



Sabbath Practices Ministry Kit for the Seasons of the Church

Prayer, Storytelling, Hospitality, Service and Retreat

Introduction

The church measures time differently. Our life and our ministry centers around the liturgical seasons of the church year. In PC(USA) congregations, we also highlight special seasonal emphases and special days throughout the church year that often become a focus for our worship.

Our understanding of time is rooted in scripture, the rhythm of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 and the Jewish practice of Sabbath outlined in Exodus. “The Sabbath was meant to be reserved for holy rhythms. For that one day, they [people of Israel] could set aside their daily labor and engage in holy practices that connected them to God and to one another. Put simply, we understand Sabbath to be *an exchange of our daily rhythms for holy ones*.” The 5 sabbath faith practices in this toolkit project were chosen as practices that form a communal life of faith. Sabbath practices are rooted in communal worship, the central act that resets our individual and communal rhythm and reestablishes our connection to God and to ourselves. Worship reminds us by its very nature that life has a rhythm.

This ministry kit will highlight ways to incorporate the 5 sabbath practices into the rhythm of communal worship, based on the liturgical year and special seasonal emphases. Some seasons incorporate all 5 practices, while others more naturally lend themselves to one or two practices. Suggestions are offered for incorporating the practices into the liturgy, as well as resources available through the denomination for further exploration. There are some suggestions for remote or virtual worship and others you will need to adapt as needed.

You are encouraged to name these practices as you use them in your worship services to help the congregation begin to connect the practices across all church and home life. When we frame our times of communal gathering as Sabbath and incorporate these sabbath faith practices into our worship, it nurtures our understanding of God’s intention for all creation; to cease from our labors and our striving so that we might dwell with God, with creation, and with one another.

In this kit you will find suggestions for using practices for the following church seasons:

- Season of Peace and World Communion Sunday
- Stewardship
- Advent
- Christmas/Epiphany
- Lent
- Easter/Eastertide
- Pentecost
- Ordinary Time/Creation



Season of Peace and World Communion Sunday

The Season of Peace begins on the first Sunday of September and concludes with World Communion Sunday on the first Sunday of October. A wide variety of resources are available through the PC(USA).

Prayer

- Make peace a focal point of the Prayers of the People each week during this season. Encourage worshipers to share their prayers for peace. Focus on a different area of the world that is experiencing conflict or unrest or experiencing the impact of environmental dangers. Use the newspaper and current events as a focal point for the corporate prayers, teaching people how to Pray the Newspaper
- Use the [Presbyterian Mission Yearbook](#) to highlight opportunities for prayer daily and during worship

Hospitality

- Invite global mission partners for your congregation or from the denomination to speak or write a letter to be read to the congregation.
- Include children and youth in the celebration of World Communion. A variety of [creative worship ideas](#) are available. Watch for the new series of “Worshiping at Home” in this same blog.
- Preach or tell the history of World Communion Sunday.
- Tell stories of practicing hospitality in worship. Think about who you would show hospitality to in this Season of Peace in your community. The most important element of hospitality is reaching out to strangers. How can you practice hospitality to those you don’t know during this Season of Peace?

Service

- Include a Moment for Mission for the [International Day of Peace](#) on the Sunday closest to the day.
- Participate in the [Peace and Global Witness Offering](#), utilizing all the resources for worship available on this website
- Engage members of all ages in an activity before, after, or even during worship that highlights peace as *shalom* or wholeness for all of creation – trash pick-up, tree planting, recycling - <https://internationaldayofpeace.org/get-involved/environment/>



Stewardship

Stewardship takes place at different times in different churches, but the focus is the same; sharing of our time, talent, and treasure. Stewardship is sometimes considered to be one of the most difficult seasons of the church year, but when approached through sabbath faith practices, it can be a season of spiritual growth for the church. The Presbyterian Foundation has a variety of resources to assist congregations to [create liturgy around stewardship](#).

