

Facilitator's Guide

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Living THE Way of Love

A 40-DAY DEVOTIONAL

Foreword by Courtney V. Cowart & Stephanie Spellers



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About This Guide

This facilitator's guide is intended to serve in the development and facilitation of weekly gatherings of Way of Love circles. One of the tools for creating community and deeper understanding is a "wisdom circle." The Way of Love circle is an ongoing gathering of a group; the wisdom circle is a specific small group facilitation tool. (Guidelines for conducting a wisdom circle are noted in this guide.) The primary purpose of a Way of Love circle is to create a safe environment for small groups to meet regularly, share one another's faith experiences, and grow in the ability to follow Jesus in the way of love. For eight weeks the group will focus on one of the Way of Love practices—Turn, Learn, Pray, Worship, Bless, Go, and Rest, and then creating a rule of life.

You may tailor this material to meet your needs. Within these pages you will find ways to organize a group, construct a safe and sacred space for your gatherings, facilitation tips, and outlines for each of the eight weeks of *Living the Way of Love*. These are simply suggestions based upon my experience as a facilitator and feedback from pilot groups.

Mary Bea Sullivan
January 2019

Putting Together a Way of Love Circle

Before Your First Meeting

Identify a facilitator and six to twelve people who will make a commitment to participate as fully as possible—reading the daily reflections, showing up weekly for the group, and following the guidelines for being in a Way of Love circle. Locate a space where you can meet that is private and relatively free of distractions.

Advise participants to obtain a journal and a copy of *Living the Way of Love: A 40-Day Devotional* prior to the first meeting. Send an e-mail to the entire group ahead of time identifying all the participants, communicating the schedule, location, and any important logistical information. Suggest they watch Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's video in advance (or show this at your first gathering). Encourage them to pray for one another by name.

If accessible by all, you can also create a social media private group.

Print out (or e-mail in advance) the guidelines for being in a Way of Love circle for each participant. See page 8.

Creating Sacred Space

Arrive early and place chairs in a circle. This will emphasize the nonhierarchical nature of the group. If possible, provide a peaceful focal point in the middle of the circle—maybe a cross, flowers, a candle, or all of these on a small table.

Pray for those who will arrive before they come. Remember, the countenance of the facilitator(s) will have a significant impact on the group. Review your plan before each session. If you have a cofacilitator, be clear about who will guide what portion of the conversation.

Have name tags and markers available. Greet participants warmly and introduce those who do not know each other. Provide a comfortable, gracious space.

Facilitation Tips

Depending upon the comfort level of the group, you may want to begin each session by inviting everyone to close their eyes and sit in silence for a moment or two to allow their “souls to catch up with them.” Then follow with an opening prayer.

Strike a balance between offering enough instructions so everyone will feel comfortable and leaving ample space for others to participate. Meet your participants where they are. Be an encouraging presence. Life is busy enough. This is intended to be an exercise in deepening our connection to Jesus, not a drudgery on the to-do list. For some, their rule of life may be showing up once a week for the group, and that is all they can manage, yet more than they have ever done before.

Ask open-ended questions that will illicit deep responses. Ask *why* or *how* questions rather than *yes* or *no* questions. Also use discussion prompts such as, “Tell me about . . .”

Share openly and honestly, as an equal, rather than as an emotionally distant leader. However, remember you are holding safety for the group, do not use this as a time to “unload” emotionally charged thoughts.

- If an individual is monopolizing the discussion, you may need to “break in” gently and redirect so others can participate. If this becomes an ongoing issue, call or meet privately with this person to discuss.
- If anyone expresses frustration with another member, listen patiently. If appropriate, share your intention to address the situation.
- Under no circumstances do you want to engage in gossip or speak disparagingly about a member of the group. Remember, you are setting the example for how the group will interact.
- You may find that some people can barely make time to do the readings each day, let alone the exercises. Perhaps it will help for others to share how they are carving out the time. However, avoid the temptation to try to “fix” anyone. I have seen times when busy people could only do a fraction of the exercises, and have gained and given much by listening and participating in the discussions.

Wisdom Circle Guidelines

Some weeks you will facilitate a wisdom circle to elicit responses. For a wisdom circle, choose a “sacred object,” something to be placed in the center of the circle to be picked up by the person who will speak. In the circle:

1. A facilitator poses a question to the group. Each person is encouraged to speak from their *personal experience*.
2. One person speaks at a time. This person is identified by holding a sacred object (this can be anything: a rock, jewelry, cross, etc.). The object may be placed in the center, and participants can pick it up as they are moved to speak. Or it may be passed along the circle.
3. All sharing is kept confidential.
4. The speaker is encouraged to:
 - speak from the heart
 - be lean of expression; be aware of the need for others to speak
 - “pass” if they wish; silence is welcome
5. Listeners are instructed to:
 - listen devoutly. without judgment, and without “rehearsing” what they will say during their time to speak. Trust the Spirit to move you when it is your turn.
 - This is an exercise in presence. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers. There is no “fixing,” helping, or trying to change another person in the circle. Simply listen to one another and allow one another to speak uninterrupted.

Guidelines for a Way of Love Circle

Arrive five minutes early so the group may begin on time.

