

# *Faith Practices:*



## SERVE

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*Jesus tied a towel around himself. Then, he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples feet. Then, he said, 'So if I, your Lord and teacher have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.'*

*- John 13:4, 4, & 14.*

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A congregation in the Pacific Northwest has a brief, but powerful, mission statement: "Gathered to worship; scattered to serve." The Holy Spirit "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies" the Christian holy people, but then sends them into the world in love and service to the neighbor. The Christian life is not one of maintenance, but one of mission, and that mission is in and to the world. The Book of Acts provides the template for service in the world. The first "act" of the apostles is to be reoriented. As the book opens, they gaze up into heaven at the coattails of their ascending Lord, only to be chided by a couple of angels: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?" (Acts 1:11)

The work of discipleship lies elsewhere, on earth in love and service to the neighbor. Where we look determines what we see. If we look around us instead of only up, we will see the faces of our neighbors. To a Lutheran, all the world is a neighbor, and that insight suggests an interdependence among all of creation. The neighbor figures powerfully into Luther's theology, both as the one whom we serve and the one who serves us and upon whose kindness we depend.

For Luther, the actions that would best serve the neighbor and most conform to the cross-shaped pattern of discipleship reside in works of our calling. Whether teachers or bus drivers, janitors or lawyers, we would find out how to be a neighbor to those around us by doing the best job possible. In contrast to contemporary spiritualities that seek God in individual feelings and religious sentiment, Luther asserted strongly that God also meets the Christian in social roles and relationships with others. These constitute “masks of God” in the world, in which and through which God continues the work of creation. We serve quite literally as God’s hands in that ongoing work of creation.

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*“For I was hungry and you gave me food, thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you gave me clothing. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me” ....Lord when was it that we saw you....” Truly I tell you, just as you did it to tone of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”*  
*Matthew 25:42-43, 45.*

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## BRINGING IT HOME



Of the total 10,080 minutes we live each week, the average Christian spends approximately 60-120 minutes in a church or formal faith community. The rest of the week is spent eating, sleeping, playing, working and all the rest.

### *Serve*

Think for a moment about the many activities in which you and your family are involved. Work together to draw a circle on a piece of paper and divide it to reflect the amount of time you spend doing each activity.

*What are some of the primary ways you spend your time?  
How many of them involve serving others?*

Look through the following ideas for nurturing service in your family. Choose one, two or more. Feel free to adapt them to fit your situation.

- Create a mission statement for your family. Identify who you as a family would like to be. List some ways you will accomplish the goals and ideals you have chosen. Post your statement on your refrigerator or somewhere where all can see it. Invite all to think about the reasons why God brought your individual family members together.
- Volunteer to help communities following a disaster or get involved in a project to build affordable housing where you live.
- Invite children to design coupons on paper or on your computer. Help them decide what the coupons might be good for—free hugs, emptying the dishwasher, taking out the garbage, etc. Encourage them to give the coupons freely.
- Instill a sense of pride in completing household tasks. Make a poster charting jobs that can easily be done. Use stickers, treats and compliments to motivate or reward those who help.
- Become involved in food share programs or other opportunities in our community to serve (like Back to School ministry).
- Model random acts of kindness. When you are in a check-out line, give a place to someone who might be in a hurry or have fewer items. Put a quarter in someone's parking meter.
- Share your old or extra toys with a local women's shelter.
- Go through your children's clothes with them. Package outfits they've outgrown and deliver them to a local clothing distribution center.
- Be open to sharing your lunch with someone who forgot theirs or can't afford one.

- Contact people in your neighborhood or congregation who are sick or in the midst of challenge. Deliver a meal to them (be sure to call first). Run errands for them or help transport them to doctor appointments.
- Be an advocate for those who are not heard. Communicate your views on specific issues to your local, state and national representatives.
- Bring extra blankets and water bottles to children's athletic events. Offer these to those who need them.
- Provide fast food gift cards to those on the streets.
- Become involved in opportunities to lead and serve in your congregation. There are dozens of ways to use talents and abilities of children, youth and families. Evaluate your many talents and gifts and let them shape your involvement in service to God and others. Check one the following gifts you might consider offering:
  - › computer skills
  - › financial management
  - › child care
  - › writing and editorial skills
  - › drama or dance
  - › vocal or instrumental music
  - › care and compassion
  - › prayer
  - › hospital

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*For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).*

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