Prayer

- Hold a prayer vigil prior to Stewardship Sunday.
- Do a walking prayer in the neighborhood or area surrounding your church before Pledge Sunday as a way of inviting God to show you how the time, talent, and treasure of your congregation might serve the community.
- Create a prayer calendar for the congregation with a specific focus for each daily prayer related to a ministry of the church, staff of the church, mission of the church, etc.
- Create prayer stations around stewardship. Use Pinterest or resources such as [Giving Together: A Stewardship Guide for Families](#) by Carol Wehrheim to create the activities. Prayer stations can be a great way to engage your members during social distancing times if you space out stations and design “hands-off” stations.

Storytelling

- Create a Moment for Generosity in worship and invite individuals of all ages to share stories of how they have experienced the generosity of the congregation or how they have been transformed by extending generosity to others. These can be pre-recorded for remote worship.
- Ask representatives of organizations that your church supports monetarily or with volunteers to share the impact of generosity on their work.

Service

- Stewardship season is a wonderful time to hold a drive for tangible items, such as food, coats, shoes, underwear, etc. in conjunction with the traditional stewardship activities
- Create a Time and Talent pledge card to be completed with a pledge card. The Time and Talent should be applicable to all ages and should not be exclusively focused on serving the needs of the church but include the needs of the community as well. Consider renewing this often and even having a weekly pledge especially for younger children who need smaller projects, repetition and



reminders. “This week I will.....” Remember that giving of talents happens outside the church building and matters to the larger sense of Christian community.

- Stewardship also involves the stewardship of all creation. During this season, consider how you can reduce-reuse-recycle in some aspect of worship – set up a recycling container when worshiping in-person. Have worshipers bring their own coffee cups for fellowship hour. For remote and virtual worship encourage recycling challenges in the home and make sure to share about them.

Advent

We know Advent is not just the lead up to Christmas, but it seems the commercialism of the secular holiday creeps in, even despite our best efforts. Anchoring the Advent season in sabbath faith practices creates an opportunity for families of all types to engage in traditional activities, such as the Advent wreath, but also offers deeper spiritual opportunities.

Prayer

- If you have access to a labyrinth, create intentional days of prayer during Advent and on each Sunday during Advent. Consider giving instructions for at-home labyrinth creation or finger labyrinths.
- Create an Advent prayer chain by distributing strips of paper to worshipers and inviting them to write their Advent prayer on the slip. Collect the strips of paper, staple them to one another forming a chain. Hang the chain in the worship space as a reminder that prayer undergirds your Advent journey. These can also be mailed in or displayed outside the church building.
- Advent worship and devotional resources are available through [PC\(USA\)](#)

Storytelling

- Music, art and drama are particularly powerful during the season of Advent. Look for ways to use drama in worship to tell the stories of Advent. Tell the story of a seasonal hymn or invite someone to share their personal story of how a hymn of the season has been meaningful in their life.
- Preaching the first-person stories of the characters of the Advent and Christmas stories can be a powerful way to interpret the familiar scriptures.
- Invite individuals of all ages to share stories in worship of a time they were in need of help from a stranger, much as Joseph and Mary were. These can be pre-recorded and shown each week of Advent. Engage your congregation in thinking about how they felt when they've had to move, had to rely on strangers and times when they were frightened for the safety of their family. Think about the refugees in your community and if they would like to tell their story.



Hospitality

- Hospitality is an excellent worship theme for Advent. If you choose to focus liturgy and preaching around hospitality, take extra time during worship for sharing the peace of Christ, make extra effort to welcome visitors and encourage hospitality toward children. Take care to consider how you offer hospitality virtually even if you do have in-person worship. Plan for the remote congregation that many are likely to continue to have.
- Create an intergenerational [La Posadas](#) event. Planning guides such as “[Room in the Inn](#)” by Hugo Olaiz and Yuri Rodríguez; “[Las Posadas](#)” handbook by Fiesta Cristiana, or children’s books, such as [The Night of Las Posadas](#) by Tomie de Paola can also be used to tell the story. This can even be done virtually by going from breakout room to breakout room!
- Create a hospitality challenge for each week of Advent that is age appropriate for children, youth, and adults in your context.
- Many of the traditional television shows during the Advent season include some aspect of hospitality (*How the Grinch Stole Christmas* by Dr. Seuss). Use these as sermon illustrations or as children’s moments.