Notify leader if you will be absent or late.

Turn off or silence electronic devices.

When you choose to speak, speak from the heart—be willing to share your experience both for your own self-discovery and for the benefit of others.

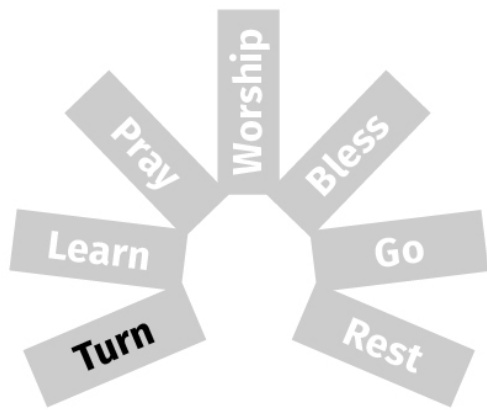
Be lean of expression; say what is most important and be respectful of the need for others to speak.

Share from your perspective using “I” statements. Avoid generalizing that your experience is the same as others.

Do not try to “fix” others by offering solutions, platitudes, or discounting their emotions.

Listen devoutly when others are speaking. Bring your whole attention to what is being shared. As best you can, do not judge the speaker or rehearse what you will say, be respectful and listen with a desire to learn, to understand. Simply receive what the other has to offer.

Hold all that is shared in confidence and avoid bringing up what someone has said outside of the group. They may not want to discuss further, trust they will connect with you about it if it is important to talk about.



WEEK 1

Turn

One of the most important outcomes for week one is for participants to feel comfortable and to understand what to expect. Below is a suggested agenda. For this and all weeks, feel free to make adjustments based upon your own resources, experiences, and your particular group.

Supplies

- name tags
- copies of Guidelines for a Way of Love Circle (noted on page 8)
- Bibles for each participant
- copies of *Living the Way of Love: A 40-Day Devotional* if participants do not already have the book
- focal point / altar items
- TV or digital device (smart phone, laptop, or iPad) connected to an LCD projector with screen (set to <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/way-of-love>)

Welcome

Prayer

Always begin with a prayer and one is suggested for each session, such as this:

Gracious and loving God, we give you thanks for this time to be together,
for this gathered community and most of all for your Son, Jesus Christ. We

pray your blessing upon this gathering. May we be guided by your wisdom and deepen in our love of you, one another, and all of creation. Enliven our hearts and lives to live the way of love that Jesus teaches us. *Amen.*

Introduction to the Session

Provide an overview for how the eight weeks will progress. Explain that each week will focus on one of the practices and ultimately everyone will create their own rule of life. Invite each participant to state their name. What are their hopes for this time? You may also wish to show Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's invitation to the Way of Love (<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/way-of-love>)

Teach: A Rule of Life

Discuss

What is a rule of life? Distribute copies of *Living the Way of Love* if participants don't have one. Tap into its contents: use the introduction on pages ix to xii, references mentioned on days 37 through 40 (pages 99–109), and the epilogue (page 111–14) to briefly explain a rule of life. Suggest that for the time being, the most important thing is to commit as best as possible to take some time each day for the reflections and practices.

Guidelines for a Way of Love Circle

Set the stage for being in community. Hand out the guidelines (page 8) and ask for consent from the group. You can also ask if there is anything else they would add.

Practice: Turn

Read

Distribute Bibles and slowly read the story of the prodigal son, Luke 15:11–32. Allow time for silence afterward.

Reflect

Ask the group reflection questions such as:

- Who did you most identify with in the story and why?
- What came up for you?

Discuss

As a group, talk about the meaning of forgiveness. Below are a few possibilities¹ to highlight:

- The desire to repent comes from God's longing for reconciliation.
- If we believe this, our desire to reconcile can be joyful as well as painful—it can alleviate some of the shame.
- God's forgiveness is not the reward for having changed one's life, but the source and condition of that change.
- Openness to forgiveness freely offered is part of a comprehensive change of heart / repentance / transformed life / reconciliation with God.
- As we live into our own forgiveness, we can forgive others.

Wisdom Circle

If there is time, facilitate a wisdom circle with a question you see most appropriate.

Suggested questions are:

- What role has forgiveness played in your life?
- How can you imagine, or does receiving or offering forgiveness help you to turn toward God?

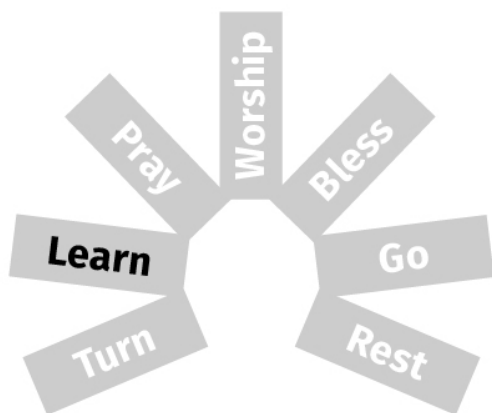
Close

End your gathering with prayer, such as this:

Loving, forgiving, merciful God, we give you thanks and praise for your
immeasurable love of us. Thank you for the insight from this time together,

¹ Many of these are taken from *Reconciliation: Preparing for Confession in the Episcopal Church* by Martin L. Smith (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1985).

for your wide embrace of forgiveness. Give us strength and wisdom and courage to re-TURN our hearts to you again and again and again. In Jesus name we pray, *Amen*.



