

# Spiritual Practices for Life's Road: Faith, Hope and Love in Action. Make It Happen!

What a rich road trip we are on. Mountains, meadows, deserts, oceans—scenic views that are so beautiful they take your breath. Switchbacks, dead ends, sharp turns—sorrows that will break your heart. What comes of these experiences, how we respond to what we meet on the road, has much to do with our inner life, our conscious, intentional, private time with the Source of Life, God, Creator, Friend, Sustainer.

How we engage with life on the outside is informed and inspired by our inner openness to and freedom with the Spirit within. Always—from the beginning of the journey to the end—this requires spiritual discipline, spiritual work.

Here at Assembly, even amid the energy and excitement of thousands of us coming together to be in conversation, to worship, we can take some time to attend to our inner life. The prayer and meditation room offers several spiritual practices for you to experience during Assembly and to pack in your backpack as you continue your journey, returning to the place that is your outer home, knowing that your inner home is always with you, wherever you journey.

Too, with Jesus as our model, teacher and guide, as we engage with others along the road, as we stand with others who are struggling, as we engage in mission work, the time we spend attentive to our inner life—God within—will enable us to be the compassionate, understanding, loving travelers that help God bring God's love in creation to completion.

Come along with us now to holy sites and several way stations along the road.

## Way Stations

A way station is a stopping place on a journey, such as a layover if traveling by air, a scheduled stop on a train line between the starting point and final destination, a rest stop or gas station when traveling by car.

At way stations we pause for refreshment, for rest, for a change of scenery, to step back a moment from our traveling the longer journey. Sometimes there are surprise encounters with others. Sometimes we learn something new or observe something that helps us as we travel on.

What are some way stations that you routinely stop at? How do they help you make the journey?

## Holy Sites

Holy sites are sacred places of pilgrimage, places of religious significance, where often we experience God.



United  
Methodist  
Women

FAITH • HOPE • LOVE IN ACTION

## Way Station: The Labyrinth

*The labyrinth is a path to connect you to the still, small voice, the sacred within yourself.*

—Helen Curry, *The Way of the Labyrinth*

*As people tread through the turns and counterturns of the labyrinth, the world begins to drop away. Walking, breathing, being—things that we never think about in the day-to-day—merge into a walking meditation. Our pace becomes a background rhythm against which we are able to clear our minds. As one moves toward the center, healing occurs. Some say they hear the voice of their own truth, experience guidance or feel a sense of grace or transcendence. Some feel they have brushed against the Eternal or touched the Divine.*

—Helen Curry, *The Way of the Labyrinth*

Suggestions for walking the labyrinth (taken from Helen Curry's *The Way of the Labyrinth*):

- Be attentive to the process.
- You might focus your attention on the bottoms of your feet as you take each step.
- You might invite Jesus or another companion to walk alongside.
- You might use a mantra—a word or phrase—with each step.
- You might try to coordinate your steps with your in and out breaths.

As you enter the labyrinth:

- You might consider what's on your mind.
- You might try saying, "I am a pilgrim seeking ..."
- If you are seeking change, think about the change you are seeking.
- If you have an intention for the walking meditation, be aware of it.
- You might say, "My intention for this labyrinth walk is to be open to receiving guidance about this question."
- Avoid making the intention into an expectation; be open to guidance rather than look for solutions.
- If you choose a word or phrase to use as a mantra or meditation as you walk, choose one that is in line with your intention.

Pause at the entrance and notice how you are feeling (so you can compare your feelings as you leave the labyrinth).

At the center:

- Walking into the center of the labyrinth is a journey to your inner self.
- As you approach the center, notice how you are feeling.
- Take time to stand still in the center for at least a few moments. Be still.

Walking out:

- As you walk the turns that lead you out of the labyrinth, you are preparing to reenter the world and apply the experience or insights in your daily life.
- As you take the last step out, you may want to pause.
- You may want to turn back and face the labyrinth and express your gratitude and reverence.