Service

- Advent is a time when there are often many opportunities to engage in service. Some options for the whole congregation include caroling, cookie baking and delivery, gift wrapping, food collection and distribution
- Provide an opportunity to create and send Advent/Christmas cards to overseas military personnel, PC(USA) mission co-workers, and/or your congregational mission partners.

Retreat

- As busy as the Advent season can become, it is also a wonderful season in which to hold a short retreat, launching the Advent worship theme, including intergenerational activities and fellowship, creating Advent worship resources for the home.
- Consider Advent at home packets just as you may have done for VBS. Encourage households to have mini-retreat time with the packets during Advent. Ferncliff Camp and Retreat Center has an [Advent in a Box](#) program.



Christmas/Epiphany

This season is about light; light coming into the world in the birth of Jesus Christ and the Light of Christ that we are to carry into the world. Christmas and Epiphany marks the miraculous shining forth of God in human form.

Storytelling

- A popular activity during this season is called “[Star Words](#),” in which words are written on paper stars and distributed during worship, on either the 1st or 2nd Sunday of Christmas. The following year invite members to share stories about how their Star word impacted or guided their life in the past year.
- Hold a special nighttime service focused on stars. Invite the telescoping community to set up their scopes on the church lawn and tell stories about the constellations. Read the story of the Magi’s visit to the infant and his family while worshipers are gazing up at the stars. You can also give a packet of resources for households to hold their own service focused on stars.
- Invite individuals to share stories about their experience of following God in their lives during worship. Have they always been able to see the way clearly? Were they surprised by the destination? What has their journey been like? Several stories could be woven together as the sermon.

Hospitality

- Just as the Magi brought gifts to the Christ child, invite your congregation to bring gifts to newborns in your community. Connect with a local organization who meets the needs of infants and their families in crisis. Determine a tangible need that your congregation can meet, such as providing diapers, baby formula, infant clothing. Collect the items during worship and dedicate them with prayer.

Service

- The Presbyterian calendar identifies the 2nd Sunday of Epiphany as “Criminal Justice Sunday.” This day is combined with an emphasis on Racial & Intercultural Justice. In the context of the Matthew 25 initiative of the PC(USA), contact your local jail or prison and determine if there are tangible needs that your congregation can meet to bring light into the lives of those who are incarcerated. Incorporate the needs into the worship service as appropriate, either through prayer or tangible service.
- Depending on the size of your congregation, take the Light of Christ into the world during this season and do a “Work-ship” Sunday. Arrange a variety of locations throughout your community where members can provide a service on Sunday morning, whether to individuals or organizations in need. Begin in the



Sanctuary or in one zoom room with an opening prayer and commissioning, then go out into the community to bring the Light of Christ to others. Return to the Sanctuary or zoom room for a prayer of thanksgiving and sharing stories.

Lent

Because Lent is a season in which we emphasize spiritual disciplines and in which we are intentional to redirect and refocus our lives toward God, the sabbath practices can be a complement to other Lenten practices your congregation already incorporates into worship.

Prayer

- If you have access to a labyrinth, create intentional days of prayer during Lent and on each Sunday during Lent.
- Consider a Lenten preaching series on the Prayers of Jesus: Matt. 11:25-26 or Luke 10:21, John 11:41-42, John 12:28, John 17, prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane, prayers on the cross
- Introduce new forms of prayer during various parts of worship: the [breath prayer](#) as a call to worship or response to the Word; praying the newspaper using the national or local headlines as the focus of the prayers, [Lectio Divina](#) as scripture is read;
- Teach the whole congregation how to “[pray in color](#)” and use the time for corporate prayers to allow individuals to pray in this way, providing paper and pencils or markers.
- Create [interactive prayer stations](#) for the congregation to use before, during or after worship. This website link offers ideas for all seasons of the church year.

