



THE WAY OF LOVE
Practices for Jesus-Centered Life

Living the Way of Love in Community

Small Group Facilitation Guide & Curriculum

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www.episcopalchurch.org/wayoflove

LIVING THE WAY OF LOVE IN COMMUNITY:

NINE-SESSION SMALL GROUP FACILITATION GUIDE AND CURRICULUM

The purpose of a faith-based small group is to build trusting relationships with God and one another. When we meet each other for conversation, practice, and prayer, we learn how to love. A small group provides space for prayerful support and accountability as we seek to live the Jesus Way. Your small group may be a new discipleship group or an existing circle like the Vestry, Bible Study, Teen Youth Group, Episcopal Church Women, Brotherhood of St. Andrew Chapter, Altar Guild, etc. Ideally, everyone who commits to the Way of Love should be part of a small group intentionally sharing the journey.

This nine-session program is for small group settings to explore The Way of Love and experience each of the seven practices: Turn, Learn, Pray, Worship, Bless, Go, and Rest. Sessions may occur once a week, every other week or once a month.

This Facilitation Guide offers leaders a process for guiding 8-14 people for nine 90-minute sessions, with an option for an additional 30-minutes to gather over a meal. Each session is comprised of prayer, check-in, discussion, practicing the Way of Love, check-out, and worship and includes suggested scripture readings and hymns.

Session One: Rule of Life

Session Two: Turn

Session Three: Learn

Session Four: Pray

Session Five: Worship

Session Six: Bless

Session Seven: Go

Session Eight: Rest

Session Nine: Living the Way of Love

Follow-up: Small Group Recommitment Session

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Learn more about The Way of Love and The Episcopal Church at www.episcopalchurch.org/wayoflove.

Share reflections and queries by writing to wayoflove@episcopalchurch.org or on social media using [#wayoflove](https://twitter.com/wayoflove).

FACILITATION GUIDE

WHY SMALL GROUPS FOR WAY OF LOVE?

Jesus said, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” - Mark 12:30-31

The purpose of a faith-based small group is to build relationships with God and one another. When we meet each other in real conversation, we learn how to love. Small groups also create trusting spaces for support, accountability, and prayer as we seek to live the Jesus Way. Ideally, everyone who commits to the Way of Love should have a small group sharing the journey.

How to Start a Small Group

1) Find a capable facilitator.

Great facilitators...

- Are familiar with the discussion material: “Let me rephrase the question a different way...”
- Invite others into the conversation: “Would anyone who hasn’t yet shared like to share?”
- Are perceptive to nonverbal cues: “It looks like she’s trying to say something.”
- Get the conversation out of the head and into the heart: “What does ... have to do with your relationship with God?” or “How does it make you feel that...?”
- Open the conversation back up: “What do others think?”
- Engage introverts: “Just a reminder, if you always speak, count to three before speaking. If you never speak, don’t stop to count!” or “We’re going to take a minute of silence to think about the question, and then we’ll share.”
- Refocus the question: “I wonder if anyone had any thoughts about the topic at hand.”
- Claim their authority as facilitator: “I’m sorry, but we don’t interrupt one another. Not interrupting is part of our group’s norms.” or “Let’s remember to speak one at a time and wait for others to finish before we speak.”
- Watch the time: “This is a great discussion, but it’s time to move on to our practices for this session.”

The best training for small group facilitation is being a part of a well-functioning small group in the past. You might think of people in your community who have taken part in Education for Ministry or other small groups. Remember, good facilitation isn’t about knowing everything about the content, but rather having the ability to facilitate meaningful conversation.

2) Gather a small group.

Jesus was onto something: Twelve is about the perfect number for a small group. You can get away with 8-14 people, though. Fewer than eight and, with a few absences, the group is too small. More than 14 and there are too many people to have an in-depth single conversation. Personal invitations go a long way toward forming a meaningful small group. Be upfront about expectations when inviting people so they know what to expect. Small groups function best with consistent participation, so be clear that you will be depending on the members to participate consistently.

3) Plan logistics.

Thoughtfully consider the following questions:

- Where will sessions be held? Is it safe and accessible for everyone in your group?
- When should sessions be held? Will your group meet weekly, twice a month, or once a month? We recommend meeting weekly, if possible. Weekly gatherings are likely to result in more consistent participation and greater group cohesion. Meeting less frequently, however, may be more appropriate in some settings and allows participants more time to process and practice the Way of Life in their own lives.
- Should your group eat together? If so, how will your group ensure that participants' food restrictions are met?
- Should your group provide childcare?
- How could your facilitator contact participants if the meeting's time or place has to change on short notice?
- What kind of name tags does your group want to use? Even if you think everyone knows each other, providing name tags facilitates conversation and helps build community.

4) Set group norms.

The first time your group meets, the members should set group norms together. Group norms are simply expectations about how members of the group will treat each other, and they are an important part of healthy groups. Some groups prefer to post norms clearly in their meeting space, while others reread the norms at the beginning of each session. Still other groups are much more informal. Whatever the level of formality, it's important for everyone to have the same expectations about their time together.

Here are some issues that all groups should discuss as they begin their relational small group:

- Confidentiality – What is allowed to be shared outside the group? What may be shared on social media?
- Respect – How will group members respect each other during their conversations?
- Logistics – What are expectations about arriving on time? About providing or sharing food? What is the group's position on alcohol? Do members of the group have food restrictions?
- Technology – What is the phone policy? Will they be turned off and placed in the middle of the table? Silenced? Or is casual use acceptable?
- Session preparation – What, if anything, are group members supposed to prepare before they meet each session?

Facilitators should feel empowered to reference the group's norms if a behavior is becoming a distraction. "I'm sorry, but the group decided that we would not be texting during the session. Is this an emergency?" or "Remember, it's our policy not to interrupt others while they are talking. Please wait for her to finish." If the group or one particular member consistently breaks the norms, the facilitator may find it helpful to revisit the norms with the group. The group may decide to affirm or change the norms.

5) Keep the agenda of the small group consistent.

Here is a tried-and-true structure for a small group gathering:

MEAL (30 minutes)

Eating together is optional, but it's fun! If your group will be eating together, allow 30 minutes for the meal and then start your session after everyone is done.

PRAYER (5 minutes)

Ask God to be with your group during your time together.

CHECK-IN (15 minutes)

Check-in is a chance for group members to get to know each other better, reconnect, and warm up for the discussion questions.

Some tips for check-in:

- The first few times your group meets, consider asking an “ice-breaker” type question.
- Your group may want to use the process of mutual invitation where the first speaker invites the next person to speak.
- Participants may “pass,” but the facilitator should invite those who pass to speak at the end.
- Check-in may take longer than 15 minutes the first few times your group meets, but it's worth taking the time to get to know each other better.
- Check-in is not about responding to the last person who talked, but rather offering one's own answer to the question.
- Try to link the check-in question to the focus content.

This curriculum will provide sample check-in questions for each session, but feel free to meet the context of your group and make your own!

A note on mutual invitation: The process of mutual invitation is a method of sharing that ensures that everyone who wants to speak has the opportunity to do so. Because members are asked to call on one another by name and may be required to call on members on whom they would not naturally call, it builds group cohesion. Mutual invitation also shifts power within the group, and because in some cultures group members will not speak up unless invited, it honors different cultural expectations about speaking.

