, etc., and put the items into the box. They can also write on a small slip of paper anything they want to leave behind, so it doesn't distract them during Sabbath. Put the papers in the box as well. Suggest that on Sabbath eve, morning, or moment (whatever time they set aside for Sabbath), they make a regular practice of divestment and refocusing so that as they begin the Sabbath, they will focus on God and receive God's blessings. After all have had a chance to contribute something to their Sabbath box, ask if any of them want to share what they discarded temporarily. Be prepared to share something yourself.

Prayer: *"If you watch your step on the Sabbath and don't use my holy day for personal advantage, if you treat the Sabbath as a day of joy, God's holy day as a celebration, if you honor it by refusing 'business as usual,' making money, running here and there—then you'll be free to enjoy God!"* (Isaiah 58:14 The Message).

⑥ A Time of Rest

Leader preparation: Obtain Abraham Joshua Heschel's classic book, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1951), <http://www.tinyurl.com/33elpag>. Read pages 81 at the very bottom, 82-83, and 98-101 in preparation. Consider how to present these ideas to your group. Perhaps develop a list of questions or discussion starters to use with the group. Study Mark 6:30-34, 53-56 and jot down any insights that come to you.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- candle and lighter
- meditative music

Light a meditation candle and play soft, nonintrusive meditation music such as Taize chants, flute, or harp music. Invite the participants to sit in a comfortable position, close their eyes, breathe deeply and slowly, and visualize a restful, lovely place — a real or imaginary place that brings them peace. Sit for a few minutes in this visualized place, savoring its beauty and restfulness while breathing deeply. After a few moments invite those who are willing to share their experience.

Invite a volunteer to read Mark 6:30-34, 53-56. Pose these or similar questions for discussion: Why did Jesus invite his disciples to join him in a time of rest? If Christ needed rest, why do we so often deny ourselves this rest? How can we celebrate Sabbath in our frantically busy culture? How can pastors, musicians, health-care workers, caregivers, parents, police and firefighters, and others whose Sabbath is necessarily a work day, create space really to rest? What might this rest look and feel like?

Present Heschel's analogy of Sabbath to time, and how God transcends and makes time eternal. How might this broaden our ideas about Sabbath when there is so much work to do?

Blessing: *May the peace of God surround you, may the power of the Holy Spirit fill you, and may the truth and light of Jesus Christ guide you this week. Amen.*



Sending & Serving Activities



⑦ Survey of Gifts in Community (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Review Mark 6:30–35, 53–56, and Isaiah 58:9b–14 this week. A goal in this session is to develop an informal survey of time and talents that members, or other church leaders, may choose to use to help realize their own unique gifts and talents and imagine ways to use these and their time in creating Sabbath in more meaningful ways.

Supplies:

- paper and pencils
- Bibles
- white board or newsprint and markers

Ask the participants to read Mark 6:30–34 and 53–56 and Isaiah 58:9b–14 in a way that is comfortable for your group: aloud, silently, taking turns, one volunteer read the whole passage, etc. Discuss the passages briefly, noting how Jesus dealt with these situations.

Distribute paper and pencils. Ask the participants to work in groups of three or four to create a short survey of time, talents, and availability. What questions might you pose on the survey to help people identify their own gifts of time, talent, and availability? How might a survey help people think about using these gifts to create Sabbath for themselves and for others?

Invite each group to read its survey to the entire gathering. Note on a whiteboard or newsprint common elements of these results. Ask a volunteer to collate this information and design a printed survey for the congregation. Present this to the governing body, pastor, and others who might need to approve the content before you distribute this to the congregation at a future date. The survey may help the congregation discover gifts, talents, and availability that have not been appreciated or utilized.

⑧ Fixed on Jesus

Leader preparation: Learn the song “I Woke Up This Morning” (Tune: WOKE UP THIS MORNING), and be prepared to teach it to the group. If possible, have the music taped so that people can hear at least the melody line.

See <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong8>.

Supplies:

- music “I Woke Up This Morning,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong8>
- recording (optional), <http://www.tinyurl.com/37m2ztb>

If available, play the music for “I Woke Up This Morning.” Ask: How did you feel this morning when you awoke? What were your first thoughts? What would be your verse of this song? Teach the hymn and sing it several times together. Talk about how this spiritual was adapted during the civil rights movement, where a third stanza, “Woke up this morning with my mind on freedom,” was added. Sing the spiritual with this third stanza.

Invite the participants to stand and put motions to the words. Use hand and arm movements and even dance steps. Be prepared for a lot of laughter and some embarrassment, but encourage people to loosen up and be creative (after all, there are only three stanzas). If the group is willing, arrange with the worship leader



or children's choir director to teach this spiritual and dance to a children's group. You might also present it as part of a service of worship or as part of a visit to those who are homebound or in a long-term care facility.

Close by thanking the participants for their willingness to experience bodily freedom, and thanking God for music, community, laughter, and creativity.

9 Sabbath Extended

Leader preparation: Read Mark 6:30-34, 58-56 and Isaiah 58:9b-14. Think about Sabbath traditions in your community and how Sabbath time is spent.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- posters "Going to Church," <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPoster8>, by William H. Johnson and "Midday Rest," <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters9>, (after Millet), c.1890 by Vincent van Gogh
- candle and lighter

Light the candle and invite the participants to read the Mark passage, reading collectively, alternating verses with you. Repeat this process with the Isaiah passage. Initiate a brief discussion of any thoughts or insights inspired by the texts.