## **Way Station: Praying for Travelers**

Along the journey we meet new people and get to know their life journey. We also travel with others and come to understand their challenges and sufferings. Our hearts reach out to them because we are all part of God's wondrous creation. And because we are connected, because we are interdependent, our prayers for one another, for all of creation, matter. Even if we never see the outcome, our prayers for one another and all of creation help.

If you have prayers on your heart—for people, for creation, for situations—you may leave them in the basket.

If you want to pray for others, please take a prayer from the basket and pray for that request. When finished, return the prayer to the basket.

If you want to visit with someone and have a prayer partner, ask one of the volunteers in the room.

## **Way Station: Graffiti Walls—Public Prayers**

Sometimes the prayers on our heart are to be shared publicly, corporately. The spiritual power of two or more praying for the same person or situation is wondrous. For years people all over the world prayed together at the same time on the same day for the Berlin Wall to come down. The fruit of corporate prayer speaks to our connectedness, as one living body, revealing God's love.

You are invited to add your prayers to the walls.

## Way Station: Prayer Shawls—Meeting Kindred Spirits Along the Way

When the road gets rocky—during times of twists, turns, switchbacks, getting lost, being in the desert—we long to be comforted. Our prayers become more fervent when we feel lost or confused. Maybe you remember a time when you felt alone. These are times of spiritual desolation. And we long for consolation. Prayer shawls offer a tangible way for us to feel embraced and uplifted by prayer in close relationship with God.

Admire the prayer shawls and materials for making shawls that surround you in this sacred space. Visually notice the colors, the textures and materials used.

Imagine the making of one of these shawls for you. How did the fibers come into being? Did they come from an animal or a plant? If an animal such as a sheep, consider how that animal grew its fleece all winter, how that wool kept the sheep warm through the winter, how the sun and soil and rain produced hay for that sheep to eat all winter, how it was sheared in the spring, how that big ball of fluff was then made into yarn.

Or maybe the fibers came from a cotton plant. Think how the sun and soil and rain produced those fibers. Be aware that all this life-giving has been going on, even as you have been unaware.

Now think of the hands that chose the colors of the yarn and the maker's thoughts about what she or he wanted this prayer shawl to be. Think of the one who made the shawl ... working rhythmically ... maybe sitting beside others as they each lovingly, prayerfully, created wraps, the one in which you are now mentally embraced. Imagine the prayers they said for the ones they didn't even know. Allow the warmth and love of the kind stranger to envelope you. Remember that during the challenges along the road, you are never alone. Not only is God's creation bringing sunshine and rain, not only is God's Spirit breathing through you in every automatic breath, you are a unique and significant part of God's good, interdependent creation. You are part of the life of the Body of Christ. You are never alone.

Sit in the warmth and love of the life you are part of as long as you wish. In the silence, let your heart speak.

When you are ready, offer your thanks for all who prayerfully created each shawl, contribute to making a shawl as you feel inspired and add your prayer for those who will one day wear the shawls.

O God,

You knit us together,

You created the lamb and the lion;

You comfort all.

May your tender love and care

be woven into this shawl,

and may the one who receives it

know Your love,

Your tender care,

Your healing,

Your peace.

Amen.

## Creating a Mandala (a postcard from your trip)

Create a mandala representing your experience in the United Methodist Women Assembly. This is like a postcard reflecting your experience as a keepsake of the memories.

From *Creating Mandalas: For Insight, Healing and Self-Expression* by Susanne F. Fincher: "While working on mandala, suspend judging and thinking as much as possible. There is no right or wrong mandala. Each is simply a reflection of the person you are at that moment in time. In order to give expression to the unconscious, let instinct guide your choices of colors and forms."

Before beginning, take a few moments to relax. Breathe deeply and imagine tension leaving the body with each exhalation. Try to clear your mind of the concerns of the day. Allow yourself a break from responsibility to enjoy this time apart.

Close your eyes and focus attention inward. Notice any forms, colors, shapes that dance before your mind's eye.

Using as little thought as possible, select a color, form or feeling from your inner vision as the starting point for your mandala. If nothing occurs to you, simply go to the next step.

Open your eyes and look at the colors before you. Choose a color to begin your mandala.

