

# TALKING POINTS



## **Faith Practice One: Honoring the Body**

- ◇ A Difficult Friendship
- ◇ Embodiment
- ◇ The Suffering Body



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- ◇ The Sabbath Commandment



## **Faith Practice Three: Forgiveness**

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- ◇ Good Friday/Easter Tension



## **Faith Practice Six: Singing Our Lives**

- ◇ Singing Through the Ages



## Faith Practice One: HONORING THE BODY

### “A Difficult Friendship” 15 minutes

This covers material from POF, chapter 1, pp. 13-18.

You may also want to read additional material in *Honoring the Body* (HTB) book, pp. 16-25.

#### 1. Read this quote from the book:

*“The poet Jane Kenyon speaks of our ‘long struggle to be at home in the body, this difficult friendship.’ (POF, p. 15)*

Often this struggle is between “having” a body and “being” a body (HTB, pp. 16-20). This tension exists in religious traditions as well and often moves back and forth between the two.

#### 2. State these two distinct ways of understanding the body:

- ◇ A body is something we have – the essence of who we are is merely encased, temporarily in a body.
- ◇ We are our bodies – what is essential about human beings cannot be separated from our bodies.

So many forces in our society today dishonor the body:

- ◇ Commercials create dissatisfaction with the way we look
- ◇ Some bodies are held up as perfect and desirable while others are despised (HTB, p. 4)
- ◇ Suspicion of the goodness of sexuality is found, especially in religion
- ◇ Make reference to “Retrieving an Ambiguous Legacy” (POF, pp. 16-18)

#### 3. Read this quote from the book:

*“If we are unable to shape a way of life that honors the body in every moment, we will lose something vital to human flourishing.”*

(POF, p. 18)

### Sacred yet Vulnerable

Make these points:

- ◇ To hold a newborn child is to know both the sacredness and the vulnerability of the body.
- ◇ We see this connection at death as well.
- ◇ Our challenge is to remember the sacredness of the body in every moment of our lives.
- ◇ We cannot do this alone, for it is a shared practice: “Because our bodies are vulnerable, we need each other to protect and care for them.” (POF, p. 15)

Hopefully, through considering “honoring the body” as a faith practice, this will transform our troubled relationship with our bodies to one of honor and joy.

Discuss questions like the following:

- ◇ What are some of the ways we dishonor our bodies?
- ◇ Where can we turn for help?
- ◇ Why did early Christians mortify the flesh? Are there remnants of this idea today? (e.g., DaVinci Code and Opus Dei)
- ◇ To what religious traditions do we turn for wisdom about the body?
- ◇ How are we to celebrate the body’s pleasures and protect the body’s vulnerabilities in a world that seems confused about both? (HTB, p. xiii)
- ◇ How can we choose reverence over exploitation and anxiety?



**“Embodiment” 15 minutes**

Embodiment as a central theme to the Christian Faith is explored in this segment. Material about this can be found in book POF, pp. 16 ff.

Themes of embodiment found in scriptures:

- ◇ Creation
- ◇ Incarnation
- ◇ Resurrection

**Creation**

For Jews and Christians alike, the body reflects God’s own goodness.

Every body is made in the image of God.

**Incarnation**

In Christianity this affirmation is supplemented by the belief that God was somehow fully present in a particular human body that lived in a particular time and place, the body of Jesus of Nazareth.

God was incarnate – enfleshed in a body that ate and drank, slept and woke, touched and received touch.

This body also suffered a death as painful and degrading as any human beings have devised. You may want to make reference to Mel Gibson’s movie, *Passion of the Christ*.

**Resurrection**

Early Christian testimony that this body also lived again after death shapes a profound Christian hope that undergirds the practice of honoring the body.

Whatever else it means, the resurrection of Jesus tells us that bodies matter to God. And they ought to matter to us, too. (HTB, p. 8)

Creation, incarnation, resurrection hold the body at the center of Christian life. They influence how we worship, how we understand ourselves, individually and as a community.