Display the posters "Going to Church" and "Midday Rest." Pose these or similar questions for reflection: What is the story behind this picture? What, do you think, is the Sabbath tradition of the people in the picture? What are some of your family Sabbath traditions? In what ways have events or the culture of your community changed the way people practice Sabbath? Does your community have laws that protect Sabbath time, such as "blue laws"?

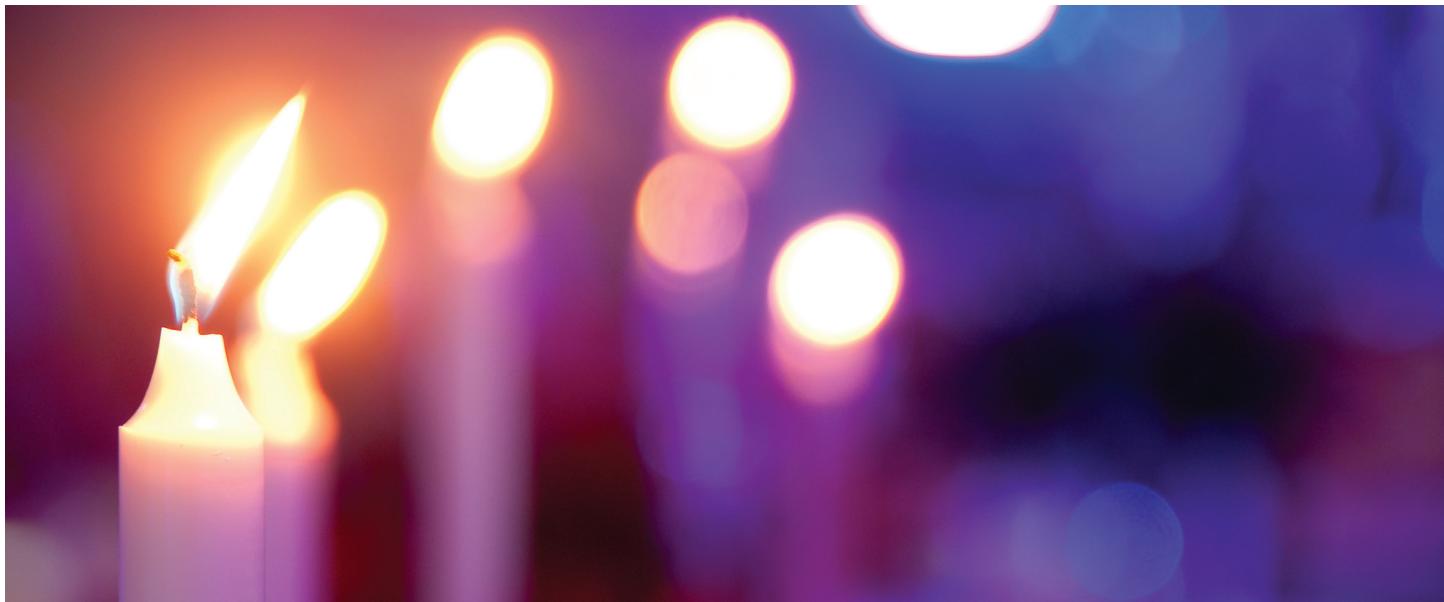
Invite the participants to get up, stretch, move around, and, if your meeting space has windows or doors, look at the larger community outside or even in the building around you. Ask: What did you notice while you were moving around or looking outside? How do you feel about the way we practice Sabbath in this group, in our church, in our community? How is Sabbath practiced in our family? What changes have you noticed? What changes still might be made? Discuss how Sabbath might be made more focused and more joyful. As a group decide on one small change you will make individually or with your family, and another small change you will work on as a group to institute in a larger body, such as your congregation, workplace, or city.

Close with sentence prayers for guidance and courage to make these changes and any special needs members may have.

Reflect

How do we keep Sabbath rest for ourselves and in our world, and how do we incorporate personal refreshment and loving service to others? How can we add joy, using our passion and gifts, to enrich our own lives and those of others? What does freedom really mean? Does Sabbath tradition make a difference in my Christian walk?

Keeping Sabbath



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

This exploration invites the use of meditation, journaling, and play to deepen an understanding of living Sabbath personally as well as in the larger world. It may help the participants identify new ways to relate theory to practice, and to envision how they, as individual adults and as a group, might make a difference in their culture. Adults usually enjoy sharing real-life experiences and discussing possibilities, so allow plenty of time to mull these things over yourself and in the group.

About this Exploration

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



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Romans 12:9-18

John 6:1-21

Leader Preparation

Read through all the activities and choose those that are most appropriate for your group. Meditate on the scriptures and note any impressions and insights you may receive. Pay attention to current news, and check out the availability of community service agencies so that you may offer suggestions if your group seems stuck. Pray for clarity and direction as you prepare, and allow plenty of time for discussion, as adults will draw upon their own life experiences and want to share these.

Prayer: Creative and colorful God, we thank you for the gift of Sabbath. We ask your blessing on this quilt we created to honor you. Enter into its names and colors and enable it by its wholeness and vibrancy to bless our group, your church, and those who enter our sanctuary. Instill your Sabbath spirit into this quilt and into our lives as we worship together. Help our busy hands, minds, and hearts feel your peace and creativity under its colors. Amen.