WEEK 2

Learn

Supplies

- Bibles or a printed copy of the scripture to be used for *lectio divina*
- name tags
- focal point / altar items
- paper, pens, and clipboards or another hard surface for writing
- copies of Guidelines for Scholastic *Lectio Divina* (page 17), one per participant
- *optional*: print out the Contemplative Outreach *Lectio Divina* brochure at www.contemplativeoutreach.org/sites/default/files/private/lectiodivinabrochure_2018.pdf

Welcome

Prayer

Begin with prayer, such as this:

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning:
Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them,
that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting
life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and
reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*
(Book of Common Prayer, Proper 28, p. 236)

Introduction to the Session

For each week from now on, begin with a brief check-in. Be sure to allocate a certain amount of time so this doesn't take the whole session. Suggested questions are:

- When did you feel closest to God this week?
- How is it going?
- What supported taking time alone with God? What got in the way?
- Any responses to the written reflections from this past week or last week's gathering?

Teach: Benedictine Spirituality

You need not be an expert, but given the rule of life is grounded in Benedictine spirituality, it may be helpful and interesting to give a bit of background about St. Benedict and his monastic tradition of listening, study, and prayer.²

Listening

St. Benedict's rule of life includes instructions to "listen with the ear of the heart." Esther de Waal explains the key is that "we listen to one another and listen to God. . . . This is total listening. Not the cerebral listening of the head but coming from the heart which is the true innermost self. It means to listen with sensitivity and openness."³ Later de Waal expounds that the "word 'obedience' is derived from the Latin *obedire*, which shares its root from *audire*, to hear. So to obey really means to listen and act upon what we have heard, or, in other words, to see that the listening achieves its aim."⁴

Praying with Scripture

One of the ways to prepare for giving a sermon is to pray with the scripture and consider:

² Two websites with excellent summaries of St. Benedict and Benedictine spirituality are www.episcopalchurch.org/library/glossary/benedictine-spirituality and www.stpaulseattle.org/formation-practice/benedictine-spirituality/.

³ Esther de Waal, *Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 12.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

- Where does this scripture speak to me?
- This community?
- The world today?
- Historically?

Discuss

- What is your response to Benedict's instruction to "listen with the ear of the heart"?
- How does it impact your listening to God, life, scripture to consider that listening alone is not enough, that a response is required?

Practice: Learn

Lectio Divina

Distribute a handout with the Guidelines for Scholastic *Lectio Divina*. Review the process step-by-step. Choose a few verses of scripture to read to the group following the *lectio divina*⁵ process found at the end of this session on page 16. Suggested scripture includes:

- Matthew 5:1–10
- Mark 4:35–41
- Mark 9:30–37
- Mark 10:46–52
- 1 John 4:7–11

⁵ This way of practicing *lectio divina* developed in the Middle Ages at the beginning of the scholastic period. At this time, there began a tendency to compartmentalize the spiritual life. As this tendency grew, the emphasis was placed more upon rational analysis and less on personal experience. The scholastic form divides the process into stages or steps in a hierarchical pattern.

Reflect

After a period of silence, pair participants in groups of two, giving five to seven minutes for each person to share with their partner any reflections from the *lectio divina* exercise. Be clear that the “listener” is not to interrupt, simply to listen and receive. Keep time and communicate when it is time to switch who is sharing and who is listening.

Close

End your gathering with prayer, such as this:

Mysterious Lord, we give you thanks for the most Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, inspired by you and within which contain all things necessary for salvation. Open our minds and hearts and lives to continue to learn your way as revealed through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, in whose loving name we pray. *Amen.*

Guidelines for Scholastic *Lectio Divina*

Step One

Read the passage, encouraging everyone to listen with the “ear of their heart.” What phrase, sentence, or even one word stands out to you?

Step Two

Read the passage again and reflect on the word of God. Encourage everyone to be aware of what touches them, a thought or reflection that is meaningful. Allow a minute or two of silence.

Step Three

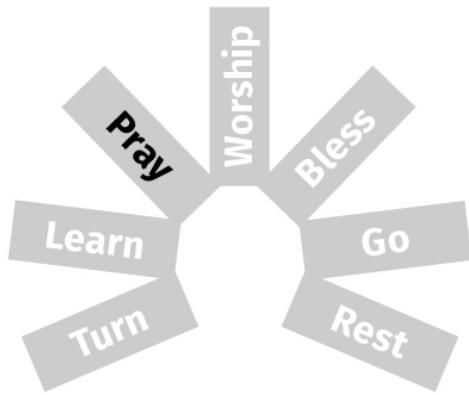
Read the passage again and respond spontaneously to the word of God. Be aware of any prayer that rises up within that expresses the experience. Allow a minute or two of silence.

Step Four

Read the passage a final time and rest in the word, reflect or pray and allow God to speak in the silence. Allow three or four minutes of silence.

To Extend the Practice

After the resting, take the phrase, sentence, or word into your daily activity and listen to it, reflect on it, pray over it, and rest in it as time allows during the day. Allow it to become part of you.