NOTE – The Early Christians, the early church, thought of themselves as the “body of Christ.” They didn’t call themselves the “spirit of Christ.” They took up the work of Christ with their own hands and feet, heads and hearts – with their bodies.

The words of Jesus at the Last Supper were – “This is my body, This is my blood.” God offers us food and drink.

Touchstones for contemporary Christian practice of honoring the body:

- ◇ God created our bodies good; we are made in the image of God’s own goodness.
- ◇ Our bodies are “a temple of the Holy Spirit.” (I Corinthians 6:19)
- ◇ God dwelled fully in a vulnerable human body.
- ◇ God gathers us up in death – body and all.
- ◇ Through our bodies we participate in God’s activity in the world. When we do anything to the least of these, we do it to Christ. (cf. Matthew 25:31-46)
- ◇ Our bodies are worthy of care and blessing and ought never to be degraded or exploited – when we honor the bodies of others, we honor Christ; when we dishonor the bodies of others, we dishonor him.
- ◇ Through the needs of the body, we are invited into relationship with God.





## “The Suffering Body” 10 minutes

The book *Honoring the Body*, has a chapter devoted to honoring the suffering body, pp. 165 – 180. The material found there may be helpful for the following discussion, though it is not necessary.

To focus more pointedly on practicing honoring our bodies from an end of life perspective, ask these or similar questions:

- ◇ How does one care for a suffering body?
- ◇ How do we keep the sacredness of the body in view even in the midst of suffering?
- ◇ How can touch be healing when we are ill?
- ◇ Can bodily suffering draw us near to God? (refer to the apostle Paul’s experience of the “thorn in the flesh” and how he could conclude that “when I am weak, then I am strong,” II Corinthians 12:8-10).
- ◇ Are there things we can be doing now that will better prepare us for when our bodies are in pain? (e.g. “trying to honor our bodies and the bodies of others in the midst of everyday life, attending to the sacredness of the body when we bathe and dress, eat and drink, run and rest and love,” HTB, pp. 177, 178)
- ◇ What is your understanding of this quote of John Koenig:

*“When we are very ill, we are brought to the place where life and death meet. For Christians, this place is the cross. Yet in the central mystery of our faith, the cross is also a prelude to new life.” (HTB, pp. 178, 179)*



## Faith Practice Two: KEEPING SABBATH

### “Our God Our Help in Ages Past” 10 minutes

The hymn, “Our God, Our Help in Ages Past,” is based on Psalm 90.

1. Read these particular words from the hymn:  
*“Time, like an ever-rolling stream,  
soon bears us all away/We fly forgotten, as  
a dream dies at the opening day.”*

Ask: How does the hymn writer help us to see we don’t have all the time in the world?

2. Sing the hymn, “Our God, Our Help in Ages Past,” #20 in the *LTWD Songbook* and found in most hymnals.
3. Present these focal ideas:
  - ◇ God as “our shelter from the stormy blast, our eternal home”
  - ◇ God present both “in ages past” and “in years to come”
4. Ask these questions:
  - ◇ Why do you think this hymn is used at funerals?
  - ◇ What do you think it says about a faith perspective of time? [“...it shows us a God who exists beyond time, a God who promises that when we are in God’s keeping the waves of time can no longer buffet us about.” (RTD p. 10)]
5. Suggest these ideas:
  - ◇ It is not that we flee from time, but that we are seeking something better.
  - ◇ It is within time itself that God meets us. This is central to the Christian theology of incarnation, the idea that God comes to humanity in a specific time and place.



- ◇ Time is not our enemy, is rather a meeting place with God.
- ◇ Time itself is made holy by the presence of God.



### “Receiving the Day” 15 minutes

Purpose: to explore the evening/morning sequence in Hebrew thought

Ask questions like:

- ◇ When does a day begin? You may want to show or tell about the scene from the movie, *Groundhog Day*. (See the reference to this in RTD, p. 17)
- ◇ What have we lost when we think the day starts with us, when we get up in the morning?