Session Development

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



① Sabbath Sensitivity (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read and meditate on Jeremiah 17:19-27 and 1 Corinthians 11:17-26. Make a list for yourself of things you might eliminate from your Sabbath time to make it less stressful, anxious, or cluttered. Then make a list of what might help you remember, appreciate, and honor the Sabbath.

Supplies:

- small items borrowed from the children’s area such as toy animals, puzzle pieces, Legos or small building blocks, crayons
- two baskets or other containers
- Bibles
- candle and lighter

Light a candle, pass out Bibles, and ask the participants to read Jeremiah 17:19-27 and 1 Corinthians 11:17-26. Label one basket “Give Up” and the other basket “Add To.” Pile all the small items in the middle of a table. Place a container on each side of the pile. Invite the participants to choose one or more small items to symbolize something that causes stress, worry, confusion, or overwork during their Sabbath time, something they would like to get rid of to make Sabbath time more relaxing and holy. Put these pieces in the “Give Up” basket. Then invite them to choose one or more pieces to represent what they would like to add to Sabbath to help them focus on God, Christ, and reconciliation. Put these items into the “Add To” basket.

Empty out the “Give Up” basket and talk about these items. How does each one stand in the way of a celebration of Sabbath? What other items would people add to this basket? Repeat this with the “Add To” basket.

Prayer: O God of restoration, redemption, reconciliation, and revelation, thank you for reminding us that Sabbath is a gift and calling. Guide us in creating space and time for you so that we will love you with our heart, soul, and mind, as Jesus instructed. Thank you for today’s time of Sabbath. Bless and renew us for the week to come. Amen.

② Celebration!



Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Check with the worship leader or pastor about planning a joyful procession with the banners.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- poster “Guatamala: Procession,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>, by Betty LaDuke
- song “Let Me Enter God’s Own Dwelling” (tune: UNSER HERRSCHER) <http://www.tinyurl.com/2vanofj>
- magazines
- colored marking pens
- blunt scissors
- construction paper cut into quarter sheets
- fabric glue and a stapler
- large (1’ or so) triangles for banner background
- 1/4” to 1/2” diameter dowels
- large urn, jar, or other container for the base to hold the banner



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

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

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

Read Jeremiah 17:19-27 and ask: What makes Sabbath “holy” — “wholly”? Display the poster “Guatemala: Procession.” Invite reflection on this poster. After hearing the scripture, what image might this picture present? Sing the song “Let Me Enter God’s Own Dwelling.” <http://www.tinyurl.com/2vanofj>

Divide into groups of three or four. Ask each small group to create a banner (or more, if they are inventive and have time) that communicates Sabbath. Provide each small group with a banner, a dowel, at least one pair of scissors, several magazines, pens, construction paper, and glue sticks. Find pictures in the magazines or write words or phrases on a construction paper strip that represent something that could be a part of Sabbath. For example: “joyful music,” “meditation,” “walks in nature,” “community,” “naps,” “good worship service.” Staple a curl at the wide end of the triangle around the dowel to form the banner.

Arrange with your worship leader or pastor to have a joyful processional into the sanctuary, perhaps to the hymn “Let Me Enter God’s Own Dwelling” (tune: UNSER HERRSCHER), <http://www.tinyurl.com/2vanofj>, with each person bearing one of the banners. Insert the banners into the urn or container in the front of the sanctuary or in another designated place. Perhaps the worship leader or pastor might include in the service or sermon some of the words on the banners.

③ Sabbath Jeopardy

Leader preparation: Create and print out two large Jeopardy-style charts with six columns and five rows. One chart will cover each square in the other. Read Jeremiah 17:19-27 and 1 Corinthians 11:17-26 and draft possible questions and answers that might be developed from these selections about the nature of Sabbath.

Supplies:

- Jeopardy-style charts
- Bibles
- buzzer or bell to signal time limits

Read the scripture passages. Describe the rules of the game. There is a clue behind each covered square. The team chooses a square and then must pose a question for which the clue on the chart is the answer. Divide the group into several teams, one team for each column of squares on the chart. Each team will give their assigned column a category title such as “Desecrating the Sabbath, Just Another Workday.” They will then design five clues, one for each row, related to that category based on the scripture. Affix those clues on the bottom chart. Cover the clues with the top blank chart.

When all the rows have covered clues, play the game. Set a time limit for each clue, such as 10 seconds. Ask for a volunteer to be the time-keeper. A team selects a category (other than the one they created), and then selects a clue square within that row. They have 10 seconds to give a question that corresponds to the clue. The team racking up the most correct question-and-answer points wins.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ Discerning Sabbath Meaning (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Study Jeremiah 17:19–27 and 1 Corinthians 11:17–26.

Supplies:

- pens or pencils and paper
- whiteboard or newsprint and markers
- Bibles
- tables in different parts of room
- a chalice or small portable communion set

Divide the group into smaller groups of three or four, and have each small group sit in a separate part of the room. Hand out Bibles, paper, and pens or pencils. Have the groups read Jeremiah 17:19–27 and then make a list in two columns: What things in today's world might make the Sabbath "unholy"? What things make the Sabbath "holy"? What are the blessings God promises for living this way? When the groups are finished, invite them to share their lists with one another. Record on whiteboard or newsprint comments from all the groups.

Then have the small groups read 1 Corinthians 11:17–26. Invite them to discuss the negativity and divisiveness of the early church's celebration of communion. Is any of this evident in our own church? Other gatherings? Ask each group to record their comments to share with the entire group.