Hospitality

- If your congregation does not use nametags, provide temporary nametags during Lent. If nametags are a regular practice in your congregation, affirm their use as an expression of hospitality.
- Highlight how greeting one another as an act of hospitality is different from passing the peace. Encourage the congregation to engage in a time of intentional greeting.
- If your congregation has a team of greeters, invite families to serve as greeters during Lent as a spiritual practice of hospitality.
- Make worship more hospitable by teaching sign language to a hymn or a prayer.



- Invite children or families or intergenerational groups to set the table for The Lord's Supper, carrying in the elements and other parts of the liturgy as appropriate.

Service

- The [One Great Hour of Sharing](#) offering provides an opportunity to practice service by giving. Provide a fish bank and giving calendar to the entire congregation, not just the children.
- Maundy Thursday is a clear example of serving as Jesus washes the disciples' feet. If you do a Maundy Thursday service, add an element of washing hands or feet led by ruling elders or deacons. You can also encourage this practice in homes with households.

Retreat

- Schedule a brief retreat during this season. It could be a silent retreat held at a monastic retreat center or a retreat focused on ways to pray. Be sure to include opportunity for retreatants to spend time in nature as a way of praying. Conclude the retreat with worship.

Easter/Eastertide

The Easter season – Eastertide – is a good time to engage in something new, such as the sabbath practices. The season of Pentecost begins the day after Easter and continues for 50 days. Try incorporating one or more of these sabbath practices into the life of the congregation during these 50 days.

Prayer

- Teach the Ignatian practice of the [Examen](#) in worship as a way of praying, but also of telling our story of where we have encountered Jesus by reflecting on our days.
- Use the Presbyterian calendar to focus the prayers of the congregation on the needs of the world.

Storytelling

- As you focus on the resurrection narratives in the gospels during this season, invite members to share their own resurrection stories in worship, moments when they have seen Jesus in unexpected places or through unexpected encounters.
- Use drama as a way of telling the post-Easter appearance stories. If possible, use children to help tell the story.



- Create a sermon series about Our Faith Journeys. Invite the elders and deacons of your congregation to share their testimonies about how they came to believe and to trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Tie their stories to faith stories in scripture: Zacchaeus, the Samaritan woman at the well, Nicodemus, and others.
- Present age appropriate Bibles to children in worship. Talk with the children and their families about how God's story in scripture our story is also.

Service

- During the spring, college students are preparing for final exams. As an act of worship, prepare care packages, bags, notes of encouragement from the congregation to be given or sent to the college students in your congregation. Offer a prayer for the students as you complete the activity.
- As a way of continuing the gift of the One Great Hour of Sharing, invite individuals from your congregation or the presbytery to share their story of serving with [Presbyterian Disaster Assistance](#) during a Moment for Mission.
- Create a service emphasis each week during this season, providing something tangible to a local mission partner or community organization.
- Earth Day falls in this church season. Use the [Earth Day worship resources](#) from the PC(USA). If possible, engage the whole congregation in an Earth Day activity preceding or following worship.

Pentecost

The story of Pentecost in the book of Acts is dramatic – full of sound, wind, fire, and extraordinary speech. The result was witness, in word and deed, to the Risen Christ, a new looking outward. In this shortest of all the church seasons which leads us to Ordinary Time, consider how these sabbath faith practices can enrich your Pentecost worship.

Prayer

- Distribute a simple outline of a church that is easily recognizable. Invite the congregation to write their prayers for your church and their prayers for the church around the world inside the outline. Collect the prayers and use them during the Prayers of the People. (Taken from [Worshipping With Children](#) which offers weekly ideas for engaging children and families in the lectionary scriptures)
- As a reminder that the Spirit of God shines through us every day, give worshipers red taper candles to light from the Easter candle which they will take home to re-light as a daily reminder that the Holy Spirit is with them. (taken from [Worshipping With Children](#))



Hospitality

- Invite a congregation that is different than yours from your presbytery to worship together. Create a blended worship service that honors traditions from both congregations. Share choirs, languages, maybe even a potluck following worship.
- If your congregation has a relationship with a congregation from a different faith (Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, etc.), invite someone from that congregation to speak during worship about the power of interfaith relationships. Learn more information on [interfaith worship](#).
- Invite artists in your congregation and in the community to present an art display emphasizing wind and fire.