Discuss these focal ideas:

◇ In Hebrew Scriptures, the day begins at sundown, as in the Genesis account of creation. The Hebrew evening/morning sequence conditions us to the rhythm of grace – we go to sleep as God begins his work. Thus, morning becomes a time to join in the labors already begun. We enter into what God is already doing. Each day God continues the work of new creation. We are “invited to enter, both as ones who stand in need of this divine work and as partners in it.” (RTD p. 18)

This shifts the center of our activity from us to God.

◇ Keeping Sabbath helps to restore God’s intended rhythm, teaching us about grace, about dependence on God, about the world going on without us for a day. Practices for ending the day: Sit down with children and as you go over the events of the day, ask, “Where did you meet God today?”

Ask these questions:

- ◇ What is the difference between “seizing

the day” and “receiving the day?”

◇ Ultimately, what makes us free to receive this day as a gift? [“It is the confidence that in baptism we have died the only death that matters.” (RTD, p. 43)]

Brainstorm together on the board:

◇ What hymn, prayer, or other act could help start your day at dusk?

### “Sabbath Commandment” 15 minutes

Read the two versions of the Sabbath commandment as found in the Hebrew Scriptures: Exodus 20:8-11, Deuteronomy 5:12-15 (POF, pp. 78, 79)

Look for the particular emphases of each passage:

- ◇ Deuteronomy 5 – creation, humanity in God’s image, holiness
- ◇ Exodus 20 – exodus, people liberated from captivity, social justice

Ask: Why do you think both versions are important to the meaning of Sabbath?

The two versions are like “two songs of Sabbath.”

One points to Sabbath keeping as a remembrance and perpetuation of God’s liberation of an enslaved people (Exodus 20). It pushes us to ask, “How might keeping Sabbath resist various forms of enslavement today for ourselves and others?”

The other points to Sabbath keeping as rooted in God’s creation of the world (Deuteronomy 5). It pushes us to ask, “How does our society’s keeping Sabbath (or lack thereof) express our relation to the created world?”



## “Sabbath Commandment” cont. ...

These two require the same behavior, but sing different songs. God is the generous creator who sanctifies time and the liberator who requires human beings to deal mercifully with one another. One song emphasizes the goodness of God’s creation - the other emphasizes social justice. (RTD, p. 46ff.)

These are important as we face the challenges of our modern day culture:

Society challenges Sabbath. Sabbath challenges society by nourishing an alternative vision of how things could be.

Discuss this quote:

*“The solution of mankind’s most vexing problems will not be found in renouncing technical civilization, but in attaining some degree of independence from it ...”*

- Abraham Heschel (POF, p. 88)

Ask how can Sabbath keeping teach us that independence?

Dorothy Bass gives us this warning, “If we are not mindful (of Sabbath as a gift), the culture will not be mindful for us.” (RTD, p. 59)

Discuss the quote written on the board:

*“When we keep a Sabbath holy, we are practicing, for a day, the freedom that God intends for all people.” (RTD, p. 63)*

She goes on to say: “We are practicing independence from the forces of injustice.”

Discuss.

## Faith Practice Three: FORGIVENESS

### “Which Way to Forgiveness?”

#### 10 minutes

Introduce forgiveness as a faith practice.

This may be more difficult to put into words than the previous two faith practices; harder to put into practice as well.

This is demonstrated in the prayer mentioned by Caroline Simon in her essay, “Which Way to Forgiveness?” (CR, p. 85) – a prayer written by an unknown prisoner in Ravensbruck concentration camp and left on the body of a dead child.

Hand out copies and lead participants in “Prayer for Forgiveness”

*“O Lord, remember not only the men and women of good will, but also those of ill will. But do not remember all the suffering they have inflicted on us; remember the fruits we have bought, thanks to this suffering – our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility, our courage, our generosity, the greatness of heart which has grown out of all this, and when they come to judgment let all the fruits which we have borne be their forgiveness.”*

Simon asks in her article, “How could I grow into someone who could pray such a prayer – not just over petty affronts but also over matters of monstrous harm?”

Ask: “What would it take for one of us to grow into someone who could pray such a prayer?”

Make these points::

◇ As Christians, one of our clearest





directives is to forgive.