WEEK 3

Pray

Supplies

- name tags
- focal point / altar items
- journaling prompts written on newsprint (see page 22)
- some of your favorite books on prayer or prayer resources and/or resources from the resource section of *Living the Way of Love* (pages 115–16)
- paper, pen, and hard surface for writing
- copies of *Living the Way of Love*

Welcome

Prayer

Open with this or another prayer:

Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom, you know our necessities before we ask and our ignorance in asking: Have compassion on our weakness, and mercifully give us those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask; through the worthiness of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.* (Book of Common Prayer, Proper 11, p. 231)

Introduction to the Session

How is it going? Share reflections from the readings of the past week and the sense of rhythm each person is taking time each day. As Joan Chittister says, “Spiritual practices aren’t meant to be a chore . . . but a response.”

Teach: Prayer

Prayer is fundamental to our faith. It is beneficial to pause and consider what we mean by prayer, types of prayers we pray, and what supports or detracts from our prayer life. Offering a nonjudgmental and open presence for this discussion is very important as people may be especially ashamed of or disappointed in themselves for not having a robust prayer life. The intention is to create a safe environment to explore prayer and affirm where prayer is life-giving and encourage where prayer is wanting.

What Is Prayer?

Read the following quote from Joan Chittister to the group:

Spirituality without a prayer life is no spirituality at all, and it will not last beyond the first defeats. Prayer is an opening of the self so that the Word of God can break in and make us new. Prayer unmask. Prayer converts. Prayer impels. Prayer sustains us on the way. Pray for the grace it will take to continue what you would like to quit.⁶

Discuss

What are different forms/types of prayer? Some answers may include:

- intercessory
- thanksgiving
- liturgical/worship
- contemplative

⁶ Joan Chittister, *In A High Spiritual Season* (Ligouri, MO: Ligouri Publications, 1995), <https://myquietspaces.org/2017/06/07/joan-d-chittister/>.

- blessing

Read this exposition on prayer from the Benedictine oblates:

At the heart of the ongoing conversion and obedience to God is prayer. Probably prayer has more definitions than most things in our Christian life. One of the oldest definitions is that prayer is a “lifting of the mind and heart to God.” This is quite true, provided that we realize that it is God who does the lifting. The initiative is always God’s. Fundamentally, we are a capacity for God; that might almost be our definition. Jesus came among us to tell us, to show us, that God is not a remote force, an unmoved cause in the heavens. No, God is personal and wants a personal union with us. We do not have to go looking outside ourselves for God. As Saint Augustine said, “Behold, you are within me, and I was out of myself when I went seeking you.”⁷

Ask the group some of the following questions, or those you have designed to spur conversation. Be mindful of those who may dominate the conversation and pay attention to where it may be suitable to invite a more reflective participant to respond.

- Why do we pray?
- What are impediments to prayer? Some answers may include: anger, boredom, sadness, busyness, technology, lack of space.

Additional thoughts on prayer that you may or may not wish to discuss:

- In contemplative prayer we understand silence to be more than not speaking, it is the cessation of inner noise. Do you have an attraction to or an aversion to silence? What part does silence play in your prayer life?

⁷ “Benedictine Spirituality: An Introduction,” Oblates of St. Benedict, accessed January 10, 2019, www.benedictineoblates.com/downloads/Benedictine_Spirituality_Introductory_Conferences.pdf , 14.

- In the Celtic tradition, there is a sense of prayer in all things. Our whole lives can be a prayer. Example of mother lighting the morning fire and giving thanks for the new day, the heat from the fire, etc., was a known practice.⁸
- Language is quite personal and perhaps especially so with prayer. For some of us we can only imagine a male “Father” God. For others of us gender-neutral or feminine language is most natural. Some of us prefer hierarchical kingly language and others a more mystical approach. If we are leading prayers in public, it is considerate to be aware of with whom we are praying.

Prayer is vital to the transformative journey of following in the way of Jesus. Some of the passages which show Jesus praying include him:

- seeking guidance in private: Mark 1:35 and Luke 5:16
- praying for others: John 17:11, 20–21
- praising God the Father: Luke 10:21
- giving thanks: Mark 14:22
- submitting to God’s will: Matthew 26:39
- crying out in anguish: Luke 22:44 and Matthew 27:46

Sharing

Ask the group to share any resources that have been particularly helpful for their prayer life. Examples are in the resource section of *Living the Way of Love*, pages 115–16.

Practice: Prayer

After a period of silence, introduce time for quiet, personal reflection on prayer in the form of journaling prompts. Allow sufficient time for initial responses to the following journaling prompts. You may want to provide soothing background music. Encourage participants to remain silent even when they are finished. Perhaps they can use that time

⁸ Prayers from the *Carmina Gadelica* offer this perspective, for example:

www.faithandworship.com/Carmina_Gadelica_celtic_prayers.htm.

to silently pray. Suggest participants may want to return to these prompts throughout the week if they wish to explore more deeply.

