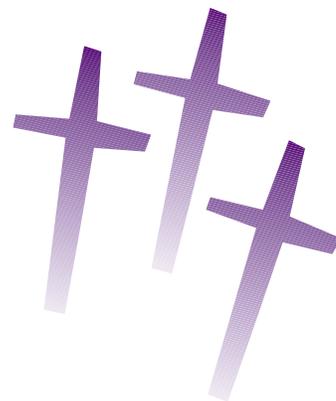


# *faith practices*

a s s e s s i n g   t h e i r   p l a c e   i n   y o u r   l i f e



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*This assessment tool offers a quick description of the seven faith practices highlighted through the Call to Discipleship. Use this resource for personal or small group reflection as a way to consider their value and significance in your own life or the ministry of your congregation.*

*Read the descriptions of each faith practice and consider the questions that follow with an awareness that there are no right answers or expected levels of accomplishment. The invitation to discipleship is a call to journey deeper with Christ. No person or ministry is every fully what we hope or God intends us to be. Avoid the “guilt trap” that sometimes comes from feeling we don’t measure up. Instead, view this as an opportunity for helpful personal or group reflection and an invitation to embrace new growth and commitment.*

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## P R A Y



Prayer is the way a disciple enjoys an intimate relationship with God. Prayer can be private or public, ritualized or conversational, silent or out loud, spoken or sung, words or action, simple or profound. Through prayer God’s will is discerned and greater clarity is gained for our journey. Prayer is powerful. Indeed, God’s creative, redeeming and healing power is often directed through prayer.

Jesus modeled the power and importance of prayer and provides our inspiration to embrace a prayerful stance toward all moments of life. One of the key ways Jesus showed his love for his Father was by regularly engaging in prayer. Throughout the Gospels we read how Jesus “went up to a mountain to pray” or “knelt down and prayed” or “continued all night in prayer.” As Jesus prayed, he gained a clearer sense of who he was (his identity) and what he was to do (his mission). Before he taught or healed, before choosing the Twelve or submitting his will to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed. Whatever the opportunity or challenge, Jesus turned to his Father first and sought the guidance of God.

Prayer is Adoration (praise, honoring God), Confession (saying “I’m sorry,” acknowledging sin, that “I can’t do it on my own”), Thanksgiving (saying thanks, counting blessings, allowing God’s perspective to shape life) and Supplication (asking for, praying for others, petitionary in character) — ACTS. The Lord’s Prayer and Luther’s interpretation in the Small Catechism provide ample instruction for the content and elements of prayer and a prayerful life.

**Part of a disciple’s job description is to pray frequently.**

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S T U D Y



The regular study of the Bible and books that help to enliven its message (e.g. Luther's Catechism, commentaries and other study resources) is a key way the disciple practices loving and knowing God. Study happens privately through personal Bible study and a regular devotional time. Study also happens publicly as families and friends learn together, in small groups, and through larger gatherings of formal study and worship. The maturing disciple attends to "study" in both private and communal contexts.

Through reading, meditating and the study of Scripture, the lively word of God becomes active in the lives of believers. For thousands of years, the words of Jesus, the teachings of the prophets and apostles, and the stories of God's people have revealed God's heart and hope for the world and each one of us. The Holy Spirit inspires us through Scripture to see ourselves as we are and as God would have us become. Through the Bible we come to understand how God works in the world, for the world and through people like us.

**Part of a disciple's job description is to study Scripture diligently.**

W O R S H I P



Worship is the practice of "stepping away" from the pattern and press of daily life to intentionally love God. In doing so, the disciple gains a deeper understanding and experience of the majesty, mercy and mystery of God. In worship we praise God for being God, for being our God!

The disciple can "step away" from the routine of the moment to honor God in numerous ways: through participation in the public event of a worship service; through the creative act of art, drama, dance, craft, music and song; through listening to a sermon or receiving the sacrament; through an encounter of God in the beauty of creation, and more. While "worship" is more than what we often mean by the word "worship," the maturing disciple acknowledges that the act of corporate worship within the context of a celebrating congregation is key and necessary to a disciple's walk and life of devotion.

**Part of a disciple's job description is to worship God regularly.**

I N V I T E



The experience of God's loving touch in one's life is a gift the maturing disciple feels compelled to share with others. One way our faith becomes active is when we put into words what God has done for us. Words of witness and acts of genuine hospitality directed toward our friends, relatives and neighbors create the opportunity through which the Holy Spirit brings others into a relationship with Christ and his church.

