January
Stewards of Our Relationship with God

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE SAMPLER SUGGESTIONS

Announce: (sample to adapt for your purposes; conclude with a potluck meal if you wish)

Call to a Year of Living Generously
As Stewards in the Household of God

Join together after worship on Sunday, [date], [start-end times], in [place] for:
Our Relationship with God: A Sabbath and Spiritual Practice Sampler

Is your life out of balance? Are you yearning for “something more”? Do you want a more vital connection with God? Are you seeking to grow as a disciple? Come sample Christian spiritual practices you can incorporate into your life daily or weekly to connect more deeply with God, the source of all our living. As stewards of our relationship with God we affirm:

“The Glory of God is a human being who is fully alive” – Saint Irenaeus

Prepare: (you may offer more than 3 Practices from which to choose during the 3 Sessions)

Ask 1 person to open and close with prayer and signal Session end times and at least 3 people to serve as Practice Guides. Assign spaces for their groups to gather. Determine with Guides beforehand how any equipment or supply needs will be handled and whether take-home guides will be provided. Offer Practice Samplers which they may use as is or as a reference to create their own. Explain the process and schedule. Stress the importance of dismissing participants promptly at the arranged time and signal. Determine what that signal will be. Post the schedule, locations, guide names, and practices in the gathering room or provide a handout.

Rotation Process for Sessions: Sample Explanation for Participants –

“After our opening prayer you may sample any of the following spiritual practices in any order you wish: In [location 1], [person] will introduce you to [practice], in [location 2], [person] will introduce you to [practice], in [location 3], [person] will introduce you to [practice]. (If more practices: in [location 4], [person] will introduce you to [practice]…) For 15-20 minutes you will learn about the practice you’ve chosen, then you’ll hear [signal] to end that Session. Move quickly to the next practice you’ve chosen. If a room/space is overfilled, try a different practice for the current period then return to that room later. After you’ve sampled three (or the number of Sessions planned) practices, we will return here for a closing blessing.”

Sample Schedule: (adapt for different start time, length, and number of Sessions, as you wish)

11:00 – 11:05 Participants Gather
Welcome, explain the rotation process, offer prayer, dismiss to first Session.

11:10 – 11:30 Session #1
Bell sounds at 11:30. Participants move to Session #2

11:35 – 11:55 Session #2
Bell sounds at 11:55. Participants move to Session #3

noon – 12:20 Session #3
Bell sounds at 12:20. Participants return to gathering place.

12:25 – 12:30 Participants receive blessing and are dismissed (to potluck if previously planned)
SPIRITUAL SAMPLER SUGGESTIONS (cont.)

Sample brief opening prayer: (or create your own)
Gracious God,
Prepare a way for you in us. Help us to discover life-giving paths for our faith journey. Unleash your Spirit to guide us home to you. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Sample closing blessing: (or create your own)
Beloved of God, depart with the assurance that God is able to accomplish in us far more than all we can ask or imagine. God will keep our going out and coming in forevermore. Go in peace.

Practice Samplers:
These introductions to practices are designed to facilitate a Spiritual Practice Sampler event, giving Practice Guides as much or as little assistance as they wish. Practice Samplers offer possibilities for sampler sessions. They can serve two purposes: (1) a resource for Practice Guides to facilitate their sessions, and (2) a take-home guide to remind participants of spiritual practice possibilities to explore further on their own.

The Practice Guides may:
♦ Use their Practice Sampler to introduce the practice (reading or adlibbing). May offer copies as take-home guides at the end of the session (so participants listen, rather than read ahead). Or,
♦ Briefly introduce the practice(s) then engage their group in a suggested activity or discussion question during the session. (Practice the timing… 20 minutes will fly by.) May offer copies at whatever point is helpful to the presentation. Or,
♦ Use the Practice Sampler to stimulate preparation of their personal presentations. Use the Practice Sampler as a hand-out or create other take-home materials. Or,
♦ Ignore the Practice Sampler and “do their own thing”. Guides deeply steeped in the topic may prefer to offer a rich and meaningful presentation of their own. (Practice the timing… 20 minutes will fly by when you’re passionate and have much experience to impart.)