The process is as follows: A designated person will share first. When that person has finished speaking, he/she invites another by name to share. The speaker does not need to invite the person next to him/her; it can be anyone in the group who hasn't spoken yet. After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege of inviting another to share. If someone is not ready to share yet, that person may say, “I pass for now,” and the leader will invite anyone who does so to speak later on. If someone don't want to say anything at all, that person simply says “pass” and proceeds to invite another to share. This continues until everyone has been invited to say something. (Process description adapted from *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb* by Eric H. F. Law)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (45 minutes)

The purpose of a small group is trusting relationship with others and with God. The foundation for these relationships is open, creative, and life-giving conversation. Ask questions about your topic that encourage emotional connection, real sharing, and creative thinking. Good discussion questions generate a space where people actually get to talk about what matters to them most.

A good discussion question...

- Is easily understood by participants
- Could be playful and imaginative (e.g., “I wonder...”) or quite serious (e.g., “What does it mean for your life that...?”)
- Isn’t answered by “yes” or “no”
- Links the participant’s life experience to the content
- Is open-ended (e.g., “What is intriguing about this idea?”) instead of closed (e.g., “Do you like this idea?”)
- Encourages storytelling
- Brings God and faith into the conversation
- Uses the content to help participants think deeply about what matters

Be prepared with at least five discussion questions, but know that the group might go really deep into just one and not get to the other questions. That’s OK! The point of this time is life-giving conversation. So if that’s being created, there’s no need to shut down conversation to get through all the questions.

Sometimes, the facilitator will have to ask some follow-up questions to keep the conversation going.

Helpful follow-up questions:

- How did that make you feel?
- Tell us more about that.
- What made you think of that?

This curriculum provides discussion questions, but you should feel empowered to ask your own questions. This is your small group!

PRACTICING THE WAY OF LOVE (10 minutes)

This curriculum includes a section called “Practicing the Way of Love,” which encourages participants to apply what they’ve learned, reflect on their own spiritual practices, and find new ways to engage the Way of Love. Facilitators will find the appropriate worksheets for each session in the appendix of this Facilitation Guide.

Check-out (5 minutes)

This is an opportunity for the group to assess its group work. It’s a time to articulate what’s been learned, or to name what could be better about the group’s time together.

Any question that asks group members to assess their time together would do, but here are some sample check-out questions:

- When did the group have a lot of energy? When was the energy lacking?
- When did you feel close to God? When did you feel far away from God?
- When did you meet Jesus in your session today?
- When did you see light from the Holy Spirit?
- What did you notice about our time together?
- What will you take away from our conversation today?
- [If short on time] Describe our time together in one word.

WORSHIP (10 minutes)

Never skip worship! Taking time to worship God brings the group together unlike anything else, and it is probably the single most important activity you'll do together. You may be tempted by fruitful discussion to neglect worship, but be good stewards of your time and be sure that worship isn't rushed or skipped altogether. As group members pray with each other each session, you'll begin to see their relationships transform.

Ideas for Worship:

- Pray Compline in the *Book of Common Prayer* (p. 127) or *Night Prayer* in *A New Zealand Prayer Book* (p. 167).
- Sing simple hymns or Taizé chants together.
- Pray your own Prayers of the People, as outlined on page 383 of the *Book of Common Prayer*.
- Practice lectio divina on a pertinent passage of Scripture.
- Offer prayers for the person sitting next to you.
- Be with each other and God in silence.

Whatever you do, be joyful! Worship doesn't need to be serious to be worship, but rather it needs only to open hearts and invite participation. This curriculum provides a number of worship suggestions; however, these are just suggestions. Use your imagination and the strengths of your group to make the worship experience your own. Some groups choose to invite different members of the small group to lead worship each session, or they designate a worship leader who is not the facilitator.

6) Pray for your small group.

Facilitators should pray for each person in their group by name and with regularity. It will make a difference.

7) Commit to the Way of Love.

Participants will be able to tell how seriously the facilitator is taking the practices and will consciously or unconsciously follow that example. As such, facilitators must be open and ready to lead by example and have their life changed by the Way of Love.

LIVING THE WAY OF LOVE IN COMMUNITY: NINE SESSION SMALL GROUP CURRICULUM

SESSION ONE

RULE OF LIFE

The Way of Love as Rule of Life

Needed materials

- Newsprint
- Markers
- A folder for each participant to store Way of Love worksheets
- Printed worksheets for participants (found in the *Curriculum Resources* section of this guide.)
- Writing utensils

Prayer (5 minutes)

Begin with at least a minute of centering silence, preferably two or three. You may find it helpful to light a candle or place another devotional item in the center of your discussion circle. The worship leader for the week should conclude the time of silence with a prayer – an extemporaneous prayer, one found in the *Book of Common Prayer*, or a prayer familiar to the group such as the Lord's Prayer. The worship leader may wish to use the prayer below:

O God of peace, who has taught us that in returning and rest we will be saved, in quietness and confidence will be our strength: By the might of your Spirit lift us, we pray, to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(A Prayer For Quiet Confidence, *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 832)

Check-in (15 minutes, may be longer during the first session)

For the first check-in session, we recommend asking the three questions below. Don't move along to the next question until everyone has either answered or passed. Be sure to re-invite those who passed at the beginning to see if they would like to add anything before you move on to the next question. Don't forget to use the mutual invitation method for check-in.

- What is your name and religious background, and how long have you been a part of this faith community?
- Why did you want to participate in this Way of Love small group, and what are you hoping to experience?
- What is your favorite routine of your day?

A Rule of Life for Your Small Group: Group Norms (20 minutes, may be shorter or longer depending on your group)

This exercise is designed to help set norms for the small group. Norms are the expected standard of behavior for a social group, and setting them at the beginning will help the group function smoothly. (See step four in the facilitation guide on page 2.) When everyone engages

with the norm-setting and feels part of the discussion, participants are more likely to adhere to the norms and the group is more likely to self-regulate. While complete consensus isn't necessary, there should be general agreement about group norms.

Post a large piece of newsprint where everyone can see it.

Here are recommended items for discussion:

- **Confidentiality** – What is allowed to be shared outside the group? What may be shared on social media? (One often-reached decision is that conversations stay in the group unless the person who shared gives explicit permission for someone else to share the story outside of group.)
- **Respect** – How will group members respect each other during their conversations? How will group members signal they would like to add something to the discussion? Will participants strive to speak from an “I position” and tell their own stories and not others’ stories?
- **Logistics** – How important is arriving on time? What are expectations around attendance? What constitutes a valid excuse for missing the session? Who will lead worship or bring snacks/meal? Who will help clean up? What is the group’s position on alcohol? Do members of the group have food restrictions?
- **Technology** – What is the mobile phone policy? Will they be turned off and set aside? Silenced? Or is casual use acceptable? Will the group make exceptions for important work or family calls?
- **Session preparation** – What, if anything, are group members supposed to prepare before they meet each session? How will members of the group pray for one another?

As items are discussed and consensus reached, write the norms on the newsprint. At the end of the session, take the newsprint down and save it for the next session. You may either use the newsprint from session to session, or type it up and print it out.

Discussion (25 minutes, may be longer or shorter to accommodate check-in and group norm-setting)

Background for Discussion

- The idea of a “rule of life” comes from the Latin word *regula* and suggests a way to regulate or regularize our lives to stay on an intentional path. A rule of life is not just a set of rules to live by; rather, it is a gentle framework to guide and support us on our way.
- A rule of life allows us to live with intention and purpose in the present moment. It helps us clarify our most important values, relationships, dreams, and work.
- A rule of life is meant to be simple, realistic, flexible, and achievable. It is a purposeful tool to help us grow into a more meaningful life with God.