Storytelling

- Tell the Pentecost story using all of the senses by inviting the congregation to imagine the smells, sounds, sights, tastes in the story. Include people of all ages in the slow reading of the text.
- Read "*The Day That God Made Church: A Child's First Book About Pentecost*" by Rebekah McLeod Hutto just after the scripture with an invitation to hear the story in more detail. Take this story and turn it into a dramatic reading script with several readers. While it is being read ask the congregation to use percussion instruments to enhance the reading as they feel led.
- Invite one or two members to share an experience of being filled with God's Spirit, empowered to do things they did not believe possible.
- Use a [dramatic reading](#) such as this to tell the biblical story of Pentecost.

Service

- The [Pentecost offering](#) of the PC(USA) provides opportunities across the denomination to nurture the faith of the church of today and tomorrow - children, youth, and young adults. A wide variety of worship resources are provided. Be sure to note that this is more than an offering to go to the denomination. Congregations keep 40% of the funds raised to initiate or designate support for programs for young people in their communities. The remaining is remitted to the PC(USA) 50% supports ministries with youth and young adults and 10% supports child advocacy/children at risk.



Ordinary Time/Creation

Ordinary time, or the Sundays after Pentecost, is a growing time - a time to tend to ordinary things: teaching, growing, learning, experimenting, changing, thinking. This long season is a time to reflect on how to live under the guidance of God's Spirit. The Sabbath practices form a foundation for this season in worship.

Prayer

- If possible, assemble the congregation outside the sanctuary for the closing charge and benediction, reminding them that this season is a season of growing and supporting new life in Christ.
- At the conclusion of this season, many young people will experience transitions – transitions to college, to a new school. The [Young Adult Volunteers](#) of the PC(USA) will conclude their service in early August. Ask God to guide them as they transition into new journeys.

Storytelling

- Use resources like [Worshiping With Children](#) to find creative ways to tell the biblical story each week.
- Invite members of the congregation to share stories in worship about people or experiences that nurtured their spiritual growth.
- If your congregation has been involved in resettling refugees, invite someone to tell the story of the impact of that experience on your congregation,
- Do you know a Young Adult Volunteer in your presbytery? Invite them to worship to share their experience.

Hospitality

- This [video](#) by Pittsburgh Theological Seminary offers a simple explanation of Ordinary Time that suggest hospitality is central to the season. Create opportunities for your congregation to offer hospitality to your neighbors on Sunday morning – a cookout, ice cream, watermelon. Be creative!
- If there was ever a season to be inclusive in worship, Ordinary Time is it. Be open to including a variety of voices in the worship liturgy, especially children and youth.
- Summer is a time in which people may visit your church. Think about how you greet and welcome visitors to worship. Work with committees or session to create a special welcome during this season – gift cards to local restaurants, home baked goods, items imprinted with your church logo, invitations to dinner from members, etc.



- Connect with an African American congregation in your community and find out if there is a Juneteenth commemoration service in your area. If the opportunity is available, invite your congregation to join in a community worship service.
- The Sunday closest to July 4th is designated as Immigration Sunday in the PC(USA).

Service

- The Presbyterian Calendar suggests several opportunities to engage in service during this season. [World Refugee Day](#) is in mid-June. If there are organizations in your community that support refugee relocation, see how you can support their work.
- Summer is the time for mission trips. If your church does a mission trip, be sure there is opportunity in worship for participants to share the impact of their experiences. Help participants with a template for sharing that focuses on how the experience impacted them and what they learned rather than sharing only about what work was done.

Retreat

- Remember that the practice of retreat includes play. Create opportunities for play after worship that include the whole congregation.
- Offer a retreat space in your sanctuary - a space set up for individual prayer with ideas for prayer, visual images to focus on during prayer, a battery candle to light, a finger labyrinth, and other aids to prayer. Invite worshipers to use the space before or after worship.
- Incorporate several minutes of silence into your worship service. Teach the congregation how to use the silence as a retreat from the noise and sounds of ordinary life.