- ◇ Forgiveness is important for end-of-life issues, as can be seen in the “Five Tasks of the Dying” ; Refer to handout and read these five tasks.
- ◇ We are grateful that God forgives us.
- ◇ We must look at how we, in turn, forgive others.

Ask: What can help us to forgive?

*How do we enter into the dance of forgiveness – “a beautiful, if sometimes awkward, dance.” (POF, pp. 138ff.)*

These steps of the dance are outlined there:

- ◇ We become willing to speak truthfully and patiently about the conflicts that have arisen.
- ◇ We acknowledge both the existence of anger and bitterness and a desire to overcome them.
- ◇ We summon up a concern for the well-being of the other as a child of God.
- ◇ We recognize our own complicity in conflict, remember that we have been forgiven in the past, and take the step of repentance.
- ◇ We make a commitment to struggle to change whatever caused and continues to perpetuate our conflicts.
- ◇ We confess our yearning for the possibility of reconciliation.



## “The Paradox of Forgiveness”

**10 minutes**

Forgiveness involves the paradoxes of truth and mercy; justice and peace.

The material from the article “The Heart of Reconciliation” (CR, pp. 83-84) presents these ideas:

- ◇ Psalm 85:10 says essentially that “truth and mercy have met together, justice and peace

have kissed.” (p. 83)

◇ “The Psalmist personifies truth, mercy, justice, and peace – as if each were a living voice, energy, or presence.” (p. 83)

“... with any level of human conflict ... it is precisely these four voices that are hard to hold together.” (p. 84)

◇ “It’s not easy to connect the voice of mercy with the voice of truth. ... In the context of conflict, the truth is oriented towards saying, ‘What actually did happen?’ Whereas mercy is saying, ‘There has been failure, but we have to provide a new start.’” (p. 84)

◇ “The same is true with justice and peace. Justice says, ‘How are we going to make right what was wrong?’ ... Justice requires that wrongdoing be accounted for. Peace, on the other hand, is about reconstituting the well-being of the community in the form of harmonious, proper relationships.” (p. 84)

◇ “These paradoxes are at the heart of reconciliation in its deepest sense.” (p. 84)

Ask participants, “How do these thoughts resonate with your experiences?”

Read and discuss the following quote from the study guide to *What’s So Amazing about Grace?* by Philip Yancey:

*“... In the final analysis, forgiveness is an act of faith. By forgiving another, I am trusting that God is a better justice-maker than I am. By forgiving, I release my own right to get even and leave all issues of fairness for God to work out. I leave in God’s hands the scales that must balance justice and mercy.” (p. 44).*





## “Who Deserves Forgiveness?”

### 10 minutes

Forgiveness as a faith practice challenges us to face some hard issues.

Discuss any of the following:

◇ Is there anyone who is beyond forgiveness? Read the story of Jeffrey Dahmer, p. 95 in Yancey’s book, and discuss the idea of unforgivable sin as presented in scripture, Mark.3:29, Matthew 12:32

◇ Must we expect someone to repent before we forgive? Read the story of Will Campbell, p. 141 in Yancey’s book.

◇ What does scripture tell us?

Read:

◇ The Lord’s Prayer, Matthew 6:15

◇ The Parable of the unforgiving servant, Matthew 18:21-35

Typically the question is: Do I have to forgive her if she doesn’t repent? The better question is: Can she repent if I don’t forgive?

Talk about the final scene from the movie, *Places in the Heart*: a poignant expression of forgiveness, when everyone is gathered in church partaking in the Lord’s Supper – even one who had been an “enemy,” killed earlier in the movie. If possible, view the movie in its entirety. If time does not allow, there is a good description of this scene in the article, “See How They Love One Another,” CR, pp. 9,10.

Read this quote:

*“We experience ... (forgiveness) only here and there, but it is a foretaste of what is already true about us in Christ. We can even try to work at forgiveness in our lives, not because we can achieve it, but because it has already been achieved for*

*us, given to us freely, and we can participate in that gift of the spirit.”*

Tom Long (CR, p. 34)

-or-

Read the story on the following pages of the article of a dying man asking his pastor for forgiveness.