Questions for Discussion

- What are some rules of life that already exist in our own lives, consciously or unconsciously? Are they helpful, or hurtful?
- Where is God calling you to pay more attention in your life? In what specific ways would you like to be more intentional with God?

- Monastics have been using rules of life for centuries. What do you think is key to the rule of life's staying power? What is appealing? What is daunting?
- What is holding you back from being more intentional about your relationship with God? What can you do this week to take down one of those barriers?
- The Way of Love is a rule of life. With whom could you travel the Way of Love, helping to keep each other accountable?

Practicing a Rule of Life (10 minutes)

Explanation: Living the Way of Love is less about adding a bunch of spiritual practices to your already busy life and more about intentionally using your time in a way that is fruitful and encourages spiritual, emotional, and mental growth.

Hand out a folder for participants to keep their worksheets from your nine sessions together. Hand out "Living a Fruitful Life" worksheet, and invite participants to map out how they spend their time each week. Encourage them to think about how they use their time. What is harmful or counterproductive and could be pruned out? What do they wish they had more time to do? What intentional practices in their week do they give thanks for?

Check-out (5 minutes)

Assess the group's experience during this session. Ask one of the following questions:

- When did the group have a lot of energy? When was the energy lacking?
- When did you feel close to God? When did you feel far away from God?
- When did you meet Jesus in your session today?
- When did you see light from the Holy Spirit?
- What did you notice about our time together?
- What will you take away from our conversation today?
- [If short on time] Describe our time together in one word.

Worship (10 minutes or more)

During the first session, the facilitator should plan on leading worship. Depending on your group, however, members may wish to take turns leading worship, even if they don't have experience doing so. Small groups are a wonderful place to learn by doing. See page 5 of this Facilitation Guide for worship suggestions, although the facilitator should encourage worship leaders to be creative.

Worship resources for this session:

Scripture

- Isaiah 55:1-3, 6-11
- Psalm 19:7-14
- Romans 12:1-2, 9-21
- John 15:1-11

Prayers

- Baptismal Covenant (*Book of Common Prayer*, pp. 304-305)
- A Collect for Guidance (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 100)
- A Collect for the Renewal of Life (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 99)

Hymns

- Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart (*Hymnal 1982*, 488)
- Come, thou fount of every blessing (*Hymnal 1982*, 686)
- I have decided to follow Jesus (*Lift Every Voice and Sing (LEVAS) II*, 136)
- I want to walk as a child of the light (*Hymnal 1982*, 490)
- Just a closer walk with thee (*LEVAS II*, 72)
- Will you come and follow me (*Wonder, Love, and Praise*, 757)

SESSION TWO

TURN

Pause, Listen, and Choose to Follow Jesus

Needed materials

- Printed worksheets for participants (found in the Curriculum Resources section of this guide.)
- Writing utensils
- Group norms for participants to reference

Prayer (5 minutes)

Begin with at least a minute of centering silence, preferably two or three. You may find it helpful to light a candle or to place another devotional item in the center of your discussion circle. The worship leader for the session should conclude the time of silence with a prayer, either extemporaneous or one found in the *Book of Common Prayer*. The worship leader may wish to use the prayer below:

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

(A Collect for the Second Sunday of Lent, *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 218)

Check-in (15 minutes)

Using the process of mutual invitation, check in with participants' Way of Love practices by asking one or more of these questions:

- Were you more aware of how you spent your time the last session?
- What was the biggest obstacle to using your time purposefully?
- What helps you be more intentional about using your time?

Discussion (45 minutes)

Background for Discussion:

Like the disciples, we are called by Jesus to follow the Way of Love. With God's help, we can turn from the powers of sin, hatred, fear, injustice, and oppression toward the way of truth, love, hope, justice, and freedom. In turning, we reorient our lives to Jesus Christ, falling in love with Jesus again, again, and again.

Starting the Discussion:

- Tell a story about a time you got physically lost. How did you find your way again?
- Tell a story about a time you changed your mind. What did it take to change your mind? What happened after you changed your mind?
- What is your experience of Lent? How do you feel about Lent? Why?

Questions for Discussion:

- Tell a story about a time you realized you were spiritually lost and had to find your way back to God. What made you turn back toward God?
- Why do you think the Church sets aside the season of Lent for repentance?
- The *Book of Common Prayer* offers two Rites of Reconciliation (pp. 446-452). (The Rite of Reconciliation is sometimes colloquially called “Confession.”) Did you know these rites are available? When do you think they might be helpful?
- Scripture is full of people, from Moses to Matthew, who turn from their old life to a new life in deeper relationship with God. What biblical stories speak to you? How has God called you out of an old life and into the new?
- When everything goes wrong, what practices help you to turn again and again to Jesus Christ and the Way of Love?
- What would it look like in your own life if you turned from the powers of sin, hatred, fear, injustice, and oppression toward the way of truth, love, hope, justice, and freedom? What specifically do you need to turn away from in your own life? What do you need to turn toward?
- What is one step you can take this week on the Way of Love?

Practicing the Way of Love (10 minutes)

Hand out a copy of the “Practicing the Way of Love” worksheet. Ensure that all participants have writing utensils, and encourage them to fill out the worksheet and to add “Turn” to their Way of Love working rule of life. Gently remind participants that a modest change sustained over time is better than a dramatic but unsustainable change. Participants should begin incorporating this new practice into their Way of Love practices the following day.

Some recommendations for “Turn”: Pray the Confession found in the *Book of Common Prayer* (p. 79) each day, work on forgiving a wrong, read through Form One or Form Two of Reconciliation of a Penitent (*Book of Common Prayer*, pp. 447, 449), read Psalm 51 each morning or night, or practice the Daily Examen. (You also might list a practice you are already engaged in that gives life to you.)

Check-out (5 minutes)

Assess the group’s experience during this session. Ask one of the following questions:

- When did the group have a lot of energy? When was the energy lacking?
- When did you feel close to God? When did you feel far away from God?
- When did you meet Jesus in your session today?
- When did you see light from the Holy Spirit?
- What did you notice about our time together?
- What will you take away from our conversation today?
- [If short on time] Describe our time together in one word.

Worship (10 minutes or more)

Worship resources for this session:

Scripture

- Exodus 3:1-6
- Psalm 51
- Psalm 119:169-176
- 2 Corinthians 4:5-7
- Luke 5:1-11

Prayers

- Confession (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 79, or *Enriching Our Worship I*, p.19)
- Opening Collect of Ash Wednesday (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 264)
- Litany of Penitence in Ash Wednesday Service (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 267)
- Anthems 1, 2, and 3 in the Good Friday Service (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 281-282)

Hymns

- Amazing grace! how sweet the sound (*Hymnal 1982*, 671)
- Come by here (*LEVAS II*, 162)
- Lead me, guide me, along the way (*Wonder, Love, and Praise*, 756)
- There's a wideness in God's mercy (*Hymnal 1982*, 469-470)
- There is a balm in Gilead (*LEVAS II*, 203)
- 'Tis the gift to be simple (*Hymnal 1982*, 554)

SESSION THREE

LEARN

Reflect on Scripture each day, especially on Jesus' life and teachings

Needed materials

- Printed worksheets for participants (found in Curriculum Resources)
- Writing utensils
- Group norms for participants to reference

Prayer (5 minutes)

Begin with at least a minute of centering silence, preferably two or three. You may find it helpful to light a candle or to place another devotional item in the center of your discussion circle. The worship leader for the session should conclude the time of silence with a prayer, either extemporaneous or as found in the *Book of Common Prayer*. The worship leader may wish to use the prayer below:

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.