Journaling Prompts

- What is an early memory that you have of prayer? Describe the experience.
- Who taught you to pray?
- Is there a prayer that has not been answered for you? If so, how have you/or haven't you, reconciled with God?
- If I considered my whole life as a prayer. what am I praying?
- How would you describe your current prayer life?
- How does language shape your prayer life? What words draw you closer to God?
What words create a sense of distance?
- What do you desire for your prayer life? What one step could you take to move in the direction you desire to go?

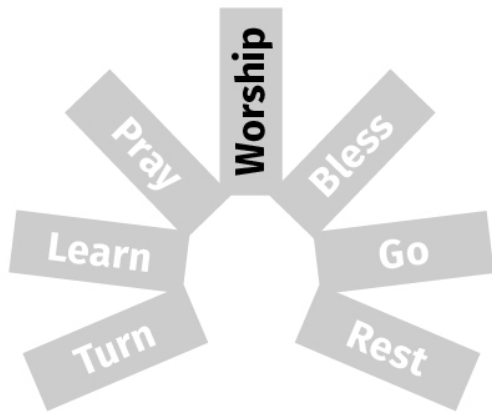
Reflect

If there is time, reflect as a group on the experience of journaling about prayer and any insights that may have been gleaned from this session. Encourage the community to take even a brief period of time for prayer each day.

Close

Loving God, as we seek to know and follow you more faithfully, we pray you will open and fill our hearts with the love and knowledge of your Son, Jesus. May we see ever more clearly what it is you call us to, and may we respond with the lives of joy and justice. *Amen.*⁹

⁹ Office of the General Convention, *Daily Prayer for All Seasons* (New York: Church Publishing, 2014), 86.



WEEK 4

Worship

Supplies

- name tags
- focal point / altar items
- copies of the Book of Common Prayer
- Bible
- copies of *Living the Way of Love*

Welcome

Prayer

O Almighty God, who pours out on all who desire it the spirit of grace and of supplication: Deliver us, when we draw near to you, from coldness of heart and wanderings of mind, that with steadfast thoughts and kindled affections we may worship you in spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (Book of Common Prayer, 833)

Introduction to the Session

How is it going? Share reflections from readings of the past week and sense of rhythm in taking time each day to deepen each of the practices of the Way of Love.

Teach: Prayer in Community

Distribute Bibles and prayer books. Use them as together you share some general thoughts about worship and see how it is central to our practice as Episcopalians.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. (Luke 24:30–31)

Celebrant: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them to the Lord. (Book of Common Prayer, 361)

When we worship, we gather with others before God. We hear the Good News of Jesus Christ, give thanks, confess, and offer the brokenness of the world to God. As we break bread, our eyes are opened to the presence of Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are made one body, the body of Christ sent forth to live the Way of Love.¹⁰

Ronald Rolheiser in his book *Sacred Fire: A Vision for Deeper Human and Christian Maturity* claims we need community and grace.¹¹ He also points out that Pentecost happened to a gathered community.¹²

Read

Together, turn to “Day 25: Belonging” (page 67) in *Living the Way of Love*. Read together:

¹⁰ “WORSHIP: Gather in community weekly to thank, praise, and dwell with God,” Church Publishing, accessed January 10, 2019.

<https://www.churchpublishing.org/wayofloveworship>

¹¹ Ronald Rolheiser, *Sacred Fire: A Vision for Deeper Human and Christian Maturity* (New York: Image, 2014), 129.

¹² *Ibid.*, 131.

When St. Athanasius said, “For the Son of God became man so that we might become God,”¹³ he was referring to *theosis*—growing in sanctification, growing in holiness. “We are imprinted with God’s image at birth,” said Rt. Rev. Frank Griswold. “Likeness is what we are growing toward.”¹⁴ *Theosis* is not a private matter; it is done in and for community—those living and the communion of saints.

We are a sacramental people, sanctified as we participate in the sacramental life of the Church. We mark time and our spiritual lives in community.¹⁵

Discuss

- How does community help or hinder your growing in union with Christ?
- How can you strengthen the life of your faith community?

Read

Turn to “Day 4: Worship: Kneeling at the Rail” on page 10 and read:

The liturgical rhythm of the seasons resonate because they illuminate the entire scope of human experience. Regular participation in worship provides a Christ-centered framework for living in all stages and seasons of our lives.¹⁶

¹³ St. Athanasius in his work *On the Incarnation*.

¹⁴ The Most Reverend Frank Griswold speaking during his class “Anglican Spirituality” at Virginia Theological Seminary on February 23 2003.

¹⁵ Mary Bea Sullivan, *Living the Way of Love: A 40-Day Devotional* (New York: Church Publishing, 2019), 66.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 10.

Discuss

You may choose to share some background about Anglican worship. Below are excerpts from the Diocese of Alabama Confirmation Curriculum.¹⁷ Choose talking points that seem most interesting to you as it relates to why we worship and how we worship. Reading each bullet point is not engaging, but perhaps knowing this information will give some material for you as a facilitator.

- Worship is central to the identity of the Anglican tradition and from its beginnings in the Church of England worship united various factions into one church.
- The first English Book of Common Prayer (1549) provided a framework uniting ancient materials with theological understanding of that time and place. Subsequent editions show development of thought and reflect differing cultures.
- Celtic, Benedictine, and Roman traditions influence Anglican tradition and worship.
- Anglican worship is incarnational, recognizing that all parts of our human self are heirs of the promise of salvation begun in Christ's incarnation; we use all parts of our being (body, mind, spirit) to worship God.