Congregational Leaders... Let the Spirit move you! Create your unique process for introducing Sabbath Keeping and Spiritual Practices.

Note:
This Spiritual Practice Sampler includes: Keeping Sabbath/Spiritual Practices, Prayer, Christian Meditation, and Singing from Our Soul. You may create your own materials for others.

Watch for the Spiritual Practices suggested for other themes throughout the year:
♦ February: Engage your community in spiritual practices of forgiveness, reconciliation, justice, openness, honesty, hospitality, shaping communities
♦ May: Engage your community in spiritual practices of living simply, household economics, decluttering, relinquishing, saying yes and saying no, sustainability, gratitude
♦ July: Engage your community in spiritual practices of testimony, community discernment, openness, honesty, and shaping communities
♦ September: Engage your community in spiritual practices of justice, testimony, prophetic witness, and reconciliation

You may wish to advertise Spiritual Practice Samplers to your wider community as an outreach activity. Many people who self-identify as “spiritual” or “religious” but not “church going” are hungering for and seeking a vital connection with God.
Stewards of Our Relationship with God:
Sabbath and Spiritual Practices

Keeping Sabbath

What is Sabbath?

*Sabbath Keeping is a way of organizing time*. In the Bible a pattern is set: six days of work, followed by one day of rest. Having created everything, on the seventh day God rests, blesses this day and makes it holy. The Bible offers two reasons for Sabbath rest. Made in the image of God, we rest as God rested. Remembering God brought the people out of slavery, we honor our release from bondage. Slaves cannot take a day off, but free people can. Sabbath keeping originated as Shabbat in Jewish thought. It continued in the early Christian community.*

*Sabbath is simply setting aside time to delight in God*, a gift to God and oneself in the midst of our rushing, checklists, productivity, and burn-out. As UCC minister Rochelle Stackhouse says in *The Gifting God*, “God gives, in the midst of relationships, to create, to strengthen and honor, and with the intimacy of one desiring deep and fruitful relationships.”

*Can we keep Sabbath today?* Legislation (“blue laws”) and custom no longer protect Sunday. Some people need to work on Sunday or tend to home chores. Schools schedule sports events. Yet all need rest from work, commerce, and worry. Joyful worship, leisure time with loved ones, time alone for rest and reflection are helpful in seeking to observe “one day that, week after week, anchors a way of life that makes a difference every day.”* Some suggest our need for rest and God may not have a one-day solution.

*There are many ways of Sabbath keeping*. Some people prefer to set aside a special day to re-create through worship, leisure, loved ones, rest and reflection. Many choose to engage in particular spiritual practices, choosing a specific time daily or weekly. Others prefer to incorporate spiritual practices into the midst of daily life. Through spiritual practices, Christians through the ages have encountered God in life-renewing ways. Prayer is the most traditional but there are many others. Spiritual practices invite us to increase our awareness of God in every moment, allowing Sabbath keeping to permeate all our living.

*adapted from *Practicing Our Faith* edited by Dorothy C. Bass

*Questions to ponder*: If I take time to slow down, what do I need most? When have I broken from my routine to do something that really nurtured my spirit? What do I do on Sunday (or other days) that keeps Sabbath? Can I experiment with organizing my time differently to permit time for worship, leisure with loved ones, and reflection? – What would I need to do differently?

*Sabbath and Temperament*  
(or Can Type-A Personalities and Extroverts Keep Sabbath?)