Ask: “Is Forgiveness human or divine?”

Mention these resources for further study and reflection:

◇ *Embodying Forgiveness, A Theological Analysis*

◇ essays on “Forgiveness” *Christian Reflection*, and its website.

## Faith Practice

### Four:

## HEALING



### “Faith Healing” 20 minutes

Purpose: to explore healing as a faith practice

Write on the board the words “faith healing.” Ask, “What word associations come to mind?” Listen for any negative associations such as suspicions that many ‘faith cures’ are phony or the idea that modern medicine holds the only approach to healing .

Ask, “How can we get beyond bad connotations in order to understand healing as a practice of faith?”

Read Tilda Norberg’s quote of the day about “real health.”

*“(Healing is)... not just fixing up things that are wrong. Real health, from a Christian point of view, is coming to the fullness of your vocation as a child of God.”*



Summarize how real health can be seen from a Christian point of view as coming to the fullness of your vocation as a child of God? Our book says "It means becoming Christ-like." (POF, p. 161.)

Ask one or more of these questions:

- ◇ How does this speak to you?
- ◇ What is this vocation in terms of healing?
- ◇ What is the biblical commission? See James 5:14-15
- ◇ Was healing just for early disciples? See Luke 9:1-2.

Distribute handout "Jesus' Healings in the Gospels."

Read one of the healing stories.

Ask one or more of these questions:

- ◇ Do we take seriously the commission to carry on Jesus' ministry of healing?
- ◇ Do we really believe we are empowered by God to heal as Jesus healed?
- ◇ How do you as a congregation respond to the command of Jesus to heal the sick?

Ask what do we learn from the interesting history of Christian healing as presented in the book? (POF, pp. 152-154)

Discuss how the group sees the inter-relatedness of the faith practices – of healing especially to honoring the body and forgiveness.

Ask: "Where in your life does the practice of healing take place?"

Possible suggestions: medical facilities most obviously, but what about congregations, even homes?

## Recipe

(For a Church Cookbook)

By J. Barrie Shepherd

Nourishment must be more than merely fuel for running on, fodder for the furnace that consumes our hours in furious haste. There is an art to eating, old as breaking of a loaf, the sharing of a deep, refreshing cup. Each meal, if touched with light imagination, a modicum of care, can lead to miracles of more than multiplying fish and bread, transforming water into wine, can bring about the forming and re-forming of that sacred circle shaped in trust and sealed by eyes and hands across a table where the grace, once said, is then revealed in every morsel, fragment, sip or swallow savored in the feast that feeds and heals our days.

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You may choose to read the above poem and discuss. (See shaded box).





## “Shalom – Being Whole, I”

### 10 minutes

Purpose: to explore the idea of healing as wholeness

Talk about the following ideas:

◇ The Hebrew notion of Shalom: a sense of wholeness, peace, connectedness that comes from a restored and whole relationship with God.

◇ Healing is an indispensable part of the coming wholeness that God intends for all creation; God is at work, reconciling the world, and healing is central to God’s activity.

Read the quote,

*“Healing events are daily signs of the divine mercy that is surging through our world and guiding it toward its final perfection. This is true whether they take place by the sharing of chicken soup, the performance of delicate surgery, or the laying on of hands in a service of worship.” (POF p. 150)*

## “Shalom – Being Whole, II”

### 10 minutes

Purpose: To continue to explore the ideas of treating the whole person

Talk about the following ideas from, *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home*, the chapter on Healing Prayer, p. 204:

◇ Distinction between priest, psychologist and physician is of recent vintage. Always before, the physician of the body, the physician of the mind, the physician of the spirit were the same person.

◇ Ancient Hebrews saw persons as a unity – it would be unthinkable to minister to the body without ministering to the spirit .

◇ Healing is an art - as well as a science.

Discuss the following faith affirmations:

◇ the healing ministry of Jesus continues in the community of faith.

◇ healing includes the whole person – spiritual, physical, and emotional.

◇ God wills our wholeness and is actively involved in our growth.