Practice: Worship

The Book of Common Prayer

Depending upon the time of day that your group is gathering, find the various rites in the Book of Common Prayer and choose one to pray together: Morning Prayer (page 37 or 75), Evening Prayer (page 61 or 115, or Compline (page 127). To find the readings from the lectionary, you may go to <https://www.bcponline.org>, the Daily Office Lectionary found on page 934 in the Book of Common Prayer, or online at http://prayer.forwardmovement.org/daily_readings_anytime.php.

¹⁷ The Rt. Rev. Henry N. Parsley, Jr., et al., "Anglican Essentials: A Course of Adult Catechesis in the Diocese of Alabama," Diola Ministries, Anglican Diocese of Alabama, (accessed January 15, 2019).

www.dioalaministries.org/uploads/3/0/5/4/30546011/adult_confirmation_final_curriculum_pdf_format_billie.pdf.

Wisdom Circle

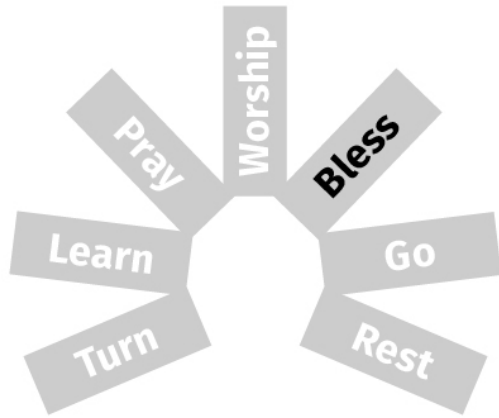
If time permits, facilitate a wisdom circle with a question or two regarding worship.

Some suggestion questions are:

- Share an experience of worship that was profound for you. What made it memorable?
- What makes worship meaningful for you?
- When has worship been challenging?
- How does worshipping in community differ for you than private prayer?

Close

Invite one of the participants to lead a closing prayer or have participants each share a favorite prayer from the Book of Common Prayer.



WEEK 5

Bless

Supplies

- name tags
- focal point / altar items
- Bible
- sacred object for wisdom circle
- Wisdom Circle Guidelines (page 8)
- *optional: John O'Donohue's To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), especially pages xiii and xvi

Welcome

Prayer

Gracious God, Lover of Souls, grant us the generosity of heart and humility of spirit to thankfully receive your blessings; and to bless others by abundantly sharing them. *Amen.*

Introduction to the Session

- How has coming together in this way these past four weeks impacted you?
- What changes have you noticed?
- Share reflections and experiences from readings of the past week. What resonated with your life today?

Teach: Biblical Blessings

Share

On the Way of Love website¹⁸ we find:

- Bless: to share faith and unselfishly give and serve.
- *“You received without payment; give without payment.”* (Matt. 10:8)
- *Celebrant: Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ? People: We will, with God’s help.* (Book of Common Prayer, 305)
- Jesus called his disciples to give, forgive, teach, and heal in his name. We are empowered by the Spirit to bless everyone we meet, practicing generosity and compassion and proclaiming the Good News of God in Christ with hopeful words and selfless actions. We can share our stories of blessing and invite others to the Way of Love.

Read

Distribute Bibles and invite different individuals to read one or more of the following stories:

- Genesis 1:22 (God blessing creation)
- Genesis 12:1–3 (Abraham blessed to be a blessing)
- Proverbs 22:9 (The generous will be blessed)
- Luke 1:39–56 (Mary and Elizabeth)

Discuss

- What do you notice about blessing in these stories?
- Who is giving the blessing?
- Who is receiving?
- Knowing what you do about these people in the Bible, how do those who have been blessed share their blessings.

¹⁸ “The Way of Love,” The Episcopal Church, <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/way-of-love>.

Practice: Bless

Following the Wisdom Circle Guidelines (page 8), ask each of the following questions one at a time. Read the guidelines aloud. Then ask:

- In what ways do you feel blessed?

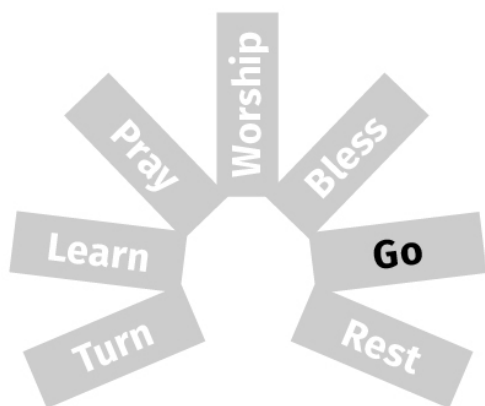
After everyone has responded, ask:

- How are you sharing your blessings?
- What are ways the Spirit is calling you to bless others with what you have freely received?

At the conclusion of the circle, give thanks for the honesty, courage, and devout listening of the group. Encourage the group to seek ways to bless others this week through sharing resources, faith, and their story. Perhaps remind them we cannot simultaneously bless and curse.