Next, draw a circle. Begin to fill in the circle with color and form (or pictures from magazines), using as little thought as possible. You may begin in the center or around the edge of the circle. Continue to work until you feel the mandala is complete.

Next, identify the proper position of your mandala. Turn it, look at it from all angles. When it feels balanced or there is a sense of "this is right" or you feel relaxed with it, mark the top of your mandala with a small "t." Date it. If you feel unfinished, you may want to make a second mandala.

Look at your mandala at arm's length, maybe propping it up in front of you. You may want to give it a title, from some inner knowing.

## Cairn

A cairn is a stack of rocks that identify a path or mark a point of significance. It may be a mound of stones erected as a memorial, as in some biblical stories, or a marker at a battlefield. In hiking, a cairn of rocks on the right side may indicate a turn in direction to the right. By walking from cairn to cairn, a hiker may follow a previously unknown path to reach her final destination.

You are invited to add a stone to the cairn as, together, we make a marker to leave here, along the “roadside,” a memorial to our experience traveling together in this sacred space.

## **Blessing**

Suggested words to be said as people anoint one another or themselves, making the sign of the cross on the palms of their hands:

As you (I) leave this place and travel the road home,  
may we (I) walk together  
along God's way  
of justice and compassion.

## Holy Site: Baptism

*Lectio Divina* (Holy Reading)

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:9-11).

**Step 1:** Slowly read the passage, simply to "hear" it. Keep silent for a moment or two.

**Step 2:** Read the passage slowly again and let a word or phrase strike you. Notice the word or phrase that gets your attention. Keep silent for a minute or two.

**Step 3:** Before reading the passage a third time, ask God to show the meaning of this word or phrase for you today. Then read the passage slowly a third time and keep silent open to God's stirring. As you become aware of what the passage's message is for you today, make a mental note or write it down on the paper available. Offer God a prayer around this experience and the message for you. If nothing comes, offer thanks to God and stay open as you travel the road ahead.

## Script for Imaginative Prayer With Baptism

Instead of, or in addition to, the lectio divina with the passage from Mark, you can enter into an imaginative prayer with Jesus' baptism. Follow the script and imagine yourself at the Jordan River, as the manuscript prompts.

Imagine yourself at the River Jordan. Burdened by life's challenges, you have come away from the city and traveled out into the wilderness with others. You've heard that there is a man who is dipping people in the river and helping them reclaim their closeness with God. That sounds hopeful to you, and so you have come to the river. Smell the clean desert air. Does it smell dry? Dusty? Spicy? Sweet?

[Pause.]

See the water. Notice its color. Is it blue and clear? Is it muddy?

[Pause.]

Hear the breeze as it blows through the scrubby trees alongside the river. Can you hear the water moving in the river? Listen for the hushed voices around the river and see John, there in the water, holding people and dunking them in the river water.

[Pause.]

Hear the splash of water as another person rises out of the river, wipes her face and slogs in her heavy clothing back to the shore.

[Pause.]

You watch and consider now if you are willing to walk into the water yourself. Notice how you are feeling. Do you want to go into the river, too? Are you resistant? Are you apprehensive but feeling drawn to the water anyway? Are you eager?

[Pause.]

Then one man goes into the river, walking toward John, and your attention is drawn to him. Maybe it's the way he approaches John. Maybe it's the expression on his face. Maybe it's the expression on John's face as he sees this man.

*[Pause.]*

This man and John seem to have an exchange, and then John lowers him into the water. John raises him out of the water, and you notice something different about the man. A certain feeling comes over you. What is it that you are feeling?

*[Pause.]*

You watch as the man comes ashore and walks along the riverbank until you can see him no more.

*[Pause.]*

For some reason, you don't even hesitate now but walk into the water and approach John. John places his hands on your back and your head and lowers you into the water. Then, suddenly, you are springing up out of the water and are overcome with a sensation that you've never felt before. You hear a tender voice saying to you: "You are my child, my Beloved." You hear your name spoken: "\_\_\_\_\_, with you I am well pleased."

