



Sabbath Practices Ministry Kit for Households

Hospitality, Prayer, Service, Storytelling and Retreat

introduction

The 5 sabbath faith practices enrich the faith life of households through simple and meaningful rhythms and rituals in daily life. These faith practices are meant for households with or without children, singles and extended families. Use this ministry kit alongside the essential tools for each practice as you teach and equip the households in your faith community. The role of the faith formation leader is to provide encouragement, coaching and resources as the household explores practices and makes them part of their faith formation in the home. It is considered best practice to engage in these same practices in the church communal life so that households can see the connection between church and home. Each of the 5 practices in this ministry kit have a section of things to consider, ways to engage and a resource list is provided at the end. The kit is meant as a guide and a launch pad for leaders.

Practicing Hospitality at Home

“Where the opportunity for hospitality exists--so does the opportunity to make a neighbor of a stranger” - Fr. Daniel, OSB & Loni Collins Pratt in “Radical Hospitality: Benedict’s Way of Love”

things to consider

Hospitality is often thought about as a practice of welcoming others into a space that we have control of. Jesus didn’t have a home and yet he practiced radical hospitality wherever he went. Encourage households to explore ways of being hospitable that are beyond invitation into their spaces.



It is easy to equate hospitality with fanciness or expense. Although hospitality certainly includes the idea of giving our best, it is important not to focus on perfection when engaging in this practice. Instead, ask, “How can we make the time we spend together authentic and meaningful?”

For this purpose, we are defining hospitality as “being intentional in extending authentic and friendly welcome to all God’s people, treating strangers and friends alike”. A home practice of hospitality falls short if it does not include some aspect of welcoming the stranger.



Although hospitality is about welcoming the stranger, safety is also important. It is important to remind children that while kindness is always appropriate, they should never put being polite before feeling safe or being in control of decisions about their own bodies. Have conversations as a household in advance about how you will deal with safety when practicing hospitality.

In acts of hospitality where food is central, be aware of dietary restrictions and medical needs of participants. This includes clear labeling of allergens (as well as vegetarian/vegan options), providing safe alternatives including dairy-, nut-, and gluten-free choices, and providing nutritious, healthy options like vegetables and fruits (which are, for the most part, suitable for most dietary needs).

engaging in hospitality

Celebrating the helpers. Choose an organization to send a treat, note of thanks, or small gift to. Some examples might include bringing donuts to first responders or a coffee gift-card to crossing guards in your neighborhood. You could do this as a 'random act of kindness, or to tie it to a special day (such as an anniversary or birthday) or church season.

Be intentional about casting the net wide in offering hospitality. Hospitality to friends and family is wonderful but extending that hospitality to the stranger is Biblical. Some ways you could do this would include inviting new members to join you at a church potluck, greeting unfamiliar faces in coffee hour, or inviting a young adult living away from home to join you for a holiday meal.

Kindness challenge. Look for sincere and authentic opportunities to compliment or thank people and be intentional about making the effort to be extra kind in everyday actions to friends, family and strangers. Talk about how this went around the dinner table, in the car between activities or journal about them.

Set-up a "Turquoise Table" in your front yard. Read more about this movement designed to help neighbors to get to know each other better. It is linked in the resources section at the end of this toolkit.

Adopt a grand-friend or a family. Connect with your pastor or leaders in your congregation to see if there is an older adult who is homebound or in a care community that you could forge a relationship with through visits and/or correspondence. Likewise, older adults can look for a family to adopt that may not have grandparents nearby.

Be extravagant 'just because'. Extravagance does not necessarily need to be financial, but it does have to be 'extra'. Make that delicious (but difficult to prepare) meal, spend the time painting tiny flowers on your child's fingernails, or buy flowers for your partner on an ordinary Thursday.



Take on an act of welcome that your household will be responsible for on behalf of your church. Ideas include the delivery a hand-drawn 'welcome' banner to each baby born into your congregation, writing a personal note of welcome to each new member, sending a staff member a card on their birthday or sending care packages to college students, members of the military or "just anyone".

Post a lawn sign of welcome. In an age of divisiveness, this can send a message of acceptance. Talk about what your lawn sign should say and how it is a practice of hospitality. You can make your own or see some ideas in the resource section.

Chalk-art, parades and messages of welcome. Encourage households to create a culture of hospitality in their neighborhoods with chalk messages or car parades with encouraging words of welcome. This practice started in quarantine in many places but can continue as a way of showing hospitality to our neighbors.