Close

Thank you, God, for the innumerable blessings you have bestowed upon us, including this gathered group. Thank you for the infinite opportunities you present to us to share our blessings with others. *Amen.*



WEEK 6

Go

Supplies

- name tags
- focal point / altar items
- Bibles
- *optional*: copies of *The Hymnal 1982*

Welcome

Prayer

Gracious and loving God, we give thanks for the diverse ways you manifest in each of us. Grants us the courage, wisdom, and love to reach out to those who are different than us to learn together and to care for one another. *Amen.*

Introduction to the Session

Share reflections and experiences from readings of the past week.

- When this past week did you experience being blessed?
- Where did you offer blessing?
- What resonated with your life today?

Remind the group that the Way of Love practices—Turn, Learn, Pray, Worship, Bless, Go, and Rest are not intended to be burdensome on already busy lives. Oftentimes we are

unaware that we are already employing these sacred practices. Hopefully, reflecting upon these practices will affirm what one is already doing, and if there is a pull to address one practice in particular, to explore that as an area for growing in relationship with Jesus.

Teach: Crossing Boundaries

Discuss

For group discussion, consider how the Bible incorporates many stories of crossing boundaries.

- Which ones come to mind?
- How do they inspire you?
- What risks were taken?
- What was gained in the boundary crossing?
- What was sacrificed?

Some stories you may be prepared to share, discuss, and/or read together:

- the call of Abraham (Gen. 12)
- Jesus and the Samaritan Woman (John 4:5–9)
- Jesus and the Centurion (Matt. 8:5–13)
- Paul with Jesus’s early followers and the Gentiles (Eph. 3:1–20)

Discuss

- How has following Jesus required you to cross boundaries to provide love and mercy?
- What risks did you take?
- What did you fear?
- What unexpected gift came from the encounter?
- What community or person is different from you that you feel drawn to get to know better?
- How could you cross that boundary in a respectful and mutually beneficial way?
- Who would you least expect to befriend?

Practice: Go

Listen Deeply

The term “listen devoutly” has been used in regard to the wisdom circles. It is similar to listening deeply.

- When you have listened deeply (or devoutly) to life, to God, to other people, how has that changed you?
- What was something new you learned about yourself? Other people?
- What distracts you from listening to others?

Live like Jesus

- What does it mean to you to live like Jesus?
- What are things he did that you can do?
- Where does your life seem contrary to the teachings and life of Jesus?
- What is one thing you could do to live more like Jesus?

After the initial group discussion, pair off into groups of two or three and prompt each participant to share, one person at a time, about a time when he or she crossed boundaries (physical/ethnic/sexual orientation/economic). How did the encounter impact each person? Instruct the small groups when it is time for the next person to share. Allow five minutes per person.

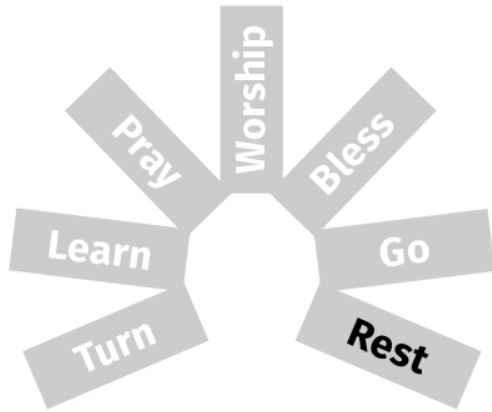
Close

Pray or sing (Hymn 593 in *The Hymnal 1982*) the following prayer associated with St. Francis of Assisi:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love; for it

is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. *Amen*.



WEEK 7

Rest

Supplies

- name tags
- focal point / altar items
- Bibles
- large sheets of paper such as flipchart paper
- colored markers
- “Be Still Chant” (download at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ITIHoBGYwha6EteubZhudxFg4VxLCtMy/view?ts=5c3d0595>)
- digital device (smart phone, laptop, or iPad) for playing music, with speakers
- *Living the Way of Love* copies
- chime, singing bowl, or chime app on a smart phone

Welcome

Prayer

Below is a prayer you may chant with your group. You do not need to have a musical background to chant this; however, if this is uncomfortable for you, you might choose a leader in advance to help you. Or you can use the link

(<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ITIHoBGYwha6EteubZhudxFg4VxLCtMy/view?ts=5c3d0595>) of this chant to be your guide. If you lead it, simply use a monotone for the entire chant. It is quite soothing, so allow a gracious space of time, at least a minute,

before you begin speaking again. You may let your group know there will be silence afterward.

Chant together three times:

Be Still and Know that I am God

Be Still and Know that I am

Be Still and Know

Be Still

Be

Introduction to the Session

- What have you noticed about your relationship with God this week?
- Which practices come most naturally to you?
- Which seem most challenging?
- Where is the Spirit stirring something new in you?

Teach: Talking Sabbath

Read

Invite a volunteer (or two) to read:

- Genesis 2:1–3
- Leviticus 23:3

Discuss

- What does sabbath mean to you?
- How, if at all, have these past six weeks made you more aware of sabbath as a Jesus-centered practice?