(A Collect for Proper 28, *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 236)

Check-in (15 minutes)

Using the process of mutual invitation, check in with participants' Way of Love practices by asking one or more of these questions:

- What's been working well with your "Turn" practice? What hasn't been working well?
- What did you learn about yourself? About God? What adjustments might support you in the Way of Love?
- What has surprised you about your "Turn" practice?
- Name a gift that your practice has given you since we last gathered.

Discussion (45 minutes)

Background for Discussion:

By reading and reflecting on Scripture, especially the life and teachings of Jesus, we draw near to God and God's word dwells in us. When we open our minds and hearts to Scripture, we learn to see God's story and God's activity in everyday life.

Starting the Discussion:

- What is your favorite passage of Scripture? What does it mean to you?
- Have you ever tried to read the Bible all the way through? Describe your experience.
- If you could share a meal with any person (other than Jesus) from Scripture, who would it be? What would you ask that person?

Questions for Discussion:

- The Catechism says that “God still speaks to us through the Bible” (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 853). How has God spoken to you through Scripture? How does God speak to the Church through Scripture?
- What is your favorite story about Jesus? What about it speaks to you?
- How does hearing the stories of God working in the world in Scripture help you spot God working in the world today?
- What is the sermon you have always wanted, but have never heard, preached? What Scripture would you use?
- How has your approach to understanding Scripture changed over time? Has this changed how you relate to God and others?
- What ways of reflecting on Scripture are the most life-giving for you?
- What gets in the way of making time to read and reflect on Scripture during your day? What is one thing you can do to set aside time for Scripture?

Practicing the Way of Love (10 minutes)

Hand out a copy of the “Practicing the Way of Love” worksheet. Ensure that all participants have writing utensils, and encourage them to fill out the worksheet. Give permission to adapt or discard a practice they tried that was not life-giving. This is a work in progress. Instruct participants to add a practice for “Learn” to their Way of Love working rule of life. Gently remind participants that a modest change sustained over time is better than a dramatic but unsustainable change. Participants should begin incorporating this new practice into their Way of Love practices the following day.

Some recommendations for “Learn”: Read the scripture from the Daily Office Lectionary found in the *Book of Common Prayer* (p. 934) or online through various websites or apps, take up a Bible reading plan, read a daily devotional, practice lectio divina, or listen to a podcast that includes scripture such as “Pray as you go.” (You also might list a practice you are already engaged in that gives life to you.)

Check-out (5 minutes)

Assess the group’s experience during this session. Ask one of the following questions:

- When did the group have a lot of energy? When was the energy lacking?
- When did you feel close to God? When did you feel far away from God?
- When did you meet Jesus in your session today?
- When did you see light from the Holy Spirit?
- What did you notice about our time together?
- What will you take away from our conversation today?
- [If short on time] Describe our time together in one word.

Worship (10 minutes or more)

Worship resources for this session:

Scripture

- Micah 4:1-5
- Psalm 90:1-12
- Hebrews 4:12-16
- Matthew 7:24-29
- Matthew 13:44-53
- John 14:23

Prayers

- Collect for the Fourth Sunday of Easter (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 225)
- Collect for the Fifth Sunday of Easter (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 225)
- Collect for Proper 20 (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 234)

Hymns

- Book of books, our people's strength (*Hymnal 1982*, 631)
- How firm a foundation (*Hymnal 1982*, 636-637)
- O Christ, the Word incarnate (*Hymnal 1982*, 632)
- God has spoken to his people (*Hymnal 1982*, 536)

SESSION FOUR

PRAY

Dwell intentionally with God each day

Needed materials

- Printed worksheets for participants (found in the Curriculum Resources section of this guide.)
- Writing utensils
- Group norms for participants to reference

Prayer (5 minutes)

Begin with at least a minute of centering silence, preferably two or three. You may find it helpful to light a candle or place another devotional item in the center of your discussion circle. The worship leader for the session should conclude the time of silence with a prayer, either extemporaneous or as found in the *Book of Common Prayer*. The worship leader may wish to use the prayer below:

Almighty and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we to pray, and to give more than we either desire or deserve: Pour upon us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our Savior; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

(A Collect for Proper 22, *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 234)

Check-in (15 minutes)

Using the process of mutual invitation, check in with participants' Way of Love practices by asking one or more of these questions:

- What was adding "Learn" in your practice like? What did you learn about yourself? About God? How are your other Way of Love practices going?
- What's been working well with your Way of Love practices? What hasn't been working well? What adjustments might support you in the Way of Love?
- What has surprised you about your Way of Love practices?
- Name a gift that your practices have given you since we last gathered.

Discussion (45 minutes)

Background for Discussion:

Jesus teaches us to come before God with humble hearts, boldly offering our thanksgivings and concerns to God or simply listening for God's voice in our lives and in the world. Whether in thought, word, or deed, individually or corporately, when we pray we invite and dwell in God's loving presence.

Starting the Discussion:

- When do you feel closest to God during your day?
- What is your favorite way to pray?
- Share a story of how prayer has impacted your life.
- Which person of the Trinity do you most often address in your prayers?

Questions for Discussion:

- What part of the Lord's Prayer are you drawn to right now? Why?
- In the story of the boy Samuel in 1 Samuel 3, Samuel confuses the voice of God with the voice of Eli. Have you ever mistaken God's voice for someone else's? Or, have you heard God through the words of others?
- The Book of Psalms includes many psalms of thanksgiving, as well as psalms of lament. What changes when we can pour out all of our life, the good and the bad, to God?
- What does "God's loving presence" look like in your life? Or what could it look like?
- Kathy Staudt, a spiritual director and seminary professor likes to say, "Five minutes of silence a day is the spiritual equivalent of flossing your teeth." How can you foster silence and receptivity to God in your own life?
- What intentional prayer practices center you in God's presence, so you can hear, speak, or simply dwell with God? How do you invite God to dwell in you? If you don't know about intentional prayer practices, where could you get more information?
- What stands in the way of a more active and consistent prayer life? What are simple (or not-so-simple) changes you can make to be more present to God throughout your day?

Practicing the Way of Love (10 minutes)

Hand out a copy of the "Practicing the Way of Love" worksheet. Ensure that all participants have writing utensils, and encourage them to fill out the worksheet. Give permission to adapt or discard a practice they tried that was not life-giving. This is a work in progress. Instruct participants to add a practice for "Pray" to their Way of Love working rule of life. Gently remind participants that a modest change sustained over time is better than a dramatic but unsustainable change. Participants should begin incorporating this new practice into their Way of Love practices the following day.

Some recommendations for "Pray": Set aside a specific period of time for experiencing contemplative silence, doing contemplative writing, using prayer beads, walking and praying, practicing Ignatian prayer, praying by coloring, or praying the Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 136). (You also might list a practice you are already engaged in that gives life to you.)

Check-out (5 minutes)

Assess the group's experience during this session. Ask one of the following questions:

- When did the group have a lot of energy? When was the energy lacking?
- When did you feel close to God? When did you feel far away from God?