Set the chalice or communion set or some other symbol of communion in front of the group. Initiate a discussion using these or similar questions: What is communion? What does it represent to us? How might we practice it in more equitable and "holy" ways? How might Christ enter into our communion service more meaningfully?

⑤ Community News Game

Leader preparation: Check out the website for your local TV news station, or read the local newspaper. Keep track of regional news for your area. Make a list of major incidents, tragedies, and heroics or "good news" stories. Prepare your list for presentation to the group, either as a handout or display it from a computer. Read Jeremiah 17:19–27 and 1 Corinthians 11:17–26.

Supplies:

- your list of news items
- markers or pens in various colors
- dice
- index cards
- 2' x 2' poster board or cardboard
- colored tokens or tiny toys to use as markers
- Bibles

Invite the group to read the two scriptures alternating between half the group reading the odd-numbered verses and the other half reading the even-numbered verses. Ask: What bearing might these texts have on the present? Present your list of news items to the group.

Challenge the group to design a game that incorporates the “good,” “sad,” and “bad” news items from your list. Invite them to add other news items to the list. Have the group work together to design a game board. Draw out a rough copy on a piece of paper. The entire board can be composed of squares like a chess board, or squares around the edge like Monopoly, or a wavering design like Candyland or Chutes and Ladders. Transfer the pattern onto the large piece of cardboard or poster board with the markers. Design a starting and ending square. Create an icon for “good news,” “bad news,” “sad news,” “scripture,” and “Sabbath.” Inter-splice these icons throughout the game trail.

Ask the participants to make four stacks of index cards: one each for good news, bad news, sad news, and scripture. On each card write the names of “good” and “sad/bad” news incidents (such as “lost boy found” or “car chase results in one injured”), or a phrase from scripture. On each index card include an instruction such as “move ahead three spaces,” “go back to start,” “lose a turn.” Ask players to set some basic rules about rolling the die to advance, whether any card or roll of the die might cause players to miss a turn or get an extra roll, how to win, what to do when you land on a Sabbath square, etc.

Play the game you have created. Then display the finished game in the fellowship hall or other appropriate space and invite others to play.

⑥ Seeing Our Community

Leader preparation: In the weeks before this activity, find out about your community’s needs and what community services are available. Perhaps your community has a food pantry, homeless shelter, walk-in medical service for indigent families, disabilities resource center, women’s/children’s shelter, unemployment assistance center, housing coalition, HIV or drug treatment programs, veterans’ assistance center, elder-abuse prevention program, clothes closet, etc. Gather pamphlets, DVDs, fact sheets, or other educational items from several of these, at least three or four if possible.

Supplies:

- information from community service providers
- Bible

Invite a volunteer to read aloud 1 Corinthians 11:17-26. Present this picture of the early church. The church in Corinth was a house church. They would celebrate the Lord’s Supper every week, but they would conduct it like every other meal in their culture. People were served according to their status in the community. The rich people were seated in a special room, and the poor people were out in the atrium. Even at one table, people were served different food based on their status. Visualize that early communion that exhibited not love, but greed and chaos. Ask: What is communion about? What is true community? How do we build or strengthen it? In what ways might we desecrate God’s church (*The Message*, verse 11)? Do we see greed or self-interest in our church? In ourselves? In what ways does the divided church community dishonor God’s gift of unity in the church through Jesus Christ? How can we more faithfully enact justice, mercy, freedom, and refreshment in the world?

Describe the tremendous needs in your community, and show the DVD or educational materials that you gathered. Divide these among several small groups, and ask each group to identify ways that “being Christian” and “doing Sabbath” might really help people who need the specific service they are studying. For example, how might Christians work together to change employment structures so that more workers could be hired at a living wage, perhaps accepting fewer hours

so more could share? When the groups complete this task, gather the groups back together and ask each group to report on its findings and suggestions.

As a group choose one cause or agency or program through which to carry out one of their Sabbath suggestions.

Meditation: "Indeed, one can never truly know the inward feeling of the Sabbath without the outward form. The Sabbath is not a theory to be contemplated, a concept to be debated, or an idea to be toyed with. It is a day, a day filled with hours and minutes and seconds, all of which are hallowed by the wonderful pattern of living that the nobility of the human spirit has fashioned over the course of the centuries" (Samuel H. Dresner, *The Sabbath* [New York: Burning Bush Press, 1970], quoted in Dorothy Bass, *Practicing Our Faith* [San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997], p.81).

Sending & Serving Activities

⑦ Dance of Praise

Leader preparation: Sing the Doxology used by your congregation ("Praise God, from whom all blessings flow"). Review Jeremiah 17:19–27 and 1 Corinthians 11:17–26. Meditate on these passages, consciously inviting the Holy Spirit to guide you. Each time you do this, stand up and praise God through a few Spirit-inspired movements or dance steps to the tune.

Supplies:

- hymnals

As a group sing the Doxology used in your congregation's service of worship. Stop and ask the participants to call out key words or phrases that "speak" to them. For example, "praise" or "creatures" may connote something valuable. Sing the Doxology again.

Invite the participants to devise some liturgical movements to this hymn. Make this an "offering of thanks" to God, and be joyful! If possible, demonstrate and teach this dance to your congregation. You might even take it on the road to teach to a children's group, senior citizens, disabilities group, or nursing home at a date you mutually set.