The biblical model for evangelism is relational: friends bring friends to Jesus. "Come and see" are the operative words and find frequent expression in the Gospels, the story of the early church, and in the tradition of the church over the centuries. The disciple plants seeds and invites; the Holy Spirit works the miracle of faith and conversion.

**Part of a disciple's job description is to invite others often.**

## E N C O U R A G E



Disciples are not born mature; in reality, many disciples never grow beyond the infancy stage of their relationship with Christ. Inherent to the journey of discipleship is the ongoing call to mature in faith.

Growth in faith happens as we are mentored and as we mentor and encourage others. Christian education is the more formal way children of God are disciplined in their faith. Mentoring relationships are a less “institutional” way the building of faith happens as more mature disciples become “stewards of the mysteries of faith” with seekers. Encouragement happens between more seasoned disciples and those growing, between friends at similar points in their journey encouraging each other to growth, between key teachers such as pastors and congregational leaders and students of the faith. In this process of exchange it is not only the learner who grows, but the one who mentors and teaches. The maturing disciple knows she is never finished; that the path of maturity continues to the day we exchange this life for the next. A biblical model for this process can be Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8).

**Part of the disciples’ job description is to pass on the faith.**

## S E R V E



When the prophet Micah told his people how to practice faith, he told them to do justice and to love mercy (Micah 6:8); When Jesus was asked about ultimate matters, part of his response was “to love your neighbor as yourself.” Practicing justice and doing acts of mercy and service put flesh on God’s love. Caring for others in Jesus’ name in active, tangible ways 1) incarnates Christ’s presence and heart to others; 2) helps those we serve in places where they truly hurt and have need, and, 3) is a witness to those who are watching from the sidelines about the integrity and heart of Jesus’ followers.

Jesus didn’t only address the spiritual needs of the people he met. His was a high-touch, hands-on ministry that addressed human needs for health, wholeness and inclusion. The maturing disciple seeks to serve as Jesus served.

**Part of the disciples’ job description is to serve for the sake of others.**

## G I V E



The maturing disciple knows that everything belongs to God; we are merely caretakers and managers. In response to God’s touch in our lives, we offer ourselves joyfully to others: our time, our talent and our financial treasures. God has blessed us abundantly, providing us “with food and clothing, home and family, daily work, and all I need from day to day” (Luther’s Small Catechism). In and through our baptism we receive and discover our spiritual gifts. The growing disciple finds ways to unpack and use those gifts for the sake of Jesus, the church and the world.

Knowing God has entrusted us with abilities and goods we ask, “How can we use these resources to love God?” Thus we do not waste time striving to be rich in things, but to be rich in love. The maturing disciple is also maturing in financial stewardship, understands the biblical concept of the tithe and is growing in sacrificial and joyful giving toward and beyond a ten percent response in all areas of life.

**Part of the disciples job description is to give freely.**

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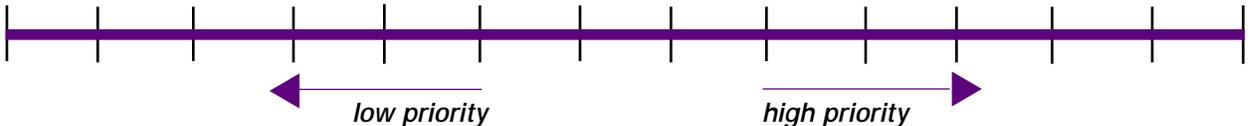
# *faith practices* their place in your life

Consider the seven faith practices in your own life. Place letters designated for each practice (P for Prayer, W for Worship, etc.) at points on the scale which you feel best reflect the expression of that practice in your life. Take a few moments to consider the meaning of your selections. If you are completing this exercise as part of a group, find a partner and discuss your thoughts.



What new commitments might you consider as part of your own call to discipleship? List these and share them with a friend.

Complete this same exercise from the perspective of your congregation's ministry. Place letters designated for each practice (P for Prayer, W for Worship, etc.) which best reflect your sense of how significant each practice is within the life of your congregation. Complete the following two questions and share your answers with members of the group as a way to both celebrate your present ministry and consider areas where there might be room for growth and encouragement.



List some of the ways your congregation takes seriously each of the faith practices.

Where might there be room for improvement or growth?