- When did you meet Jesus in your session today?
- When did you see light from the Holy Spirit?
- What did you notice about our time together?
- What will you take away from our conversation today?
- [If short on time] Describe our time together in one word.

Worship (10 minutes or more)

Worship resources for this session:

Scripture

- 1 Samuel 3:1-10
- Psalm 25:1-9
- Psalm 86:1-13
- 2 Corinthians 12:7-10
- James 5:13-18
- Luke 11:1-13

Prayers

- A Collect for Proper 10 (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 231)
- A Collect for Proper 11 (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 231)
- A Collect for Guidance (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 100)
- A General Thanksgiving (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 836)
- Collect at the Prayers (*Book of Common Prayer*, pp. 394-395)

Hymns

- Breathe on me, breath of God (*Hymnal 1982*, 508)
- Come down, O Love divine (*Hymnal 1982*, 516)
- Day by day, dear Lord (*Hymnal 1982*, 654)
- Ev'ry time I feel the spirit (*Wonder, Love, and Praise*, 751)
- It's me, it's me, it's me, O Lord (*Wonder, Love, and Praise*, 797)
- King of glory, King of peace (*Hymnal 1982*, 382)
- O Lord hear my pray'r (*Wonder, Love, and Praise*, 827)

SESSION FIVE

WORSHIP

Gather in community weekly to thank, praise, and dwell with God

Needed materials

- Printed worksheets for participants (found in the Curriculum Resources section of this guide.)
- Writing utensils
- Group norms for participants to reference

Prayer (5 minutes)

Begin with at least a minute of centering silence, preferably two or three. You may find it helpful to light a candle or place another devotional item in the center of your discussion circle. The worship leader for the session should conclude the time of silence with a prayer, either extemporaneous or as found in the *Book of Common Prayer*. The worship leader may wish to use the prayer below:

O God, whose blessed Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread: Open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him in all his redeeming work; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(A Collect for the Third Sunday of Easter, *Book of Common Prayer*, pp. 224)

Check-in (15 minutes)

Using the process of mutual invitation, check in with participants' Way of Love practices by asking one or more of these questions:

- What was adding "Pray" to your practice like? What did you learn about yourself? About God? How are your other Way of Love practices going?
- What's been working well with your Way of Love practices? What hasn't been working well? What adjustments are you thinking about?
- What has surprised you about your Way of Love practices?
- Name a gift that your practices have given you since we last gathered.

Discussion (45 minutes)

Background for Discussion:

When we worship, we gather with others before God. We hear the Good News of Jesus, 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.

Starting the Discussion:

- What is your favorite Sunday or other service of the Church year? Why?
- What is your favorite hymn? Why? (What is your least favorite hymn? Why?)
- What is the most meaningful part of a worship service for you? Why?

Questions for Discussion:

- Read the second verse of the hymn “I come with joy to meet my Lord”:

*I come with Christians far and near
To find, as all are fed
The new community of love
In Christ's communion bread*

- What does a “new community of love” mean to you? How has this community changed your life?
- Talk about a time you experienced God's presence in a worship service.
- What is your favorite way to worship God outside of Church?
- Have you ever participated in worship leadership (like ushering, serving as an acolyte, reading, etc.)? How has that changed your perception of what it means to worship?
- What do you think it means to have the eyes of our faith opened? (From the Collect for the Third Sunday of Easter, also Luke 24:31)
- What prevents you from coming to worship with your community on a weekly basis? How can you remove some of those obstacles?
- What communal worship practices move you to encounter God and knit you into the body of Christ?

Practicing the Way of Love (10 minutes)

Hand out a copy of the “Practicing the Way of Love” worksheet. Ensure that all participants have writing utensils, and encourage them to fill out the worksheet. Give permission to adapt or discard a practice they tried that was not life-giving. This is a work in progress. Instruct participants to add a practice for “Worship” to their Way of Love working rule of life. Gently remind participants that a modest change sustained over time is better than a dramatic but unsustainable change. Participants should begin incorporating this new practice into their Way of Love practices the following day.

Some recommendations for “Worship”: Attend worship weekly, identify a way to be more fully present in worship (e.g., arriving early for a time of silence or to say a prayer of thanksgiving before worship), or pray for your worshipping community each day. (You also might list a practice you are already engaged in that gives life to you.)

Check-out (5 minutes)

Assess the group's experience during this session. Ask one of the following questions:

- When did the group have a lot of energy? When was the energy lacking?
- When did you feel close to God? When did you feel far away from God?
- When did you meet Jesus in your session today?
- When did you see light from the Holy Spirit?
- What did you notice about our time together?
- What will you take away from our conversation today?
- [If short on time] Describe our time together in one word.

Worship (10 minutes or more)

Worship resources for this session:

Scripture

- Isaiah 56:1-7
- Psalm 96:1-9
- I Corinthians 11:23-26
- John 4:23
- Luke 24:28-35

Prayers

- A Prayer of St. Chrysostom (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 102)
- Venite (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 82)
- Jubilate (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 82)
- A Song of Creation (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 88, also *Enriching Our Worship I*, p. 25)
- A Song of Praise (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 90, also *Enriching Our Worship I*, p. 29)
- Additional canticles found in Morning Prayer Rite 2 (*Book of Common Prayer*, pp. 85-95, and *Enriching Our Worship I*, pp. 30-41)

Hymns

- Joyful, joyful, we adore thee (*Hymnal 1982*, 376)
- How great thou art (*LEVAS II*, 60)
- I come with joy to meet my Lord (*Hymnal 1982*, 304)
- Santo, santo, santo (*Wonder, Love, and Praise*, 785)
- We gather together to ask the Lord's blessing (*Hymnal 1982*, 433)
- What wondrous love is this (*Hymnal 1982*, 439)

SESSION SIX

BLESS

SHARE FAITH, AND UNSELFISHLY GIVE AND SERVE

Needed materials

- Printed worksheets for participants (found in the Curriculum Resources section of this guide.)
- Writing utensils
- Group norms for participants to reference

Prayer (5 minutes)

Begin with at least a minute of centering silence, preferably two or three. You may find it helpful to light a candle or to place another devotional item in the center of your discussion circle. The worship leader for the session should conclude the time of silence with a prayer, either extemporaneous or as found in the *Book of Common Prayer*. The worship leader may wish to use the prayer below:

O God, from whom all good proceeds: Grant that by your inspiration we may think those things that are right, and by your merciful guiding may do them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

(A Collect for Proper 5, *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 229)

Check-in (15 minutes)

Using the process of mutual invitation, check in with participants' Way of Love practices by asking one or more of these questions:

- What was adding "Worship" to your practice like? What did you learn about yourself? About God? How are your other Way of Love practices going?
- What's been working well with your Way of Love practices? What hasn't been working well? What adjustments might support you in the Way of Love?
- What has surprised you about your Way of Love practices?
- Name a gift that your practices have given you since we last gathered.

Discussion (45 minutes)

Background for Discussion:

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.

Starting the Discussion:

- What is the best gift you have ever been given? Why was it so special?
- Who was the first person who told you about Jesus?
- Name a time you were blessed. What happened? How did you feel?

Questions for Discussion:

- What have you been freely given? What can you freely give? (Matt 10:8, NIV)
- Where is God already working in your neighborhood? How could you partner with God to bring about blessings and love for those around you?
- Who in your life could you invite to join you in the Way of Love?
- God gives us gifts so that we can share them. What are your spiritual gifts? What are the ways you share them with your community of faith and your community at large? (1 Cor 12) What else have you been gifted?
- What things get in the way of sharing your faith? What things get in the way of sharing God's blessings? Are they the same things, or different?
- What is one practice of generosity or compassion you could commit to trying this week?
- What are the ways the Spirit is calling you to bless others in your community?

