



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

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A Best Practice: Spiritual Practices for these Times (Part II)

In times of challenge and opportunity, it often is true that people deepen their spirituality. Small but significant practices have the potential to change, deepen and intensify the beauty and gift of life.

Often when we think of spiritual practices we think of morning prayer, reading and praying with Scripture, fasting, doing a work of mercy. These are vital and meaningful practices. At the same time, since we meet God in all the events, happenings, and practices of our lives, many things can be spiritual practices. A spiritual practice is an action that connects us to the presence of the sacred, to God. It grounds us in the present moment, bringing us into awareness of what is happening right now. A spiritual practice is simply an action or habit that

- gives us energy
- reminds us of what matters most
- connects us to God and the gift of life that God has given us

In my reading, prayer and spiritual practices, I thought that, perhaps, one of the formational things we, as parish and (arch)diocesan leaders can do is to share with others some ideas and encouragement to incorporate a new spiritual practice into their lives. This can be done through

- bulletins and e-newsletters
- the parish (or {arch}diocesan) website
- Zoom gatherings
- Snail mail mailings sent to homes, especially those who do not have internet access

I heard a retreat director say recently that one of the things that will get us through challenging times is to have at least one personal practice that we do each day. Our parishioners might want to choose and live a habitual, everyday practice especially during this Lenten time.

What follows, then, are some quotes from various people – in their books, articles, or online blogs; following the quote is one idea of a way to live it as a spiritual practice. You might want to share these with your parishioners.



In *Openings: Poems by Wendell Berry* we read:

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

TO LIVE THIS AS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE:

Find your favorite place in nature. Spend time there often.



“...a practice I've taken to calling Candle Hour. An hour before I go to bed, I turn off all my devices for the night. I hit the lights. I light a candle or two or three — enough to read a book by, or to just sit and stare at the flame, which, by drawing oxygen, reminds me I need to breathe, too. ... Candle Hour doesn't even need to last a full hour, though; sometimes it lasts far longer. I sit until I feel an uncoupling from the chaos, or until the candle burns all the way down, or sometimes both. ...

At night, by candlelight, the world feels enduring, ancient and slow. To sit and stare at a candle is to drop through a portal to a time when firelight was the alpha and omega of our days. We are evolved for the task of living by

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candlelight and maladapted to living the way we live now.

~ Julia Scott, "Letter of Recommendation: Candle Hour,"
The New York Times

TO LIVE THIS AS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE:

End your day with a Candle Hour. If that's not possible, turn off all your devices at least an hour before going to bed. Relish the quiet, the slowness, the peace.



Jan Richardson in her book, *Sparrow: A Book of Life and Death and Life*, shares one of her poems:

Who told you
this would be
so final,
so complete?

Be at peace.
It will not be
so endless
as that.

Feels like a wall,
yes.
Feels like a door
never stops closing,
yes.

But listen.
We have ways
and ways.

TO LIVE THIS AS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE:

As you begin each day, take a moment of prayer to think of one new way to live the day, especially when you find yourself in situations and happenings which feel like a wall surrounding you.



"Do you know at this moment you are praying the ancient prayer of hieroglyphics? That word, which means "sacred marks or pictographs," was used by Egyptians for the art of writing. They believed writing to be a sacred gift from the gods.

Our modern world is awash in words — in ink, pencil, paint, neon and especially electronically on your computer screens. Yet words can continue to be gifts from God...

God has not stopped speaking. God speaks to you, encourages and inspires you in countless ways. Perhaps our primary spiritual task is to pay attention and learn how to listen. God communicates to you through the signs of the times and the events of daily life. God speaks to you in the holy words of scripture as well as in the commonplace words in your spiritual reading...

I propose a small ritual to assist you in seeing your time of spiritual reading as the Prayer of Hieroglyphics. Pause before you begin reading, and with your thumb make a sign of the cross on your forehead and heart. Then as you read, be alert for hidden messages from God addressed personally to you concealed in the words on the page. A good rule for spiritual reading is: Read a little and reflect a lot."

~ Edward Hays in *Prayer Notes to a Friend*

TO LIVE THIS AS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE:

Follow Hays' suggestion: Pause before you begin reading, and with your thumb make a sign of the cross on your forehead and heart. Then as you read, be alert for hidden messages from God addressed personally to you concealed in the words on the page.



In the November 2020 issue of *The Monastic Way*, Joan Chittister writes:

"Mercy is what we weigh when we're faced with the opportunity to forgive. And if we don't? Then, it will be justice that weighs our own fate. The mystic Julian of Norwich reminds us, 'In this life, mercy and forgiveness is our way and evermore lead us to grace.' And what grace is Julian of Norwich talking

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about? Or what does she mean by ‘grace?’ Is it possible that she’s telling us that our own embrace of mercy and forgiveness will be exactly what makes us good? Hmmmmm. How do you feel about that?”

TO LIVE THIS AS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE:

Take time at the end of each week to ask yourself: Is there someone whom you need to forgive? Take the first step to reach out.



“Although not everyone is blessed with a healing touch, our touch can be a source of healing and blessing for others, especially when accompanied by a brief prayer. In the course of the day we touch others physically, sometimes intentionally, sometimes not — an inadvertent touch of hands with a checkout clerk when paying for groceries, picking up a child who has fallen on the sidewalk, a friendly pat on the back to a colleague who has done a good job, as well as the hugs, kisses, and pats we bestow on family members. Think of these as being moments of grace. Let them be reminders of prayers, blessings, and good wishes that can be said silently at the moment.”

~ Tom Cowan in *The Way of the Saints*

TO LIVE THIS AS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE:

Get in the habit – whenever you touch another - of silently whispering a prayer of blessing for that person.



“Even Socrates, who lived a very frugal and simple life, loved to go to the market. When his students asked about this, he replied, “I love to go and see all the things I am happy without.”

~ Jack Kornfield in *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry*

TO LIVE THIS AS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE:

On your next trip to the mall, pretend you are visiting a museum. Admire the beautiful objects but don't touch anything.



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Past issues of **GEMS** are archived
at www.janetschaeffler.com

Additional ideas for Adult Faith Formation planning and best practices can be found:

- *Deepening Faith: Adult Faith Formation in the Parish*
<https://www.litpress.org/Products/4652/Deepening-Faith>
- Lifelong Faith Training: <https://www.lifelongfaithtraining.com/>
- Lifelong Faith: <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/>
- Lifelong Faith Studio: <https://www.lifelongfaithstudio.com/>
- Seasons of Adult Faith website: <https://www.seasonsofadultfaith.com>
- The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation:
 - https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/seasons_of_aff_journal_special_issue.pdf
 - <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/books.html>