Prayer: *Holy God, thank you for music, joy, and dance. Help us to keep your Sabbath holy and joyful, celebrating the great love you showed us through Jesus Christ. Keep our hearts and minds dancing daily as we share your good news with the world around us. Amen.*

⑧ Communion Feast

Leader preparation: Bake or purchase whole loaves of bread, preferably with an interesting shape or texture, enough to have communion with your group. Provide grape juice or whatever is served as part of your congregation's celebration of communion. Invite someone who is authorized in your denomination to preside at and serve communion to join your group for this activity. Study 1 Corinthians 11:17–26, print out copies for everyone, or arrange to have this projected. Have hand sanitizer or soap and water available.

**Supplies:**

- communion elements
- copies of 1 Corinthians 11:17–26
- hand sanitizer or a place to wash hands
- candle and lighter

Light a meditation candle or sound a singing bowl to gather and center the group. Hand out copies of the scripture or project it, and invite the group to read the verses together as one body. Use the background description in Activity 5 to set the scene of the celebration of the Lord's Supper in the church in Corinth. Invite the group spontaneously to act out verses 20–22. What does this chaos feel like?

Ask the participants to clean their hands. Read verses 23–26 again. Ask the pastor or another authorized person within your tradition to pray over the elements and distribute communion by breaking the bread and pouring the juice. Invite the group members to serve bread to one another as you read verse 24 again. Then have them serve the cup to one another as you read verse 25.

Prayer: Say the Prayer of Jesus together.

9 Quilting as Sabbath Gift

Leader preparation: Have available, or ask participants to bring with them, fabric remnants at least half a yard square, and several pairs of pinking shears. Alternatively, purchase precut and pinked quilt blocks from a fabric or quilting supplier. Provide fabric pens in various colors (at least three or four shades for each table).

Supplies:

- Bibles
- fabric squares
- fabric pens
- pinking shears

Read Jeremiah 17:19-27. Pause for reflection. Then invite each participant to select a quilt block and colored pen and create a design or write words that represent something that makes Sabbath holy, sacred, joyful, etc. For example, worship together, music, nature activities, family dinner, prayer.

Ask volunteers or quilters to piece together these squares after the session, or schedule another session as a quilting bee, if you have the interest and a quilting frame. Display the finished quilt somewhere in your worship center.

Reflect

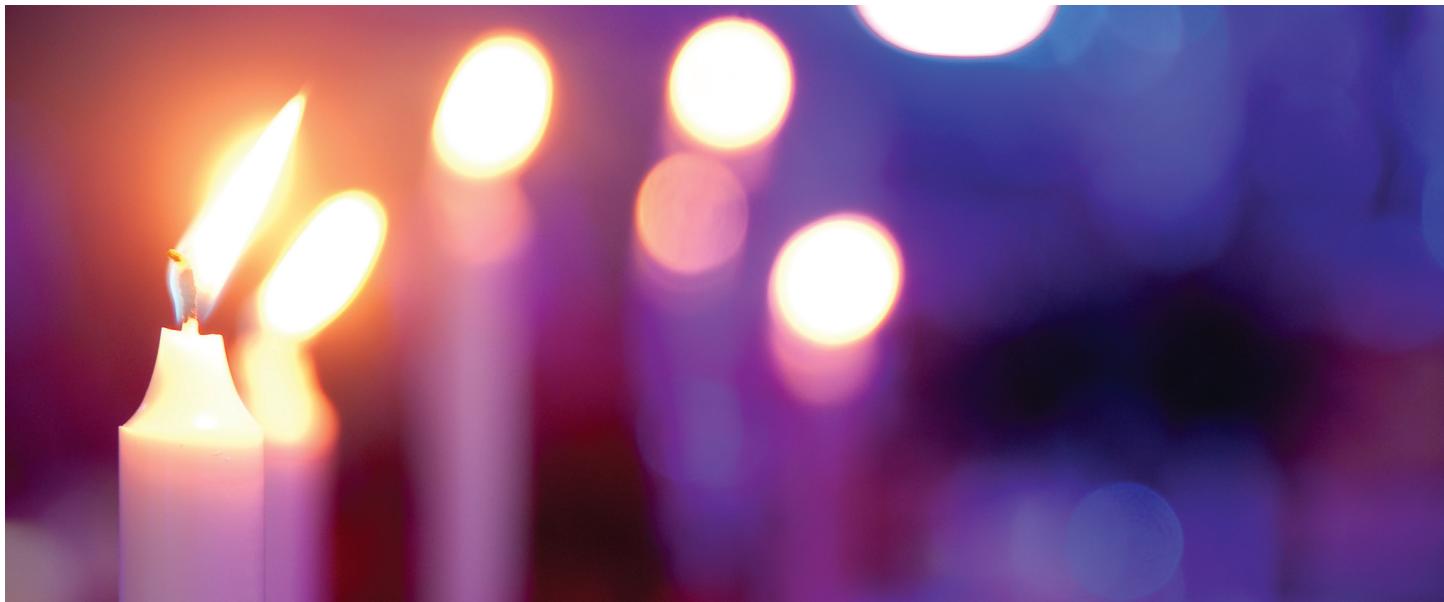
What new insights or new revelation have come to light in this Exploration? Are there ways that the participants would like to serve the larger world? Are there difficulties that have surfaced within the group, or individuals? Pray over these, and try to help those involved come to resolution and peace.

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ADULTS

Keeping Sabbath



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group

This exploration explores some difficult thoughts and may touch your group in their most sensitive areas of the heart. The crucifixion reading does not include the resurrection morning, but leaves everyone waiting in the gloom. Of course, we know the end of the story, and we live as Easter people. Relate this truth, as well as the words of the psalmist, to the way we live into God's possibilities. At the same time, we are invited to experience and learn about others' faith and practice of Sabbath in order to broaden our understanding and perhaps pave a path to peace.