*[Long pause.]*

You somehow find that you have made it back to shore, and you sit there on the bank, letting the sun and warm air dry you and allowing this time to soak deeply into your being. You keep hearing the words, "You are my child, my Beloved." You hear your name: "\_\_\_\_\_, with you I am well pleased." Let these words settle deeply in your soul.

*[Long pause.]*

### **Reflection**

You may write about or draw something depicting your experience with this imaginative prayer after reflecting on these questions:

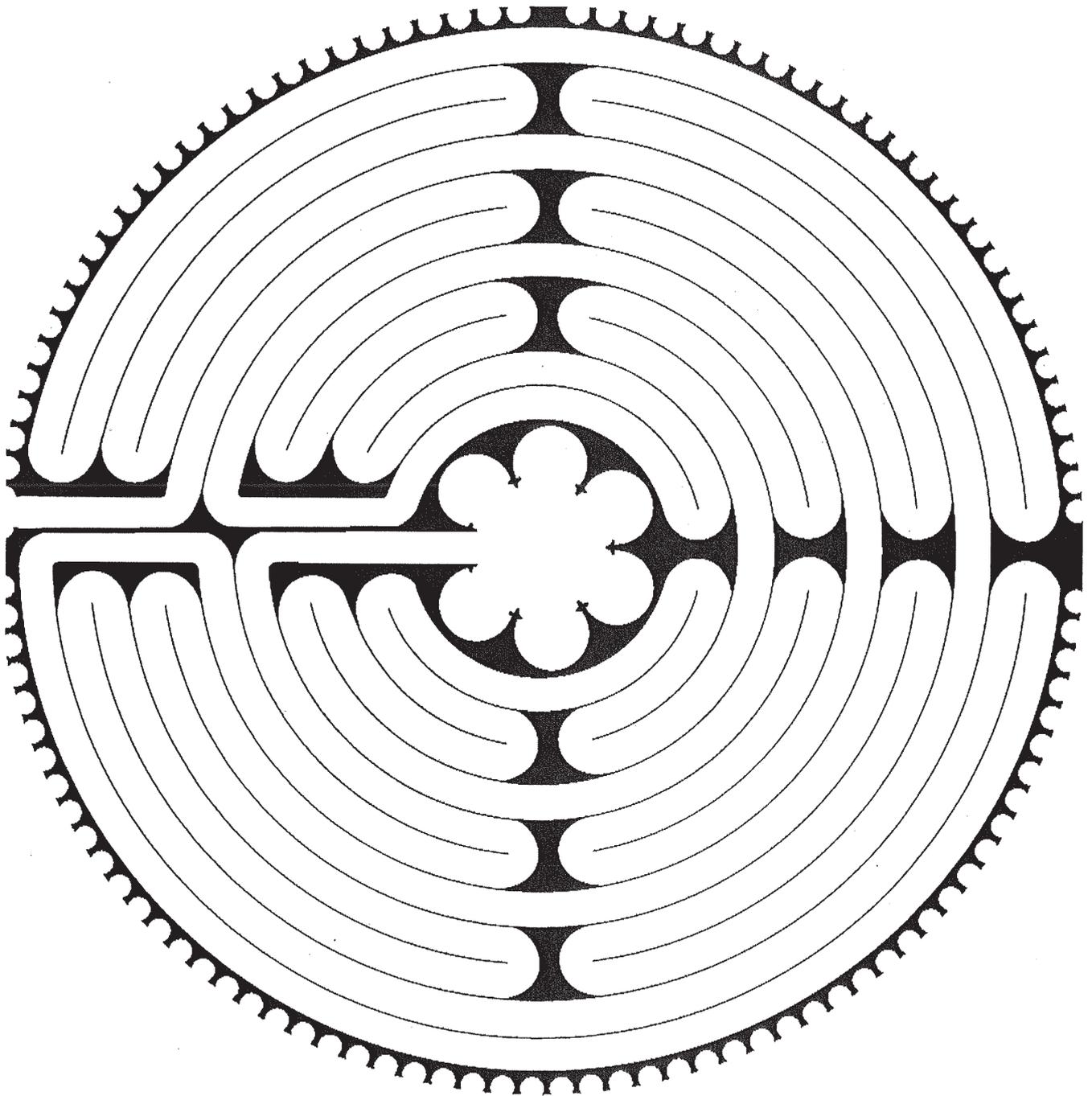
- What did you experience?
- What impact did this prayer have on you?
- How did this experience inform your understanding of your baptism?
- How does experiencing your baptism, your belovedness, assist you on your journey?