Practicing Prayer at Home

“Even though there are millions and millions of prayers that go to God every day, there are only four kinds of prayers. Every prayer that has ever been prayed is one of four types: thanks, gimme, oops and wow!” Rabbi Marc Gellman

things to consider

Prayers are not wishes, they are two-way conversations. We are in conversation with God; and like any conversation, we can hope for answers, but we need to leave room for mystery. We pray not so our prayers will be granted; we pray so we can be in holy conversation with God.



Be sure that resources for the home include all types of prayers. Some ways that we classify prayer include intercession/supplication, adoration, confession, and thanksgiving. Reminding ourselves that we don't only pray when we are in worship, when something bad happens or when someone is sick, is a good starting place for establishing a rich independent prayer life.

Move beyond the classic image of prayer always happening with hands folded and eyes closed. A focus on a variety of styles of prayer including spoken and written prayer, but also prayer through music, art, body poses, and meditative practices is helpful in connecting individuals with a style of prayer that is in line with different learning modalities.

Encourage individuals to try out some different prayer practices on their own, as well as within the wider household unit. Discovering a personal practice will infuse shared practices with richness and meaning.

engaging in prayer

Start with the basics. Mealtimes and bedtimes are perfect starting places for praying at home. You can use a set prayer all the time or invite different members to pray on the spot. The details are not important—the main goal is simply having a consistent practice of praying together.

Find tools to help make prayer a daily practice. It may be a daily devotion book, a prayer app, a calendar reminder, or finding and sticking to a set place in your daily routine. (see resources for suggestions)

Create a prayer ritual for times of separation. A simple, “God goes with you”, or “Go with God” as each person leaves the house in the morning can become an important



ritual. Similar prayer time could be incorporated when spouses travel for work or in households with split custody arrangements.

Save photo Christmas cards and use them to pray for loved ones. Keep Christmas cards you receive in a basket on the dining or bedside table and choose one each day to include in mealtime or bedtime prayers.

Siren prayers. Start a practice of making note of the sirens heard when driving and offer a moment of prayer for both those who have been put in harm's way and those who are responding to the emergency.

Walking prayers. When out for a walk, be intentional about praying for the things you see as a way of raising awareness of God's presence and creation all around us. Walks can also be a time for an extended conversation with God, bringing forth the prayers that bubble up from our minds as our feet move.

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

Prayer wall. Set aside a wall your home (an entryway is an ideal space) and provide pens and sticky notes to post a prayer. As people enter or leave the house (or are waiting for a ride or the school bus), pause to pray for these concerns.

Prayer buddies. Within your household or extended family, set up prayer buddies in a similar manner to how you might set up a 'secret Santa'. This practice can build special connections as generations pray for each other.



Practicing Service at Home

“When we volunteer together, we build ties that bind us not only to each other, but also to the foundations of our faith. Service and outreach to others connects the Bible stories with our own stories. We read about Jesus feeding the hungry, healing the sick, engaging with people who were the outcasts of society. Jesus didn’t turn a blind eye to those in need. Indeed, we are even told in the Gospel of Matthew that when we serve others, we serve Christ.” - Kathleen Long Bostrom, “99 Ways to Raise Spiritually Healthy Children”

things to consider

It is critical to remember that all are equal in God’s eyes. Just as we can now look critically at those mission models that promote “Toxic Charity”, it is also important to be sure that we are not perpetuating stereotypes or any sort of “savior” model when engaging in service. Language is particularly important with younger children.



Find real needs and work with organizations that you trust to fill them. While it might be tempting to imagine what is needed by others, it is always better to partner with organizations that are already in relationship with those in need. Churches are the perfect conduit to connect members seeking to make a difference with those organizations.

Be sure that the faith connection of the service is clearly articulated. There are food drives at school, community beautification projects through scouts or Rotary and all sorts of charity fundraisers. The church misses an opportunity for faith formation when acts of service are not grounded in Christ’s call to care for our neighbor.

It can be a challenge to find opportunities for people of all ages, so be creative. Your 6-year-old will not be able to do wiring in a home and elders in your family may not be up on a ladder on a construction site but either could be a welcoming presence, greeting a new homeowner or provide company and hospitality to volunteers at the worksite.

engaging in service

Tithe your time! At the same time your household comes up with a budget plan and makes a financial pledge to church, have discussions around how you are offering your time and talents to further God’s kingdom. Then make a pledge to fulfill that commitment in the year ahead.



Volunteer as a group of church members at events in your community outside your own walls. Is there a 5K in town where you could sponsor a water stop staffed by congregation members wearing church T-shirts? Perhaps members could participate in a beach or street clean-up effort. Be the hands and feet of Christ with and to your neighbors.

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

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

Create Blessing Bags. Blessing Bags are gallon size, zipper-top plastic bags containing items that are helpful to homeless individuals and are a simple way to be prepared to respond to the needs of your community (see resources for suggestions).