About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Psalm 119:105–136
Matthew 27:51–66

Leader Preparation

The paradoxes of darkness and light and death and life are the focus of the reading from Matthew, while the psalmist expresses hope and vision. Consider these paradoxes as you prepare this session, and anticipate what questions might arise within the group. Be aware that someone who recently lost a loved one may need a pastor or counselor to be present for assistance. Prepare yourself with prayer and perhaps fasting for this activity, and meditate on how our impossibilities can open the way for God's possibilities and resurrection.

Prayer: Gracious and always-present God, help us to see your light shining in our darkness and to feel your constant presence, especially when you seem far away. When we feel farthest from you, help us to trust in your love and compassion. Help us to hold one another up to you until we can pray with confidence, and to support one another with friendship and sustenance during our dark times. Help us to be "Christ with skin on" until we can feel again your companionship and feel your joy within, your life everlasting through and around us. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



① Sabbath as Finish (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Study and meditate on Matthew 27:51–66 (or Matthew 26:14–27:66). Imagine yourself in the various roles: Jesus, the centurion, Mary Magdalene, Joseph of Arimathea, Pilate, the soldiers, etc. Keep a journal of the insights, feelings, or questions that come to you.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- candle and lighter

Light the candle and read aloud Matthew 27:46–66. Pause for a few moments for reflection. Invite the participants to form small groups, and make certain that each person has a Bible. Divide the scripture into sections and assign one section to each group: for example, verses 46–50, 51–54, 55–56 and 61, 57–60, 62–65, and 65–66. Instruct the groups to read their section and then to read it aloud again with dramatic flair. If there is more than one person who speaks in the text, have people volunteer to read the different voices. Call the group back together and hear the scripture as each group has practiced its portion.

Invite the group members to consider how Sabbath may mean rest and completion, and even final rest. Completion, even a joyful, fulfilled completion, does involve a minor "death." This little death can bring feelings not only of fulfillment, but also of mourning or loss. Discuss death as both completion of earthly life and the transition from this life to the next, a birthing of new life. Be prepared for sharing of grief and losses, as well as avoidance. Allow each participant the freedom to be silent. (If someone has recently had a terminal diagnosis or is losing a loved one, this may present a need for one-on-one care. You may want to have your pastor or other friends nearby, just in case.) Allow plenty of time for discussion, including times of silence.

② Dead Space

Leader preparation: Study and meditate on Psalm 119:105–136 and Matthew 27:51–66. Recall any "dark night of the soul" you have experienced. What feelings and doubts or questions or insights did this time trigger for you? Recall how you came through this, and list any things that helped. On a large poster board or newsprint (at least 12" by 16") and in large, dark print, write the word "Death." Before the session begins, display this poster so that it is clearly visible to all. Alert your pastor and pastoral counselor, if your church has one, to the possibility of follow-up after this session

Supplies:

- poster board with the word "Death"
- Bibles
- candle and lighter

If possible, darken the room except for the lighted candle. Invite the group members to enter a time of silence. Sit quietly for a few moments, then read Matthew 27:51–66. Pause for silent reflection.

Turn on the lights, display the "Death" poster, and ask the participants to share their insights, perceptions, feelings, or memories stirred by this passage. Ask:

Session Development

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

- * To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.
- * To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 using at least one activity from each category.

How does it feel when our hopes have been slaughtered, buried, and sealed? After hearing from those who have chosen to share, ask the participants to imagine themselves as Mary Magdalene or Mary the mother of James and Joseph - the watchers, waiting. Invite people to share about times when they have been the watchers, the waiters, the ones keeping vigil. What sustained them? When have they been a companion to one who is keeping watch and waiting?

Read Psalm 119:105-136. Discuss key phrases in this passage relating to waiting and holding onto hope during dark nights of the soul: “Your word is a lamp,” “Give me life,” “Accept my offerings of praise,” “Teach me your ordinances,” “You are my hiding place,” “Give me understanding,” “I direct my steps by all your precepts,” “The unfolding of your words gives light.” Pose these or similar questions for discussion: How might we companion one another on this type of journey? Invite any who may be experiencing the “dark night of the soul” to share, or to meet later with your pastor or pastoral counselor, if desired.

Read Psalm 131. Encourage the group members to keep a journal during the week about further thoughts and feelings, and also to wait quietly and expectantly before God in prayer.

③ Sabbath Creativity

Leader preparation: Read Psalm 119:105–136, preferably in the NRSV, and meditate upon it during the week.

Supplies:

- drawing/coloring materials such as pastel chalk, crayons, pens/pencils/colored markers
- plenty of drawing paper
- candle and lighter
- space appropriate for a drawing/writing surface

Light the meditation candle. Invite the group members to get into a comfortable position. Pay attention to your breathing. Read Psalm 119:105: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” Pause for reflection. Read the verse again. Take a deep breath and breathe in this verse. Close your eyes and visualize a lamp and a light.

Distribute the paper and drawing or coloring materials. Invite the participants to color what Sabbath feels like to them. This may be images of light and dark, of chaos and rest, shapes and colors. When everyone is finished drawing, invite those who are willing to talk about their drawing.

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Psalm 119:105-136 slowly and distinctly. Note the poetic flow. Pass out more paper and pens or pencils, if needed. Invite the participants to create a cinquain poem about Sabbath. They may work with a partner or in small groups.