Reflect

Place large sheets of paper around the room, either on tables or stuck to a wall. At the top of each page write one of these titles: Pray/Worship/Silence; Rest/Renewal; Creativity; Relationships; Nature. Have two different colored markers next to each piece of paper

and invite the group to write on each paper—in one color marker (for example, red) the things they love to do under this category; in another color marker (for example, blue) the things they would like to make time for in their sabbath time. Invite the group to be silent during the exercise and play contemplative music in the background. Allow at least ten minutes for this exercise.

Discuss

- Ask the group what they noticed during this exercise.
- Where did you feel excitement?
- Where did you feel sadness or feel overwhelmed?
- What one thing might you do to claim sabbath in your life?

If there is time you may also remind the group of the benefits of simplicity and how even though it is challenging, simplification opens space for sabbath. Here are some talking points to get you started:

- Wayne Mueller in his book, *Sabbath Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives* (Random House, 1997) claims that sabbath is a response to the violence of overwork, busyness, and accumulation in our lives.
- Recently, there have been significant movements to claim the joy that can come with simplification—for example, the tiny house movement or the enthusiasm for Marie Kondo's tips for tidying up, <https://konmari.com>.

Practice: Rest

Using the centering prayer instructions on page 83 in the *Living the Way of Love*, lead five to ten minutes of centering prayer. If you are not familiar with this prayer method and there is a centering prayer practitioner in the group, perhaps they could lead this part. Even though traditionally this prayer is twenty minutes long, in this environment, it can be best to give a brief introduction to the practice. If you set the timer on your phone, be sure the notification sound is pleasing. Otherwise a small chime can be nice to begin and to end.

Give the centering prayer instructions, ask if there are any questions, read Psalm 46:10, and then ring a chime to begin. At the end of the time, ring the chime three times (or if using phone timer, simply wait for that to alert). Remain silent for a minute or two and pray the Lord's Prayer together.

Close

Close with chanting the "Be Still and Know That I Am God" chant three times. Allow a bit of silence and then say: "Amen."

WEEK 8

A Rule of Life and Support for the Journey

Supplies

- name tags
- focal point / altar items
- sacred object for a wisdom circle
- Wisdom Circle Guidelines
- Book of Common Prayer for each participant
- paper and pens (you may encourage participants to bring journals)
- *Living the Way of Love* books
- TV or digital device (smart phone, laptop, or iPad) connected to an LCD projector with screen (set to <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/way-of-love>)
- contemplative music and a device to play the music
- *optional*: copies of the Book of Common Prayer

Welcome

Prayer

Invite the group to share in the reading of “A General Thanksgiving” on page 836 in the Book of Common Prayer:

Accept, O Lord, our thanks and praise for all that you have done for us. We thank you for the splendor of the whole creation, for the beauty of this world, for the wonder of life, and for the mystery of love.

We thank you for the blessing of family and friends, and for the loving care which surrounds us on every side.

We thank you for setting us at tasks which demand our best efforts, and for leading us to accomplishments which satisfy and delight us.

We thank you also for those disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on you alone.

Above all, we thank you for your Son Jesus Christ; for the truth of his Word and the example of his life; for his steadfast obedience, by which he overcame temptation; for his dying, through which he overcame death; and for his rising to life again, in which we are raised to the life of your kingdom.

Grant us the gift of your Spirit, that we may know Christ and make him known; and through him, at all times and in all places, may give thanks to you in all things. *Amen.*

Introduction to the Session

Invite participants to briefly reflect on any insights from the readings of the past week.

Teach: Daily Practices of the Way of Love

Watch and Read

- Show Bishop Curry's Way of Love video: <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/way-of-love>
- Read or paraphrase pages 99–100 (“Day 37: Building Your Trellis”) and page 111 (epilogue) from *Living the Way of Love*.

Discuss

Lead a brief discussion about what it means to have a rule of life. Emphasize flexibility, simplicity, and starting in one place, not trying to be a “rule of life Olympian.” This need

not be another place to feel guilt, only a gentle quickening from the Spirit to move in the direction toward deeper love.

Practice: A Rule of Life

Rule of Life

Instruct the participants to take fifteen minutes to begin creating their rule of life by prayerfully answering the questions on pages 112–14 of their copy of *Living the Way of Love*. Distribute pens or pencils and they can write in their books or journal.

Wisdom Circle

Lead a wisdom circle with one of the following questions or one of your own:

- What has it meant to you to spend these eight weeks with this community and Living the Way of Love?
- What insight have you gained?
- Where do you feel excitement/energy moving forward?

Reflect

Lead a discussion about support going forward. How will they proceed individually or as a group? There may be a desire for some to keep going. If so, bless and release those who do not. If you, as the facilitator, desire to continue, you can indicate that or it may be time to make space for another to lead. The group may feel complete and that is wonderful. Remind the participants about *anam caras*, spiritual direction, and other groups within the congregation. If the group continues, there are fabulous Way of Love resources at <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/getting-started-way-love>.

Close

Gather in a circle and if comfortable, hold hands. Invite each person to offer a word or a phrase for the group. Remind them they can pass if they so desire by simply saying “pass.” Start with the person to the facilitator’s left and go around until everyone has taken a turn. The facilitator finishes with their word or phrase and then “Amen.”