Some people feel their God-given temperament does not lend itself to a daily regimen, or to periods of solitude… can Type-A personalities and extroverts keep Sabbath? **YES!** Many, if not most, ways of keeping Sabbath are communal. Even silence can be creatively engaged. Linda Hanick, whose life is “all about multi-tasking” and who “thrives on interaction with others” had “Sabbath anxiety” until her husband introduced her to a new way of “doing Sabbath.”

*“Here’s how it works: you focus your energy on an activity that has a beginning, a middle, and a distinct end; an activity that results in a product you can see, touch, and treasure. It should involve a physical skill that uses your hands.”*

For Linda, it was a quilt. Find her full story at [www.trinitywallstreet.org/welcome/?article&id=720](http://www.trinitywallstreet.org/welcome/?article&id=720).
Spiritual Practices

A Partial List of Spiritual Practices

♦ Worship / Play / Holy Leisure / Singing from Our Soul / Living our Call / Healing
♦ Bible Study / Lectio Divina / Devotional Reading / Prayer / Meditation / Solitude / Attention / Being Present / Openness / Fasting / Pilgrimage / Spiritual Direction
♦ Stewardship of Household Economics, Creation, Relationships, our Bodies, our Gifts
♦ Peace / Forgiveness / Acts of Justice and Compassion / Prophetic Witness / Speaking the Truth in Love / Testimony / Living Simply / Discernment / Accountability
♦ Hospitality / Nurturing / Acts of Kindness / Christian Fellowship / Spiritual Friendship

For more on spiritual practices you might begin with Insights: The Bible and Spiritual Disciplines (six pivotal components of classic Christian spirituality - Sabbath, intercessory prayer, fasting, stewardship, living into one's call, and accountability) or consult the Annotated Bibliography posted at www.ucc.org/stewardship/year-round-stewardship/january.

Why Practices Matter*

How does this idea of “practices” help us think about – and live – the Christian life?

♦ Practices point beyond the individualism of the dominant culture to disclose the social (i.e., shared) quality of our lives.
♦ Christian practices are rooted in a history that is expansive and encompasses many cultures and denominational traditions. Practices endure over time and across cultures while being embodied in specific ways by Christians in different times and places.
♦ Practices make us think about who we truly are as children of God. An important claim is that Christian practices address "fundamental human needs."
♦ A practice is small enough that it can be identified and discussed as one element within an entire way of life. But a practice is also big enough to appear in many different spheres of life. For example, Christian hospitality relates spirituality and social justice.
♦ All people engage in most or all of the practices in one way or another. All human beings necessarily rest, encounter strangers, rely on one another's help when ill, and so on. However, those who embrace Christian practices engage in fundamental human activities in the light of God's presence and in response to God's grace.
♦ Within these practices, we cultivate openness and responsiveness to others, to the created world, and to God.
♦ Christian practices add up to a way of life.
♦ Practices heal the division between thinking and doing. For example, those who offer hospitality come to know themselves, others, and God in a different way, and they develop virtues and dispositions that are consistent with this practice.
♦ It is helpful to reflect in the light of our faith on the shape and character of the practices that make up our way of life.

“Christian practices are not activities we do to make something spiritual happen in our lives. Nor are they duties we undertake to be obedient to God. Rather, they are patterns of communal action that create openings in our lives where the grace, mercy, and presence of God may be made known to us. They are places where the power of God is experienced. In the end, these are not ultimately our practices but forms of participation in the practice of God.”

– Craig Dykstra

* Adapted from www.practicingourfaith.org/prct_what_are_practices.html
Stewards of Our Relationship with God:
Sabbath and Spiritual Practices

**Prayer**

Praying is about opening yourself up to God.
People pray in some form when they have wants or are thankful, but prayer can also be a way of life.
If we can see and practice prayer everywhere in our lives, we can be constantly in touch with God and always feel God’s love.