A cinquain poem has five lines and follows this pattern:

- Line 1: one word (subject or noun)
- Line 2: 2 words – adjectives
- Line 3: 3 words – actions
- Line 4: 4 words – feelings
- Line 5: 1 word – synonym for Line 1



Samples:

Penguin	Party
Black, white	Happy, surprise
Waddling, swimming, leaping	talking, eating, laughing
A tuxedo in the cold water	my fortieth birthday celebration
Emperor	Delight

Ask the participants if they would be willing to have their poems published in the church newsletter or the order of worship.

Prayer: *God of creation, word, and light, thank you for guiding us, gifting us, leading us deeper into Sabbath practice and creative efforts. Bless us this week. May your creativity inspire us to rest in your goodness and envision new possibilities. Amen.*

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ Dark Night of the Soul (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Matthew 27:51-66. Come to terms with your own mortality, and recall any dark night of the soul or serious challenge when you wondered about God. What helped you through this? How did you find ways to experience God then?

Supplies:

- Bible

Make the room as dark as possible. Read aloud Matthew 27:51-66. Pause for several moments for reflection on the death of Jesus. Ask each person to find a partner. In pairs talk about facing one's own mortality. Have they had any near-death experiences or those "dark nights of the soul" when God feels absent? If not, do they know someone who has had such an experience? What helped them through this period, this struggle? It is important to remind the group to maintain confidentiality about these conversations. The experiences shared in the group are not to be repeated outside of the group.

Initiate discussion about the fact that death often precedes new possibility, new growth, such as flowers and plants that lie dormant through the winter to restore their food supply in order to bloom again in the spring, or forest fires that burn away the underbrush to allow for more growth. If there are foresters, farmers, survivors of major illness, etc., in your group, they may be able to provide an analogy, such as the growth of wildflowers or pines that occurs after a devastating fire. We must put away feelings of hurt and anger in order to allow positive feelings room to grow. Ask: In recalling our "death moments" or losses, what growth did you perceive? What new insight did you gain?

Remind the group that God is always at work, creating something new. Light a large candle and read Psalm 119:105-136.

Benediction: *Gracious and always-present God, help us to see your light shining in our darkness and to feel your constant presence, especially when you seem far away. When we feel farthest from you, help us to trust in your love and compassion. Help us to hold one another up to you until we can pray with confidence, and to support one another with friendship and sustenance during our dark times. Help us to be "Christ with skin on" until we can feel again your companionship and feel your joy within, your life everlasting through and around us. Amen.*



5 Despair and Possibility

Leader preparation: Read and meditate on Psalm 119:105-136 and Matthew 27:51-55. Study Käthe Kollwitz's poster "Out of Work," <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>,

noting any thoughts, ideas, or insights that arise that might be helpful to facilitate group discussion. Display the poster in a prominent, well-lighted space where all can see it.

Supplies:

- poster "Out of Work," <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>, by Käthe Kollwitz
- meditative music
- newsprint or white board and markers
- self-adhesive colored dots, enough for three per person

Play soft, meditative music as the participants study the poster "Out of Work." Pose these questions for reflection: What is the story behind this picture? Why, do you think, is the poster titled "Out of Work"? What might you title it? What feelings do you sense in this picture? What would you say to each person in the picture? When have you had feelings like you see in this picture? Put yourself in the picture. Where would you be? What would you be doing? Invite those who are willing to share their reflections.

Ask: When have you experienced times of exhaustion or despair or frustration? What or who helped you during these times? What coping skills did you use? In what ways were you changed by the experience? What did you learn about yourself? Others? Allow plenty of time for this discussion. Be prepared to stimulate or to limit discussion as needed.

Invite the group members to identify situations in your community that might lead to anxiety or desperation, such as loss of job, high medical expenses, eviction, other economic hardship. Be aware that some people in your congregation may currently be in these situations. Have the group brainstorm ways to alleviate or at least ease some of this despair and suffering. List their ideas on newsprint or a white board. For example, contribute money to the church's deacons' fund that otherwise might be spent on frivolous personal items, organize a congregational drive to collect food for a food pantry and deliver it on a set day, volunteer on a regular basis in a food pantry or soup kitchen, spend a day or several hours working on a Habitat for Humanity site, organize a free community hot-dog roast in the church parking lot, perhaps followed by a food or supply give-away, start a weekly free supper program. After all ideas are listed, give each person three self adhesive colored dots. The participants are to use their dots to vote on the ideas. They may place all their dots on one idea, or spread out their votes on three separate ideas. When everyone has voted, count the votes to see if the group is willing to go along with the highest count. Invite the group to strategize ways to approach the task on which they have decided. What is the timeline? Who will take responsibility for each part of the task? What resources will be needed? How will you get those resources? How might you involve other members of the congregation in this effort?

Invite the group members to offer sentence prayers for special needs of which they are aware and blessings for one another and those in need. Read this quote: We "run the awful risk ... to be witnesses to the presence ... of a living God who transcends everything we think we know and ... is full of extraordinary surprises" (from Frederick Buechner, *Telling Secrets* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1991).



⑥ Tools of the Trade

Leader preparation: Before this session ask every group member to bring one “tool of their trade.” This might include a laptop or pen, weekly planner, lesson plans, stethoscope, hammer, paint brush, fire extinguisher, badge, etc. You may need to help retirees think of an item to bring, such as a garden tool, cookbook, or something that represents a hobby such as a fishing rod. Be prepared to show and tell a bit about your work, too.