Practicing the Way of Love (10 minutes)

Hand out a copy of the "Practicing the Way of Love" worksheet. Ensure that all participants have writing utensils, and encourage them to fill out the worksheet. Give permission to adapt or discard a practice they tried that was not life-giving. This is a work in progress. Instruct participants to add a practice for "Bless" to their Way of Love working rule of life. Gently remind participants that a modest change sustained over time is better than a dramatic but unsustainable change. Participants should begin incorporating this new practice into their Way of Love practices the following day.

Some recommendations for "Bless": Begin regular volunteer shifts at a local nonprofit, check on a shut-in neighbor, invite a different neighbor or colleague to coffee each week to ask about his/her life and concerns, practice sharing how God has been working in your own life, consider any specific and concrete way your life can bring life and joy to others, or take on a practice of stewardship for creation such as composting. (You also might list a practice you are already engaged in that gives life to you and others.)

Check-out (5 minutes)

Assess the group's experience during this session. Ask one of the following questions:

- When did the group have a lot of energy? When was the energy lacking?
- When did you feel close to God? When did you feel far away from God?
- When did you meet Jesus in your session today?
- When did you see light from the Holy Spirit?
- What did you notice about our time together?
- What will you take away from our conversation today?
- [If short on time] Describe our time together in one word.

Worship (10 minutes or more)

Worship resources for this session:

Scripture

- Genesis 12:1-4
- Genesis 32:22-30
- Acts 3:1-10
- Acts 8:26-40
- Romans 12:9-21
- Matt 10:5-15
- Matthew 25:31-40
- Luke 6:27-36

Prayers

- For the Mission of the Church (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 816)
- Thanksgiving for the Mission of the Church (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 838)
- Prayers for Mission of the Church (three collects found in *Book of Common Prayer*, pp. 100-101)

Hymns

- Bless the Lord my soul (*Wonder, Love, and Praise*, 825)
- Christ for the world we sing (*Hymnal 1982*, 537)
- Come, labor on (*Hymnal 1982*, 541)
- Come, thou font of every blessing (*LEVAS II*, 111)
- King of glory, King of peace (*Hymnal 1982*, 382)
- Lord, you give the great commission (*Hymnal 1982*, 528)
- Peace before us (*Wonder, Love, and Praise*, 791)
- The Servant Song (Richard Gillard)
- They will know we are Christians by our love (Peter Scholtes)
- Ubi caritas (*Wonder, Love, and Praise*, 831)

SESSION SEVEN

GO

Cross boundaries, listen deeply, and live like Jesus

Needed materials

- Printed worksheets for participants (found in the Curriculum Resources section of this guide.)
- Writing utensils
- Group norms for participants to reference

Prayer (5 minutes)

Begin with at least a minute of centering silence, preferably two or three. You may find it helpful to light a candle or place another devotional item in the center of your discussion circle. The worship leader for the session should conclude the time of silence with a prayer, either extemporaneous or as found in the *Book of Common Prayer*. The worship leader may wish to use the prayer below:

*Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us 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; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we 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. (Prayer attributed to St. Francis, *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 833)*

Check-in (15 minutes)

Using the process of mutual invitation, check in with participants' Way of Love practices by asking one or more of these questions:

- What was adding the "Bless" practice like? What did you learn about yourself? About God? How are your other Way of Love practices going?
- What's been working well with your Way of Love practices? What hasn't been working well? What adjustments might support you in the Way of Love?
- What has surprised you about your Way of Love practices?
- Name a gift that your practices have given you this week.

Discussion (45 minutes)

Background for Discussion:

As Jesus went to the highways and byways, he sends us beyond our circles and comfort to witness to the love, justice, and truth of God with our lips and with our lives. We go to listen with humility and to join God in healing a hurting world. We go to become Beloved Community, a people reconciled in love with God and one another.

Starting the Discussion:

- Who is your most unlikely friend? How did you become friends?
- Where do you feel Jesus' absence most keenly in the world?
- Tell a story about a time you went beyond your comfort zone.

Questions for Discussion:

- Name a time you experienced reconciliation. What had to happen before the reconciliation could occur? How did that reconciliation change your relationship with others or God?
- Where does reconciliation need to happen in your community? How would reconciliation change your community?
- What would love, justice, and the truth of God look like in your community?
- How could you faithfully discern where reconciliation needs to happen?
- What is one thing you could do this week to heal your world?
- To what new places or communities is the Spirit sending you to witness to the love, justice, and truth of God?
- What needs to change in your own life to make you more open to seeing and engaging with the needs of the world?

Check-out (5 minutes)

Assess the group's experience during this session. Ask one of the following questions:

- When did the group have a lot of energy? When was the energy lacking?
- When did you feel close to God? When did you feel far away from God?
- When did you meet Jesus in your session today?
- When did you see light from the Holy Spirit?
- What did you notice about our time together?
- What will you take away from our conversation today?
- [If short on time] Describe our time together in one word.

Practicing the Way of Love (10 minutes)

Hand out a copy of the "Practicing the Way of Love" worksheet. Ensure that all participants have writing utensils, and encourage them to fill out the worksheet. Give permission to adapt or discard a practice they tried that was not life-giving. This is a work in progress. Instruct participants to add a practice for "Go" to their Way of Love working rule of life. Gently remind participants that a modest change sustained over time is better than a dramatic but unsustainable change. Participants should begin incorporating this new practice into their Way of Love practices the following day.

Some recommendations for "Go": Identify a community or culture that is unlike your own and learn about them either by attending an event, reading, or speaking to a friend or acquaintance in that group. You might also take a prayerful walk through a neighborhood or space shaped by a community or culture different from your own. (You also might list a practice you are already engaged in that gives life to you.)

Worship (10 minutes or more)

Worship resources for this session:

Scripture

- Isaiah 2:1-4
- Isaiah 61:8-11
- Jonah 3:1-10
- Psalm 41:1-4
- 2 Cor 5:16-20
- 1 John 3:11, 18-14
- 1 John 4:16-21
- Luke 10:1-11
- Luke 10:25-37
- John 20:19-23

Prayers

- The Collect for Proper 6 (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 230)
- The Song of Mary (Magnificat) (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 119)
- For our Enemies (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 816)
- For Social Justice (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 823)
- In Times of Conflict (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 824)

Hymns

- All who love and serve your city (*Hymnal 1982*, 570-571)
- Christ is the world's true Light (*Hymnal 1982*, 542)
- Go forth for God, go to the world in peace (*Hymnal 1982*, 347)
- Go, tell it on the mountain (*LEVAS II*, 21)
- I, the Lord of sea and sky (*Wonder, Love, and Praise*, 812)
- In Christ there is no East or West (*Hymnal 1982*, 529)
- Jesu, Jesu (*LEVAS II*, 74)
- Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love (*Hymnal 1982*, 602)
- Lord, you give the great commission (*Wonder, Love, and Praise*, 780)
- This little light of mine (*LEVAS II*, 160)
- We are marching in the light of God (*Wonder, Love, and Praise*, 787)

SESSION EIGHT

REST

RECEIVE THE GIFT OF GOD'S GRACE, PEACE, AND RESTORATION

Needed materials

- Printed worksheets for participants (found in the Curriculum Resources section of this guide.)
- Writing utensils
- Group norms for participants to reference

Prayer (5 minutes)

Begin with at least a minute of centering silence, preferably two or three. You may find it helpful to light a candle or place another devotional item in the center of your discussion circle. The worship leader for this session should conclude the time of silence with a prayer, either extemporaneous or as found in the *Book of Common Prayer*. The worship leader may wish to use the prayer below:

O God of peace, who has taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be our strength: By the might of you Spirit lift us, we pray, to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(A Prayer For Quiet Confidence, *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 832)

Check-in (15 minutes)

Using the process of mutual invitation, check in with participants' Way of Love practices by asking one or more of these questions:

- What was adding "Go" like? What did you learn about yourself? About God? How are your other Way of Love practices going?
- What's been working well with your Way of Love practices? What hasn't been working well? What adjustments might support you in the Way of Love?
- What has surprised you about your Way of Love practices?
- Name a gift that your practices have given you this week.