Alexx Campbell, 15

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**What Is Prayer?**

Everybody prays. Prayer isn't reserved for church goers. It isn't limited to words, church or religious objects. **It is the relationship everyone has with the mysterious Power of Life.** It is a basic human activity. But what makes an experience “prayer”? **Opening our hearts and releasing our longings out toward God makes an experience “prayer.”** It is a practice of giving and receiving love, which includes times of expressing hurt, anger, doubt, sadness, questions or disappointment as well as expressing happy emotions. Praying our hearts implies praying all that is inside us, in a relationship where we can be honest.


“Prayer is the most traditional of sabbath keepers. Prayer practices the presence of God. It pays attention to God as a part of life. Whether as grace before meals, or in morning and evening prayers, or in prayers for a specific purpose, prayer keeps sabbath. It sets aside time for God in the midst of time for other purposes. It can be words of petition or praise, a breath, a sigh, a laugh.”*

* from *Sabbath Keeping* by Donna Schaper

**Where Can Prayer Happen?**

Everywhere. Alone or in community. Walking down a busy street or in a quiet park, in church, while gardening, doing chores or driving your car (keep your eyes open!), with a friend, when you hear a siren or church bell, before a meal. Sometimes we breathe a quick prayer in the midst of our day. Sometimes we intentionally seek a time and space for prayer. Brother Lawrence, a 17th century monk, believed that all of life should be prayer. Throughout the day he would just turn his heart’s attention to God’s presence, as if noticing a loving friend in the room. He then engaged in all his daily activities with the awareness that God was present and loving him. He called this “practicing the presence of God,” a state in which he could become prayer.

**How Do We Pray?**

*(Meditation, Contemplation, Journaling, Gratitude, Intercession, Praise...)*

**Prayer is primarily a relationship, not a discipline.** When we pray, we are relating to somebody, the Supreme Somebody. Communication in any committed relationship takes on varied expressions and grows and changes over a lifetime. Prayer can’t be turned into a set of rules, even good rules. It is good to have some form of deliberate opening to God each day. Explore a variety of prayer expressions and allow that opening and your prayer life to evolve and change as you are moved.

* adapted from *Prayer, Stress, and Our Inner Wounds* by Flora Wuellner
A Formal Prayer Time
If you desire a more formal time of prayer, find a space that helps you pray, then choose a time. Take a few minutes to just sit in silence. Then it might be helpful to repeat a simple phrase over and over. After about five minutes or so, begin to do what you love to do with God – writing in a journal, painting, reading Scripture, reading a devotional, continuing in silence, singing, dancing – whatever helps you open your heart to God. Conclude by offering thanks to God and offering a brief prayer for the day. Jesus tells us to keep at it. (Luke 18:1-8). Over time your prayer will begin to transform you.
*adapted from Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens edited by Dorothy C. Bass and Don C. Richter

“Practicing the Presence”
Think of something that will remind you of God’s presence with you (school bells, noticing your watch, seeing children). Every time you come across your reminder, turn your heart to God. Become aware of God’s presence as you continue through the day. (What is it like to notice God? What are you like when you are aware of God’s presence with you?)*
*adapted from Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens edited by Dorothy C. Bass and Don C. Richter

Remember God in the Family: Three Simple Ways*
Grace at table – a time to give thanks for our food and perhaps other good things from our day
Prayer at bedtime – a time to invite a simple lifting of hurts or joys of the day in prayer
Prayer at times anything truly bad happens – turning to God at special times
Children love ritual. Repetition is important. Connecting your lives to God’s life is important.
* from Sabbath Keeping by Donna Schaper

Prayer/Meditation Exercise: Experiencing the Presence of Christ*
Imagine you see Jesus sitting close to you. In doing this you are putting your imagination at the service of your faith: Jesus isn’t here in the way you are imagining him, but he is here and your imagination helps to make you aware of this. (Do not bother to imagine details of his face or clothing, which may be distracting. Sense his nearness as you would someone in a dark room whose presence is clear to you.)
Now speak to Jesus… If no one is around, speak out in a soft voice…
(If you don’t know what to say, narrate events of the past day, offering your comments on each.)
Listen to what Jesus says to you in reply… or what you imagine him to say…
Imagine Jesus is by your side all through the day. Speak with him frequently in the midst of your occupations.
* from Sadhana: A Way to God by Anthony de Mello, S.J.