## Way Station: Finger Labyrinths

A labyrinth is an ancient prayer and meditation tool. You are invited to participate in this reflective spiritual walk.

Before using the finger labyrinth, choose five appropriate pausing places as reflection stations within the paper labyrinth for prayer and reflection on the way into the center of the labyrinth.

In this room there are a variety of tables offering different reflective experiences. You may incorporate the activities of the tables along with the finger labyrinth, or you can find a space of comfort to engage only in the finger labyrinth. If you choose the former, move from one table to the other with your labyrinth in hand as you pause and reflect on the questions given in this guide.



### **Contemplative Pause 1: Inner**

**Prayer:** God of beginning, open my inner ear to listen for your footsteps, as I begin this reflective journey. Open my inner being to sense your presence. As I take this labyrinth walk using my fingers, teach me to silence the other voices that fill my ears, crowd my heart and mind, and open me up to your presence, as it comes to me in many ways. Amen.

Make slow and gentle movement with your finger, shutting out everything else, letting your inner ear listen for the presence of the Spirit, preparing your whole self to respond to the gentle rhythms of God.

Enter the labyrinth with your finger. When it is time to make a stop in your journey, you may elect to pause, moving to a new table station with your finger labyrinth (if you've chosen to engage in the table activities.)

### **Contemplative Pause 2: Nourishing**

Spend a few seconds reading the following questions:

- What nourishes you on the journey?
- Who are the people and places that nourish you on the journey?

After reflecting on the responses to these questions, say the following prayer silently:

**Prayer:** Nourishing and sustaining God, I bring to my mind some of those people and places that have nourished me on my journey. Through them, you have provided me bread for the journey. Thank you, God, the Bread of Life. Enfold me, as I stop here to take a deep breath and be nourished by the memories of times on my journey that you and others have fed me. Amen.

Resume your finger walk, and when it is time to make a stop in your journey, pause. Move to the next table with your labyrinth.

### **Contemplative Pause 3: Facing**

Spend a few seconds reading the following question:

What are some of the fears you have in your journey? Name your fears.

Claim God's promise, "Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand" (Isaiah 41:10).

After reflecting on the responses to this question, say the following prayer silently:

**Prayer:** Jesus, walk with me. Help me to face my fears. Savior, help me sense your presence as you walk side by side as a companion with me in my journey. Amen.

Resume your walking, praying, "Jesus, walk with me." When it is time to make a stop in your journey, pause. Move to the next table with your labyrinth.

### **Contemplative Pause 4: Revitalizing**

Spend a few seconds reading the following questions:

- Remember some of the names of the persons, living or in glory, who have served as role models to you in your family, local United Methodist Women organization, church, community, conference and at other levels.
- What are the special qualities in them that you would like to embrace as you walk this journey?

After reflecting on the responses to these questions, say the following prayer silently:

**Prayer:** God who walks with me, I thank you for these people who have crossed my path and who have embodied your fullness of life to me. May I be strengthened by their walk and your abiding presence. Amen.

Resume your walk until you come to the center of the labyrinth. Pause at the center. Move to the intercessory prayer stations.

### **Contemplative Pause 5: Center**

Take a deep breath. Connect with God, the Center of all life.

Thank you, God, for ...

Thank you, God, for ...

Thank you ... Thank you.

After spending a few seconds of reflection and thanksgiving, pick up a piece of writing paper provided.

Reflect on your experience of walking into the center.

Use the paper available at the intercessory prayer tables to write your prayer requests. Take time to contribute your insights of the journey on the graffiti walls. There will be intercessors praying for you.