Supplies:

- tools of the trade of group members
- Bibles
- packet of seeds, floral bouquet, etc.
- index cards, pens/pencils
- a copy of the poem “Sabbath” by Wendell Berry
<http://www.tinyurl.com/248yqtm>

Invite the group members to display the tools of their trade on a table for all to see. Invite them one by one to describe how they use this tool in their work or hobby. What do they most enjoy or value in their work day? What would they like to change, or what is hardest for them?

Put a packet of garden seeds or a floral bouquet, sheaf of wheat, or clutch of Indian corn on the table with the tools. Read aloud Psalm 119:105 and ask if this verse is true for them in day-to-day life. In what ways do God’s words shed light during a busy workday? How do the scriptures help us see God’s plan and leading? Read verse 126 and ask if they sense this in their personal and/or work life. After a brief discussion, read verse 147. Have them write this verse on an index card to take with them. Encourage them to put this card in their wallet, or post it on the bathroom mirror or the refrigerator so that they can put this verse into practice at the start of each day.

Point to the seeds and read the poem “Sabbaths” by Wendell Berry, page 77 in *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*.

Sending & Serving Activities



⑦ Our Sabbath Stories (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Study Matthew 27:51–66, and read Matthew 28:1–10. Try to recall times in your life when you felt all hope had died, you were at the end of your resources and ideas, life seemed hopeless and barren — and then how you experienced a bit of resurrection, assistance, or a guiding light into new possibility. If you have not encountered experiences like this, read scriptures that show this in others’ lives, such as the story of the Exodus in Exodus 5–14, the story of Hannah in 1 Samuel 1, the story of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17, Paul’s escapes in Acts 16:16–40 and Acts 27:13–44.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- music for “Won’t You Let Me Be Your Servant?” (tune: SERVANT SONG),
<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong3>

Provide Bibles for everyone. Invite one volunteer to read Matthew 27:51–66 and another volunteer to read Matthew 28:1–10. Pause for a moment of reflection. Have



everyone choose a partner or two. Ask them to think about their own life and recall a time when they felt all hope had died, they were at the end of their resources and ideas, and life seemed hopeless and barren. Who helped them through this time? How did they experience God's love and leading in this situation? Has the situation been resolved? If so, describe this bit of resurrection, assistance, or a guiding light into new possibility.

Sing "Won't You Let Me Be Your Servant?" (tune: SERVANT SONG),
<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong3>.

⑧ Exchanging Sabbaths

Leader preparation: Obtain a copy of Dorothy C. Bass's book *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997). Read part of chapter 6, "Keeping Sabbath," beginning at the bottom of page 70 with "The Sabbath in Judaism" and continuing through page 83, "Can Christians Keep Sabbath?" These two sections provide a good basis for discussing the Sabbath texts and opening up ideas about how to practice Sabbath moments today. Also read "Life-Giving Ways of Life," pages 2 and 3, and prepare either to read or to tell the story of the Catholic priest and the Jewish college student and their unique Sabbath experiences. Also find a copy of some Jewish music, perhaps selections from "Sar Shalom," Karen Davis's Messianic Praise and Worship CD,
<http://www.tinyurl.com/2fykjnc>.

Supplies:

- white board or newsprint and markers
- book *Practicing our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* by Dorothy Bass, <http://www.tinyurl.com/248yqtm>

Arrange the chairs in a semicircle so that members of the group can see and hear one another. Make a presentation on some of the points in Bass's chapter on Sabbath. Pose these questions for reflection: How did you celebrate Sabbath as a child? How do you practice Sabbath today? Are there people of other faiths in your circle of acquaintances? What are their Sabbath practices? How do we keep from being enslaved by "good works" in today's culture? What practices, hobbies, work, or relationships separate us from time with God on Sabbath?

Bass raises a pertinent question: "What would you have to say no to, in order to say yes to keeping Sabbath?" Invite the participants to respond to this question.

Tell or read Bass's story of "Life-Giving Ways of Life," pages 2 and 3, and the story of the Catholic priest and the Jewish college student, and their exchange of Sabbath experiences. Invite the participants to express in sentence prayers their thanks to God for liberation and promise.

⑨ Learning About Others

Leader preparation: Find out through an Internet search engine or local Jewish synagogue or resource center whether a speaker is available to address your group about Sabbath, or whether the group might be able to visit a Jewish Shabbat service. Check out a list of possible dates to do either one of these.

Supplies: None

Post news about this event, whether a guest presenter will come to your group or whether the group will attend a service. If a speaker is coming to your group, be sure everyone sits where they can see and hear the speaker. Introduce your



guest and sit back and enjoy learning about Jewish Shabbat. If you are going to a Shabbat service, ask whether head coverings need to be worn, whether men and women sit in separate sections, what other information would be helpful to visitors. Arrange for shared transportation, and post the time of the service well in advance. After the service, meet for a simple meal or coffee for discussion and reflection.

Reflect

Think about the depth and change of darkness into light, evening into morning, crisis into joy, etc. Ponder any “dark night of the soul” that you may have experienced, and how you have arrived at peace again (if you have). Continue to reflect on the mystery of crucifixion and resurrection.

Reflect on the moments that transformed you. What did you learn about the practice of keeping Sabbath? What will you incorporate into your faith practices from now on? Give thanks for your group, and name the people with whom you learned.