Questions to ponder: What forms have your prayers taken? * What prayer forms would you like to explore? * Have you ever been part of a prayer circle? – What was that like? * When has music or movement been prayer for you? * Is there a special time or place that is especially conducive to prayer for you? – How can you connect with that place when you wish (perhaps in your imagination or in meditation)? * Would you like to create a prayer altar in your home? * When have you been spontaneously moved to prayer? * Is there something in your environment or routine that can serve as a spontaneous daily “cue” for praying?

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness;
for we do no know how to pray as we ought,
but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.
– Romans 8:26
Stewards of Our Relationship with God:  
Sabbath and Spiritual Practices  

**Christian Meditation**

Be still and know that I am God  
Be still and know that I am  
Be still and know  
Be still  
Be  
— Psalm 46:10

**What is Christian Meditation?**

Meditation is an ancient practice of many religions, including Christianity. The word “meditation” has been used to mean many things: the act of sitting silently, focusing on words of inspiration, or a period of contemplation. Most prayer directs thoughts toward God in the normal wakeful state. Meditation techniques attempt to move the person into another state of consciousness, another way of perceiving reality different from the usual way of sense perception. We experience our physical world through the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch; we open to non-physical spiritual reality through an inner awareness, an expanded consciousness.

**For Christians, the goal is not detachment from personhood or individuality** and merging with the Cosmic Mind to become one with pure consciousness. The goal is relationship, a more direct experience of God. “Christian Meditation is a process of opening ourselves to the realm of nonphysical reality in which God can touch us far more directly than in the physical world. It is one way of meeting and relating to God, finding sustaining and fulfilling experiences that give direction to our life. In meditation one lets down the barrier that separates one’s rational consciousness from the depth of one’s soul.”*

* from *The Other Side of Silence: A Guide to Christian Meditation* by Morton T. Kelsey

**Did Jesus meditate?** Nothing is mentioned in Scripture about Jesus practicing a formal system of meditation. He often withdrew for periods alone and unquestionably had some way of realizing God’s presence and will, of achieving a heightened spiritual receptivity.

**Meditation Technique**

**A Few Preparation Techniques: Quieting the Mind, Relaxing the Body**

- **Observing the breath**: Observe your breathing. Do not concentrate on changing or controlling it. Only be aware of it, the rhythm, the space between the in and the out. Just watch your breathing. If your mind wanders, return your focus to your breathing.

- **Breathing a Phrase**: Choose a phrase that can be said in two parts. Speak one part as you inhale and the other as you exhale. For example, breathe in and out to the “Jesus Prayer.” Inhale: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God…exhale: have mercy on me. Or try: Be still and know…that I am God.

- **Observing Your Thoughts**: Sit in silence and be aware of your thoughts. Don’t think about your thoughts, just note them. If your mind begins to wander, note this and continue to be aware of your thoughts.

- **Mantras**: Mantras are sounds, such as “love” or “God” that are repeated in the mind. If thoughts arise, answer them with this sound. Repeat the mantra until it begins to fade.
**Sensory Aids:** Choose an object, such as a candle. Sit comfortably and gaze at the object. Let any sensations or thoughts that enter your mind pass by like clouds. Look at the object as if seeing it for the first time. Use any of your senses for this exercise (listen to a waterfall or birds chirp), but only one per exercise. Just BE with the object.

**Relaxing the Body:** Sit or lie comfortably. Focus awareness on your head and face. Notice feelings of tension in the muscles. Consciously relax the muscles. Feel your jaw go slack. Move your awareness slowly down your body, dwelling on each part, noticing tenseness, relaxing muscles, telling each area that it is relaxed and feeling heavy: neck, shoulders, arms, hands, back, chest, abdomen, pelvis, thighs, calves, feet.