Secret service. Engage in an anonymous act of service for the sheer delight of helping someone out! If your household budget allows, send a grocery gift card to someone who you know is in need. If neighbors have been traveling during a snowstorm, shovel their driveway before they arrive home. This secret service never expects recognition and adds some mystery and fun!

Share and support each other in the ways that you are serving, not just in the church, but in the wider community. Celebrate an adult's participation in a fundraising 5K for the local food bank with the same gusto as a youth's participation in a church mission trip. Mutual support of individual effort strengthens all.

Tie in service to "gifting" holidays. Christmas and birthdays are days to give to and receive from loved ones. Why not start a tradition on those special days that members of your household also engage in the practice of service to others?

Learn about your church partnerships. As a household, commit to exploring one partnership over a period of time and make a plan for engaging with this organization. Invite other households to join you!



Practicing Storytelling at Home

“Sharing with each other stories of God’s faithfulness shapes our identities as children of God.” - Tori Smit, Intergenerate

things to consider

Practice active listening. Storytelling is not just telling a story; it is receiving it as well. Encourage households to think of ways to be present for each other--this includes putting down the book, phone or other distraction when others are speaking.



Every story in scripture may not be appropriate for every age, but the process of sharing the Christian story is one of layers. In our lifetime, we will hear the foundational stories repeatedly. At a young age, details may be very basic but over time and with maturity, the stories will be told and heard again, with added detail, deeper levels of engagement, and more nuanced understanding. We don’t have to tell the full story to start--there will be time to build on these stories for more full understanding.

Research has shown that children who know a lot about their families tended to do better when faced with challenges and have a greater sense of self. When we participate in the practice of intergenerational storytelling, we are fostering a sense of belonging and resilience. Hearing our ancestors’ stories of overcoming adversity remind us that we will be able to overcome hurdles too.

Remember that stories can be told beyond just the spoken or written word. Allow space for the wide diversity of learners and learning styles. Stories are told in song, dance, photography, art and of course the written and spoken word. Be creative and be open to new ways to share stories.

engaging in storytelling

Share stories of each day. How often do we say, “I ask my child/spouse/parent how their day was and the only answer I get is ‘fine’”. Offer this challenge: Find good or frustrating or funny things to share each day at home so that the regular sharing of stories is a daily, mutual ritual.

Put the story in your members’ hands! Pastors, educators and other church leaders should recommend, or even gift, quality Bibles for all ages (gifting Bibles is not a practice limited to children). The stories of our faith should be shared within households so that they become a part of a family’s understanding of the world.



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

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

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

Do a home version of "StoryCorps". Interview extended family members or close friends to learn more about their stories. Be sure to ask questions about faith and church. Link to the StoryCorp website is included under "Learn More" section at the end of this resource

Reclaim the practice of testimony and invite members to consider theirs. We all have a faith story--some are dramatic, some subtle, but all deserve to be told. Provide home resources to assist members working on their own to create a testimony.

Encourage the practice of journaling. Keeping a journal is an important way of capturing and preserving stories. Try having both personal and familial journals and consider keeping a 'guestbook' in the home so that visitors who stay can share a memory or story of their visit.



Practicing Retreat at Home

“In order to understand the world, one has to turn away from it on occasion.” Albert Camus

things to consider

It may be helpful to redefine the term retreat, particularly when speaking about a home practice. In an ideal world, people would have the resources of both time and finance to get away from the distractions and conveniences of home for retreat and reflection, but as this is not the reality for most, leaders should offer resources for practicing retreat in accessible ways at home.



A home practice of retreat doesn't have to be complicated—but it does have to be intentional. Worry less about finding a nice cross and more about putting away your phone. A short time focused on connecting with God and each other is more holy than a full day of activities interrupted by distractions.

engaging in retreat

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

Consider setting a regular date and time for members of your household to be outdoors. This could be a beach, park, or other space where you can have distraction-free time together. To set this time aside as retreat and not just an outing, decide on a way to ground the time as a retreat. You can share prayer concerns on the drive or perhaps you will choose a hymn, psalm or other scripture as a guiding text for the day.

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

Take on seasonal practices for Advent and Lent. These are natural times to “amp up” faith practices at home and after establishing the routine, may be more likely to stick.

Make shared meals a mini retreat. Create rituals including prayers, lighting candles, and sharing highs and lows, as you set aside this time as a distraction-free opportunity to connect with everyone in your household.