- Tilda Norberg, POF, p. 160

Healing may happen in many different ways. Distribute the handout, “Five Kinds of Healing.” Read each of the five kinds and emphasize the point that God always grants one of them.

If you want to follow up on any of this, you may want to:

◇ Look into the Order of St. Luke’s, a Christian healing ministry – information about this organization could be a good resource for congregations. Contact [www.orderofstluke.org](http://www.orderofstluke.org) to find out more.

◇ Visit a healing and wholeness service at a local congregation.

## “Healing When There Is No Cure”

### 10 minutes

Read these lines:

*“In the godforsaken,  
obscene quicksand of life,  
there is a deafening alleluia  
rising from the souls of those who weep, and  
of those who weep with those who weep. If you  
watch, you will see the hand of God  
putting the stars back in their skies  
one by one.”*

(from *Psalms of Lament*, Ann Weems, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995, p xvii. Used by permission.)



Ann Weems lives with an unfinished, unanswered grief for her son, Todd, who died in a car accident when he was 21. She writes that on that day “the stars fell from my sky.”

Healing, for Ann Weems, as she says in her preface, is “the hand of God putting the stars back in their skies one by one.”

Discuss these points:

An illness can be that time when the stars fall from our sky. When there is no hope for a cure, how does healing enter in? Normally we think about healing as “cure.” Can we even speak of healing without falling into denial?

Yet many, when faced with a terminal diagnosis, suddenly realize how precious life is and seem to gain a new strength, a new life-giving purpose they didn't have when they were well.

Give illustrations from those you know about

-or-

the story of Jean Blomquist, diagnosed with lupus – “To Touch the Fringe of God's Garment,” *Weavings*, pp. 30,31.

-or-

perhaps the story of Morrie Schwartz, *Tuesdays with Morrie*.

Ask one or more of these questions:

◇ Do we need to wait until we have a terminal diagnosis to gain this perspective?

◇ What are some ways we can practice healing now?

◇ What will aid us when we come to our own “end”?

◇ Do you see this as a goal of hospice — to enable people to live fully until they die? (this leads into the next session on dying well)



## Faith Practice Five: DYING WELL

### “Practicing for a Good Death” 20 minutes

Discuss the quote for the day from *Tuesdays with Morrie*:

“Everyone knows they're going to die, ... but nobody believes it. If we did, we would do things differently.” p. 81

Ask, “Is there a better approach?”

Discuss Morrie's suggestion:

“To know you're going to die, and to be prepared for it at any time. That's better. That way you can actually be more involved in your life while you're living.” p. 81

Ask, How do we do this? See Morrie's suggestion: Borrow a practice from Buddhism;

“Do what the Buddhists do. Every day, have a little bird on your shoulder that asks, ‘Is today the day? Am I ready? Am I doing all I need to do? Am I being the person I want to be?’” (He turned his head to his shoulder as if the bird were there now. “Is today the day I die?” he said.) p. 81.

Is this something you could practice each day?

Discuss Morrie's bottom line:

“The truth is, once you learn how to die, you learn how to live.”



### “Practicing for a Good Death” cont. ...

Invite participants to discuss what ideas they may have on ways we can be better prepared for our end.

Suggest the following verse as a mantra for facing our own mortality, for dying well:

“So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.” (Psalm 90:12)



### “Isolation vs. Community”

#### 20 minutes

Purpose: to explore how death has been isolated from the flow of daily life.

Read Amy Plantinga Pauw’s provocative thoughts in POF, p. 165:

“Our society ... isolates death and dying from the flow of daily life unlike almost every other society in history...In modern Western society, the two institutions that have had the most influence on how people face death – hospitals and funeral homes – have altered the communal practices that once surrounded this life passage.”

Discuss her ideas and ask about the group’s experiences of hospitals, funeral homes.

Discuss how hospice care may be responding to the need.

Discuss the importance of community.

Talk about what we learn from faith:  
What we learn about dying well from a Christian faith practice point of view is that death is not

something we are alone in, separate in, despite what society says.