**Using Imagery:**

Once the body and mind are quiet, making use of Biblical imagery is a powerful way to experience the transforming nurture of God. It doesn’t require difficult technique or hours of disciplined practice. It is accessible to everyone through the use of our God-given imagination. It is important to give yourself (or others if you are guiding a meditation) permission to opt out or change the imagery if you feel resistance. Trust your feelings and do not force anything.

You might take a scene from the life of Christ and relive it as if you were participating in the event. Read the passage then quiet your mind and body. Imagine the scene in detail, see yourself there. Notice what Jesus says and does, and your response. Allow Jesus to engage you - what does he say? What do you say? Or enter into a parable Or invite the risen Christ to walk with you through a difficult situation, or accompany you to a troubling past event, or to go ahead of you to prepare the way. Some people like to record their experience, or continue it through dialogue with their inner wisdom or a wisdom figure, in a journal.

**Sample Guided Meditation:**

*(With just a little practice this can be done without a guiding voice. You might do it daily.)*

This meditation will be using an image of light flowing through us. If that image is not right for you, use a Biblical image of water flowing around you or a gentle wind blowing through you. Remember to give yourself permission to go where you choose, even if it may be to sleep.

**Soaking Prayer***

Sit or lie in a relaxed position… Breathe gently and slowly… Give silent thanks to God that “underneath are the everlasting arms.” [Read Psalm 36:7-9] Image a cloud of light forming around your body… Perhaps you image it strong and intense, perhaps gently luminous… Perhaps it may seem to have a restful or energizing color. [Pause]

Rest and gently breathe in this surrounding light… Picture it flowing through the top of your head… slowly flowing through your tight facial muscles… relaxing them… especially around your eyes and jaw. [Pause] Picture it now as a river of light flowing through your whole body, calming… relaxing… releasing every part. Think of every slow, light breath as if breathing the breath of life which God breathes into every living being… [Repeat from the Psalm] “For with thee is the fountain of life;/in thy light do we see light.”

**Prayer of the Heart***

As you are able, place both hands, palms down, over your heart. [Allow several moments of silence] Say inwardly in silence, “The living heart of Jesus Christ is taking form within my heart…” [Pause a moment for this then continue] “The living heart of Jesus Christ is taking form within my heart… filling… calming… restoring… bringing new life.” Envision a warm light glowing in your heart. [Pause] “And this new life in my blood flows peacefully, with full healing power through my whole body.” [Pause] Now open your hands, palms outward… Hear your inner voice saying, “And the power of this new life flows into my actions and relationships with others this day.” [Pause] Return your hands to your heart and give thanks in the name of Christ. [Pause] As you feel ready, open your eyes and return your awareness to this place.

* adapted from *Prayer, Stress, and Our Inner Wounds* by Flora Wuellner
Have you ever caught yourself humming or whistling a tune? Perhaps it’s been going through your head all day… a theme from a movie, a hymn you sang in worship, a song on the radio, something your band practiced, your music lesson, a commercial jingle. Even people who “can’t carry a tune” have this experience. Maybe you’ve said, “I just can’t get it out of my head.”

**Use that moment of awareness to thank God for music!**

> “Music isn’t some shrink-wrapped product you buy at the store. Music is a human thing, a body thing, a spirit thing. You don’t have to play a musical instrument to join in the practice of making music. Simply listening to music or singing along with your friends is a way of sounding your life.

> Music is an incredible universal language, truly a gift from God. Sometimes when I’m moving to music, it’s as if time stands still. I’m so focused, so caught up in the moment that the stresses of life and school just seem to disappear. I literally feel one with the universe.” – Liz Marshburn, 17*

Sounds like a spiritual practice!