Discussion (45 minutes)

Background for Discussion:

From the beginning of creation, God has established the sacred pattern of going and returning, labor and rest. Especially today, God invites us to dedicate time for restoration and wholeness – within our bodies, minds, and souls, and within our communities and institutions. By resting we place our trust in God, the primary actor who brings all things to their fullness.

Starting the Discussion:

- Describe your ideal day of rest and refreshment.
- When was the last time you paused to rest?
- As a child, what was your favorite way to play?

Questions for Discussion:

- When was the last time you felt truly refreshed and rested? How did it change your perspective?
- What practices restore your body, mind, and soul?
- How is your productivity linked to your self-worth? Has there been a time in your life when your productivity was not linked to your self-worth? What was this like?
- What would the peace of Jesus look like in your life? (John 14:27 or 20:19)
- What do you think it means to keep the Sabbath holy? (Exodus 20:8)
- What keeps you from pursuing time for peace and restoration?
- What is one thing you could change in your life to allow yourself more time for rest?

Practicing the Way of Love (10 minutes)

Hand out a copy of the “Practicing the Way of Love” worksheet. Ensure that all participants have writing utensils, and encourage them to fill out the worksheet. Give permission to adapt or discard a practice they tried that was not life-giving. This is a work in progress. Instruct participants to add a practice for “Rest” to their Way of Love working rule of life. Gently remind participants that a modest change sustained over time is better than a dramatic but unsustainable change. Participants should begin incorporating this new practice into their Way of Love practices the following day.

Some recommendations for “Rest”: Choose a day or a time of the week in which you don’t work or take up a hobby, set limits on social media consumption/technology use (such as turning off your cell phone during meals and at bedtime), set regular time apart to be by yourself or with family and friends without an agenda or distractions, or take a walk or bicycle in your neighborhood or park.

“Rest” is the final practice of the Way of Love. When the participants have completed their “Practicing the Way of Love” worksheet, hand out the final worksheet, “My Rule of Life: The Way of Love.” Instruct your small group to take this worksheet home, look over their worksheets from the last eight sessions, carefully consider what has been working and what hasn’t been working, and craft a realistic rule of life for themselves. Participants should bring their “My Rule of Life” worksheet back to share with others during the final session.

Check-out (5 minutes)

Assess the group’s experience during this session. Ask one of the following questions:

- When did the group have a lot of energy? When was the energy lacking?
- When did you feel close to God? When did you feel far away from God?
- When did you meet Jesus in your session today?
- When did you see light from the Holy Spirit?
- What did you notice about our time together?
- What will you take away from our conversation today?
- [If short on time] Describe our time together in one word.

Worship (10 minutes or more)

Worship resources for this session:

Scripture

- Exodus 20:8-11
- Psalm 127:1-2
- Philippians 4:4-7
- Matthew 25:28-30
- Mark 6:7-13, 30-32

Prayers

- A Collect for Proper 19 (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 233)
- A Collect for Proper 17 (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 233)
- A Collect for the Fifth Sunday of Easter (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 225)
- A Collect for Saturdays (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 99)
- A Collect for Saturdays (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 123)
- A Collect for Peace (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 123)
- For the Good Use of Leisure (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 825)
- For Cities (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 825)
- For Towns and Rural Areas (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 825)

Hymns

- Come to me (*LEVAS II*, 156)
- Dona nobis pacem (*Hymnal 1982*, 712)
- How lovely is thy dwelling place (*Hymnal 1982*, 517)
- I heard the voice of Jesus say (*Hymnal 1982*, 692)
- Just as I am, without one plea (*Hymnal 1982*, 693, also *LEVAS II*, 137)
- My Shepherd will supply my need (*Hymnal 1982*, 664)
- Shepherd of souls, refresh and bless (*Hymnal 1982*, 343)

SESSION NINE

LIVING THE WAY OF LOVE

Committing to the Way of Love

Note:

Due to the presentations in the middle of this small group session, this session may last longer than the typical 90 minutes. You may want to either set aside two hours for this session or simply be very careful to watch the time during the presentations. Large groups will have to be more careful with their time than smaller groups.

Needed materials

- Newsprint
- Markers
- Group norms for participants to reference
- Participants' new rules of life for sharing with the group
- Way of Love Commitment Covenant Liturgy for each participant (found in the Curriculum Resources section of this guide.)

Prayer (5 minutes)

Begin with at least a minute of centering silence, preferably two or three. You may find it helpful to light a candle or place another devotional item in the center of your discussion circle. The worship leader for the session should conclude the time of silence with a prayer, either extemporaneous or as found in the *Book of Common Prayer*. The worship leader may wish to use the prayer below:

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 the Spirit and make the Spirit known; and through the Spirit, at all times and in all places, may give thanks to you in all things. Amen. (A General Thanksgiving, Book of Common Prayer, p. 836)

Check-in (15 minutes)

Using the process of mutual invitation, check in with your group by asking them one or more of these questions:

- What impact has adding “Rest” to your Way of Love practices made in your life? What did you learn about yourself? About God?
- What has surprised you most about our time together over the last eight weeks?
- What has been your greatest blessing during the life of this small group?
- How do you hope your life will change as a result of living your rule of life?

Discussion (35-55 minutes)

Instead of an intentional small group discussion, participants will share their own Way of Love rule with the group. While length will depend on the number of participants, each person’s presentation should not last longer than four or five minutes.

Practicing the Way of Love: Accountability Exercise (20 minutes)

As a group, discuss the following:

- Where does the group see God moving in one another’s lives over the past eight sessions?
- What are ways members of this group can support individuals as they strive to live into their new rule of life? The group should agree on at least three tangible ways members of the group will support one another. Write the suggestions on newsprint, and be sure to capture what the group has agreed upon.
- When is the next time the group will meet for the recommitment/refreshers session? Put that date on the calendar. The group may want to come up with a recurring date on a monthly or bimonthly basis.

Check-out (5 minutes)

Ask the following question: What are you grateful for during your time together?

Worship (10 minutes or more)

See the Way of Love Commitment Covenant found in the Curriculum Resources section in this guide. Your small group may wish to celebrate the Eucharist and incorporate the Way of Love covenant and an in-gathering and blessing of rules of life during the Offertory.

If the small group is part of a larger parish initiative around the Way of Love, the facilitator may wish to discuss an in-gathering and blessing of the rules of life during the principal service on Sunday with church leadership. You might consider having the participants make the covenant after the Prayers of the People and before the Peace, or having an extra offering plate go collect for the rules so that they can be brought to the altar and blessed.