Read this quote from *Our Greatest Gift: A Meditation on Dying and Caring* by Henri Nouwen, and discuss:

“How can death create unity instead of separation? Isn’t death the ultimate separation? It is, if we live by the norms of a competitive society always concerned with the question, who is the strongest? But when we claim our divine childhood and learn to trust that we belonged to God before we were born and will belong to God after we have died, then we experience that all people on this planet are our brothers and sisters, and we are all making the journey together through birth and death to new life.” (p. 27)

Read this quote from the same book and discuss:

“Reminding people in their agony of their divine childhood is not something we can do on our own .... It is the community of care that reminds the dying person of his or her belovedness.”

(pp. 62,63)

Reflect on the symbols on the tables

◇ Churches – symbols of the faith community of care in our dying

◇ Votive candles – the Church’s community of memory, for we light candles in memory of loved ones

◇ Chalice – a symbol, reminder of the ultimate price paid for us – we are not our own, we belong to God, we have been bought with a



price, Jesus drank the bitter cup of death for our sake.

Read Romans 14:7-9 :

*"We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living."*

Talk about what the faith community of memory looks like and how this may be better than what neighbors, co-workers, especially funeral homes can do.

Hospice remembrance celebrations are provided as occasions to gather and remember a loved one who was cared for by hospice.

Refer participants to the resource, *Final Gifts: Understanding the Special Awareness, Needs, and Communications of the Dying*, by Maggie Callanan and Patricia Kelley, for many inspiring stories about dying with dignity and a good death.



## **"The Many Faces of Death"**

**15 minutes**

Faith practices can teach us about "dying well," and how this can be possible.

Talk about the complexity of responding to death in its many forms: "When Christian practices are healthy, dying well embraces both lament and hope, and both a sense of divine judgment and an awareness of divine mercy." (POF, p. 167)

Present material from section "The Many Faces of Death" (POF, pp. 166-176):

- ◇ lament
- ◇ thanksgiving and hope
- ◇ judgment
- ◇ mercy

Choose one of the following options:

Read through the funeral service in your church's book of worship and identify some of the above themes.

-or-

invite your pastor to come and discuss the funeral service and its themes.

Look at the music that is played and sung at funerals and reflect on the themes found there. Consider other options for music, especially the songs from *The Last Journey*, John Bell.

Read together Psalm 88:3-7, a Psalm of lament. Other Psalms of lament are: Psalms 17, 28, 38, 42-43, 56, 64, 69, 74, 79, 86, 109, 141, 142.

Discuss how Psalms of lament "bring before God the raw intensity of the emotions evoked by death. When we pray these psalms, we expose our emotions instead of hiding them as some Christians do when they mistakenly imagine that God will be offended by their bitterness and outrage." (POF, pp. 167, 168)

Reflect on Jesus' anguish on the cross, crying the bitter lament of Psalm 22, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me? (Matthew 27:46).





## “Good Friday/Easter Tension”

### 10 minutes

Discuss the thought: Hope for new life first passes through the furnace of suffering.

Ask the group: How can Good Friday be called good?

Reflect on the irony of turning a cross, a symbol of torture, into an item for jewelry, for beautification.

Ask if anyone has ever experienced a Holy Saturday Vigil. Few congregations observe this faith tradition – which is observed the night before Easter. We do not sit long enough with this vigil, for we move too easily to Easter and resurrection.

Reflect on how difficult it was for the first disciples to comprehend the death and resurrection of Christ.



## Faith Practice Six: SINGING OUR LIVES

### “Singing Through the Ages”

#### 10 minutes

Faith is born and lives in song

Make these points:

◇ From its origins, the Christian community sang.

◇ In the New Testament, we hear doxologies (II Peter 3:18), hymn fragments, (Philippians 2:6-11), and references to the practice of singing in worshipping assemblies, (Colossians 3:16).

◇ “The Christian Church was born singing the songs of ancient Israel, the synagogue, and Greco-Roman world.” (POF p. 183)

◇ We sing not alone, but in union with the whole creation and with our brothers and sisters through the ages.

Play once again the song, “I Will Sing A Song of Love,” if available and discuss the words.

-or-

Play a song of your choosing that speaks of God’s gift of song to the worshipping community.