**Singing brings people together with more than their voices.** It creates shared memories and meaning. It happens at camp and in church vans on mission trips. It happens in a drum circle, at a ball park, at a concert, at a memorial service, in choir rehearsal, at a protest march. It unites us across distances, generations, and races and cultures. Music expresses our emotions and opens us. It is both a gift from God and an offering to God.*

In 1940 a 25-year-old man established a community of prayer, song, and outreach in the small village of Taizé, France. Brother Roger formed an ecumenical community whose meditative singing formed its core even as Europe was being torn by war. Today the “songs of Taizé” are being sung all over the world. (Learn these songs at [www.taize.fr](http://www.taize.fr))*


**Engage in some communal music making...**

**A Mini Songfest** *(ask your worship leaders/music ministers for guidance)*

Choose some simple music to sing in unison, as a round, or in parts such as:

I woke up this morning with my mind stayed on Jesus. *(3 x)* Hallelu, Hallelu, Hallelujah. Singing and praying with my mind, stayed on Jesus. *(3 x)* Hallelu, Hallelu, Hallelujah.

Jesus I adore you. Lay my life before you. How I love you. *(verse 2 – “Creator”) (verse 3 – “Spirit”) Try it as a 3-part round.*

*(S/T)* Allelu, Allelu, Allelu, Alleluia. *(A/B)* Praise ye the Lord. *(repeat)*

*(A/B)* Praise ye the Lord. *(S/T)* Alleluia. *(repeat 3 x)* *(All)* Praise ye the Lord.

Try a Taizé chant.
A Musical Odyssey
You can read about this as experienced by the 18 teens and 18 adults who collaborated in writing Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens:

Prepare a table with a collection of instruments: drums and tambourines, rainsticks and finger cymbals, maracas and bells… enough instruments for everyone, something different for each. Invite folks to gaze on the instruments and “choose one that seems right for you.” (If some do not wish to play, invite them to sit or stand and move to the music.) When everyone seems ready, invite someone, perhaps a person with a drum, “Would you get us started?” (Or you may pre-arrange for someone to begin with a beat that is sure and steady, slow but not too slow.) Others can begin to join in as they feel ready. It is likely the music will grow more complicated as many instruments embellish it. It is likely it will ebb and flow, grow louder, softer, louder, and eventually fade as instruments begin to drop out. When the music stops, sit in silence for some moments. (Resist the temptation to discuss and analyze the experience.)

A Question or Two – Ask a group to name some of their favorite hymns. Then ask how they had learned them.* How are we shaped by the hymns we love? How do they shape our community?

* from Practicing Our Faith edited by Dorothy C. Bass

Ideas to Try at Home

♦ Transition from work to home with music. Listen and sing along to a radio, tape, CD, iPod, etc. Improvise or play something you love on an instrument. Take a walk outdoors and listen for the sounds of nature or the rhythms of the city. A two-hour musical immersion can be a great way to begin a weekend or holiday.

♦ Sing a simple song to greet the morning each day for a week. Choose a different song for the second week. Use it as a way of opening to God each day. (You can sing/hum it in the shower, in the car…) Try singing grace before your meal.

♦ Let music carry you into sleep. Find the music that relaxes you. Some music is conducive to creating mental images of rivers flowing, waves rolling, scenes you move along with as you drift off. This can be helpful for those who experience chronic pain that wakes them at night. It can help them relax and drift back to sleep.

♦ Select a favorite Psalm and sing it over and over to a familiar melody. Or write a song about your love for God.*

♦ Listen for ways that God speaks to you through different kinds of music throughout the week.*

* from Soul Tending by Kara Lassen Oliver

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My life flows on in endless song,
above earth’s lamentations;
I hear the real though far off hymn
that hails a new creation.
No storm can shake my inmost calm
while to that rock I’m clinging;
While love is Lord o’er heaven and earth
how can I keep from singing?

TRADITIONAL QUAKER HYMN