Additional worship resources for this session:

Scripture

- Exodus 35:4-29
- Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18
- Isaiah 55:1-3, 6-11

- Isaiah 65:17-25
- Psalm 19:7-14
- John 15:1-11
- James 1:19-27
- Romans 12:1-2, 9-21

Prayers

- For the Joy in God's Creation (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 814)
- For the Right Use of God's Gifts (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 827)
- For Guidance (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 832)
- Prayer of Self-Dedication (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 832)

Hymns

- Abide with me: fast falls the eventide (*Hymnal 1982*, 662)
- Fight the good fight with all thy might (*Hymnal 1982*, 552-553)
- God be in my head (*Hymnal 1982*, 694)
- I have decided to follow Jesus (*LEVAS II*, 136)
- In my life, Lord, be glorified (*LEVAS II*, 216)
- Morning glory, starlit sky (*Hymnal 1982*, 585)
- Rise up, ye saints of God (*Hymnal 1982*, 551)

FOLLOW-UP

Way of Love Small Group Recommitment Session

Helping each other along the way

Needed materials

- Printed worksheets for participants (found in the Curriculum Resources section of this guide.)
- Writing utensils
- Group norms for participants to reference

Prayer (5 minutes)

Begin with at least a minute of centering silence, preferably two or three. You may find it helpful to light a candle or place another devotional item in the center of your discussion circle. The worship leader for the session should conclude the time of silence with a prayer, either extemporaneous or as found in the *Book of Common Prayer*. The worship leader may wish to use the prayer below:

Almighty and everlasting God, you have brought us in safety to this new day: Preserve us with your mighty power, that we may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all we do, direct us to the fulfilling of your purpose; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(A Collect for Grace, *Book of Common Prayer*, 100)

Check-in (15 minutes)

Using the process of mutual invitation, check in with your group by asking them one or more of these questions:

- How have you been since the last time we gathered? What is going really well right now, and what isn't going so well?
- What has surprised you about your Way of Love practices?
- Name a gift that your practices have given you since the last time the group gathered together.

Discussion (45-55 minutes)

Background for Discussion:

Spiritual practices are just that – practices – which means they need practicing. Mutual support and encouragement make the vital difference between a life-giving rule of life and a piece of paper in a drawer. Discovering the best way to support one another also takes time and practice, but with intentionality and accountability, your group can help one another.

Questions for Discussion:

- How has God shown up in your practices?
- Which practices give you energy? Do any only take away energy? Is it time to change that practice, or lean in?

- Is your rule of life too much, or not enough?
- What is your biggest stumbling block to practicing any or all of your rule? What can you do to remove that obstacle?
- What has been your best source of accountability? Do you need more or less accountability?
- As a whole, is the group adhering to the practices of support it outlined in session nine? Are these realistic practices? How could they be changed to be more helpful?
- How can you better encourage others in your group?
- When is the next time the group will meet?

Check-out 5 minutes

Assess the group's experience during this session. Ask one of the following questions:

- When did the group have a lot of energy? When was the energy lacking?
- When did you feel close to God? When did you feel far away from God?
- When did you meet Jesus in your session today?
- When did you see light from the Holy Spirit?
- What did you notice about our time together?
- [If short on time] Describe our time together in one word.

Worship (10 minutes or more)

Worship resources for this session:

Scripture

- 2 Kings 23:1-3
- Jeremiah 29:4-14
- Mark 12:28-34
- Ephesians 4:1-16

Prayers

- Baptismal Covenant (*Book of Common Prayer*, pp. 304-305)
- A Collect for Guidance (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 100)
- A Collect for the Renewal of Life (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 99)
- For the Joy in God's Creation (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 814)
- For the Right Use of God's Gifts (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 827)
- For Guidance (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 832)
- Prayer of Self-Dedication (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 832)

Hymns

- Day by day (*Hymnal 1982, 654*)
- Eternal Spirit of the living Christ (*Hymnal 1982, 698*)
- How firm a foundation (*Hymnal 1982, 636-637*)
- Jesus calls us o'er the tumult (*Hymnal 1982, 550*)
- Lead me, guide me (*LEVAS II, 194*)
- Love divine, all loves excelling (*Hymnal 1982, 657*)
- O day of peace that dimly shines (*Hymnal 1982, 597*)
- O Master, let me walk with thee (*Hymnal 1982, 660*)
- Soon and very soon (*LEVAS II, 14*)

You may also consider incorporating the Way of Love Commitment Covenant (found in Curriculum Resources section of this guide) into your time of worship together.

Making Time to Practice the Way

Living a Fruitful Life

Using the time chart below or the back of this sheet, fill in your standard activities for each day of the week. Then, thoughtfully consider:

- What time are you spending now on your relationship with God?
- Where can you make time to focus on your relationship with God?

TIME	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
4 AM							
5 AM							
6 AM							
7 AM							
8 AM							
9 AM							
10 AM							
11 AM							
12 PM							
1 PM							
2 PM							
3 PM							
4 PM							
5 PM							
6 PM							
7 PM							
8 PM							
9 PM							
10 PM							

PRACTICING THE WAY OF LOVE

Small Group Participant Worksheet

Session _____: _____

Practice

I commit to:

How often, and when?

Practicalities

What resources, including people, do I need to support this practice?

What do I need to stop doing to make room for this practice in my life?

How do I hope I will change as a result of incorporating this practice into my life?

Who or what will hold me accountable?

WRITING A RULE OF LIFE WORKSHEET

Turn

Commitment:

Frequency:

Learn

Commitment:

Frequency:

Pray

Commitment:

Frequency:

Worship

Commitment:

Frequency:

Bless

Commitment:

Frequency:

Go

Commitment:

Frequency:

Rest

Commitment:

Frequency:

Accountability

What are the obstacles I will likely encounter while trying to live my new rule of life?

What can I do to overcome these obstacles?

How do I hope my life will change because I adopted the Way of Love?

Actions I will take to help others in my group keep their new rule of life:

Date I will meet with my small group to review my rule of life:

Way of Love Commitment Covenant

Leader: Jesus' way is the way of love. In him we find more love, freedom, and abundant life. You are invited to turn toward Jesus and to commit to follow his Way of Love in the context of Christian community, trusting in his power to change each of our lives and to change this world.

After each bidding, all who desire to make this commitment should join in proclaiming:
By the Spirit's power, we will.

Leader: Will you turn and center your life on Jesus, falling in love with our Lord again and again and again?

People: By the Spirit's power, we will.

Leader: Will you ground your life in the life and teachings of Jesus, as revealed in Scripture? And will you pray and simply listen for God's voice in your life and in the world?

People: By the Spirit's power, we will.

Leader: Will you gather together in worship to break bread and to thank and praise God? And will you bless this world with your story, your resources, and your labor?

People: By the Spirit's power, we will.

Leader: Will you cross boundaries and fearlessly become God's Beloved Community? And will you take rest, receiving God's gift of grace and restoration and letting God be God?

People: By the Spirit's power, we will.

Leader: May the God who formed all things in Love, draw you near to God's own heart, empower you by the power of the Spirit to live the Way of Love with fellow travelers, and send you to participate in the resurrection and healing of God's world. And may the blessing of our Lord – loving, liberating, and life-giving – be with us and remain with us forever and ever.

All: Amen.

Optional Song: "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus" (*LEVAS II*, 136)