Consider setting aside a vacation (or a portion of a vacation) as a retreat. This can be on a large scale (traveling to the Iona community in Scotland or Taizé in France), at a denominational Camp or Conference Center (like Ghost Ranch in New Mexico), or someplace local to you. Many church summer camps offer special opportunities on long holiday weekends aside from their usual programming.

Make 'busy' a 4-letter word. The pace of contemporary life can feel unsustainable and our language reflects that. "Busy" has somehow become an appropriate response to the question, "How are you?" Start to notice how often you use the word in your daily vocabulary, and if it is frequent, try to make choices that eliminate the need for the word's use.

Set work/home boundaries. With the advent of cell phones and laptops, the lines between home and office have become more blurred than ever. The recent covid-19 pandemic brought many people's offices directly into their homes. While in some fields, you may need to be on call at times, there are also surely times when you can unplug. Decide on and stick to some ground rules in your household, especially if your home is also your workplace.

Tune into the rhythms of the seasons. Where can you connect with God according to the seasons? Weather varies by region, but all households and families have specific practices associated with the seasons. Where can you find time to hit the pause button and claim sacred time together? How can seasonal activities and traditions morph into times of sabbath retreat?



Where can I learn more?

Books

Faith at Home: A Handbook for Cautiously Christian Parents by Wendy Claire Barre. Morehouse Publishing, 2016.

99 Ways to Raise Spiritually Healthy Children by Kathleen Long Bostrom. Westminster John Knox Press, 2010.

Making a Home for Faith: Nurturing the Spiritual Life of your Children, revised edition by Elizabeth F Caldwell. Pilgrim Press, 2007.

InterGenerate: Transforming Churches through Intergenerational Ministry by Holly Allen Catterton. Abilene Christian University Press, 2018.

Sabbath in the Suburbs: A Family's Experiment with Holy Time by MaryAnn McKibben Dana. Chalice Press, 2012.

Families at the Center of Faith Formation by Leif Kehrwald, John Roberto, Gene & Jolene Roehlkepartain. LifeLongFaith Associates, 2016.

Toxic Charity: How the Church Hurts Those They Help and How to Reverse It by Robert D Lupton. HarperOne, 2012.

Praying in Color: Drawing a New Path to God. By Sybil MacBeth. Paraclete Press, 2007.

Radical Hospitality: Benedict's Way of Love, 2nd edition by Lonni Pratt Collins. Paraclete Press, 2011.

Faithful Families: Creating Sacred Moments at Home by Traci Smith. Chalice Press, 2017.

New Life through Shared Ministry: Moving from Volunteering to Mission by Judith A. Urban. Rowman & Littlefield, 2013.

Curriculum

[*Coming Home to the Table: An Intergenerational Peacemaking Resource.*](#) Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, 1999.

[*Home Grown: Handbook for Christian Parenting*](#) by Karen DeBoer. Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2010.

[*Resources for the Home.*](#) Peace and Global Witness Resources. PC(USA) Special Offerings.

[*Table Topics: Questions to Start Great Conversations.*](#) Ultra Pro International, LLC.

[*Word Teasers: Faith Edition.*](#) Big Ideas in Youth Ministry.



Online Resources

[“Blessing Bags for the Homeless.”](#) Dallas Hope Charities.

[“Building a Neighborhood Together: An Intergenerational Peacemaking Project from Family Communications.”](#) Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, Presbyterian Mission Agency.

[Ceaseless Prayer.](#)

[d365 devotions.](#) Passport, Inc. Co-Sponsored by the Office of Christian Formation, PC(USA).

[Daily Prayer app.](#) Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Mission Agency.

[“Faith5.”](#) Faith Inkubators.

[“Families: Resources for the Home.”](#) Illustrated Ministry.

[Hate Has No Home Here.](#)

[“Home Practices.”](#) Building Faith. Virginia Theological Seminary.

[“8 Solid Tips To Bring Back Family Worship.”](#) By Darby Jones. Resource UMC.

[Let’s Be Neighbors.](#)

[Praying in Color](#) by Sybil MacBeth

[“Pack a Care Kit to Help Someone Who is Homeless.”](#) Portland Rescue Mission.

[“Creating a Prayer Space at Home.”](#) by Sharon Ely Pearson. Building Faith. Virginia Theological Seminary.

[Presbyterian Older Adult Ministries Network.](#)

[StoryCorps.](#)

[The Network of Biblical Storytellers International.](#)

[The Turquoise Table.](#)

[Traci Smith: Faith+Family+ Spirit.](#)

[“Holy Hikes with the Psalms.”](#) by Noah Van Neil. Building Faith. Virginia Theological Seminary.

[Dixit.](#) Libellud. 2008 (Board Game)

[Rory’s Story Cubes.](#) Zygomatic. (Dice sets used to create stories)