



MY WAY OF LOVE

POWERED BY RENEWALWORKS

Small Groups

**A Companion Resource for the
My Way of Love Spiritual Life Inventory**

iam.ec/mywayoflove

THE *Episcopal* CHURCH 

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The Collects, Psalms, and Canticles are from the Book of Common Prayer, 1979.

Learn more about The Way of Love and The Episcopal Church at www.episcopalchurch.org/wayoflove.

Share reflections and queries by writing to wayoflove@episcopalchurch.org or on social media using #wayoflove

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Dear Friends,

We are so grateful to join you on this journey toward the heart of Jesus along his Way of Love. Thank you for your interest in *My Way of Love for Small Groups*. We have been praying for you! We hope that this resource will be helpful to you and members of your congregation. We believe that we are all on a spiritual journey, a journey toward and alongside Jesus—a journey that is important to each of our souls and the Church.

My Way of Love for Small Groups is intended for participants who wish to receive some guidance about ways to grow spiritually—deepening our love of God and neighbor. You and your group can begin using this resource and meeting together at any time, either in person or virtually. But we've also found that it's a great resource for a congregation to use. Each group member will receive regular emails focused on the keywords that make up the Way of Love, and then share with each other how and where the journey is moving your community and your hearts along the way. Participating in *My Way of Love for Small Groups* is a great community builder, and especially appropriate for smaller congregations. We believe you'll find it to be a great process for a vestry study, undergirding confirmation classes, or informing a teaching series in youth group, or as part of a standard Bible study or prayer group. Additionally, you could use it as a generator, breathing new life to a stressed-out committee or offering some spiritual hospitality to your church or school staff.

We hold you close in our prayers and hope for your discoveries of joy and wonder as you explore *My Way of Love for Small Groups*. This resource is a labor of love brought to you by RenewalWorks, a ministry of Forward Movement and The Episcopal Church. Traveling the Way of Love is just one way to join the Jesus Movement, and we are so grateful to be here with you.

Faithfully,
Jay Sidebotham

How to Use This Guide

This guide has been developed for faith-based small-group use in conjunction with the *My Way of Love Spiritual Life Inventory*. Before beginning, please be sure that all group leaders read and familiarize themselves with our DIY ministry kit, *Building Intentional Small Groups*. *Building Intentional Small Groups* addresses the why, how, and what of starting and leading small-group ministry within the Episcopal context. Additionally, we suggest using the methods for small-group communication found in the *Becoming Beloved Community StorySharing Guidebook*. You will find links to these resources and the inventory at the back of this book.

About Small Groups

Whether your congregation calls them small groups, discipleship circles, neighborhood groups, life groups, or something else, a small group provides space for prayerful support and accountability. God works on us in powerful ways in the context of a small, intentional, dedicated group of disciples through scripture, tradition, formation, culture, and evangelism.

Jesus was onto something: 12 is about the perfect upper-end number for a small group. For optimal sharing and bonding, we suggest setting your group size between eight and 14 participants, including one group leader.

About Small Group Leaders

Small group leaders for this experience should have a deep love for Jesus, be committed to following the Way of Love, and be familiar with the physical layout of their meeting space and/or with the technology needed to host a virtual meeting. We also recommend that they become familiar with the discipleship methodology of RenewalWorks and RenewalWorks for Me (links in the additional resource section), as well as the practices of Episcopal evangelism from episcopalchurch.org/episcopalevangelism.

Supplies: A large stack of unlined 3-by-5 index cards or blank sticky notes, enough pens and pencils for each person to have a writing utensil, NRSV *The Holy Bible*, *The Book of Common Prayer*, and text of weekly email for reference during process time.

About Gathering

Week Zero occurs at home and involves individual group members taking their spiritual inventory on the RenewalWorks website, signing up for the regular emails, and checking their technology (if your meetings are going to be virtual rather than in person).

The flow for gatherings held on Week 1-8 is:

- Read: Scriptural references from the NRSV
- Relate: Process the Way of Love focus for the session
- Reflect: Questions and discussions
- Recommit: Closing prayer

Week 9 meets at the discretion of your group and should be a time of celebration and thanksgiving for your time together and the gifts you have received during the sessions. You may want to mark this time with a special meal or a celebration of the Eucharist, etc.

Week Zero:

Before Your First Meeting

Pray:

Everliving God, whose will it is that all should come to you through your Son Jesus Christ: Inspire our witness to him, that all may know the power of his forgiveness and the hope of his resurrection; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

(The Book of Common Prayer, pg. 816)

Read:

Luke 9:23-27: Then he said to them all, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words, of them the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. But truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.”

Relate:

This week, each participant will take the My Way of Love Spiritual Inventory. This inventory can be accessed at iam.ec/mywayoflove.

Powered by RenewalWorks, this spiritual inventory is a personal guide for the spiritual journey, providing coaching to help individuals grow deeper in their relationships with God and neighbor through the seven practices of the Way of Love: turn, learn, pray, worship, bless, go, and rest. This brief online survey will help provide an assessment about where you may be in your spiritual life.

Once an individual’s responses have been processed, an email will be sent with an explanation of the findings and tips for continuing and deepening one’s spiritual journey. At that point, participants will be prompted to sign up for an eight-week email series that offers suggestions and coaching for how to grow spiritually, and ways to strengthen love of God and neighbor.

Reflect:

What do you think your results will suggest about your spiritual health?
How will you be praying for the other members of your small group this week?
What do you hope to learn over the course of this study?

Recommit:

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated unto thee; and then use us, we pray you, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

(The Book of Common Prayer, pg. 832)

Week 1:

Getting Started

Begin your time together by reading the following scripture. Ask each participant to share a word or phrase that stands out for them—just the word, no explanation needed. Then ask them to write the word on a slip of paper and set it aside until the end of the session.

Read:

Luke 12:22-34: [Jesus] said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest?”

“Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Relate:

When we think about physical well-being, most of us agree that to stay “healthy,” we must monitor what we eat, exercise regularly, take our medications on time, etc. Maintaining our spiritual health is much the same kind of monitoring. To grow in our relationship with Jesus and our neighbors, we have a responsibility to faithfully pursue our spiritual journey, to take ownership of the process, to exercise our faith. This kind of internal workout helps us live the Way of Love Jesus asks us to follow. Following Jesus grows in us greater love, joy, and peace—and the capacity for healthier relationships.

For the next steps in your journey, spiritual practices like reading and reflecting on scripture will become vital lifelines—like water stops along a marathon route. Quiet time in prayer (especially using *The Book of Common Prayer*) and reflection on your spiritual journey are key to making healthy strides along the Way.

Here’s how *My Way of Love* will help you grow: Each week (for the next eight weeks) you’ll receive an email with an individualized spiritual workout plan that focuses on three practices of the Way of Love (turn, learn, pray, worship, bless, go, and rest) so that you can:

1. Discover what it takes to follow the Way of Love in a way that nourishes your soul.
2. Focus on practicing forgiveness and reconciliation.
3. Deepen your commitment to your Baptismal Covenant as a guide for your life—a way to put faith into action and continue to develop deeper relationships with Jesus and your neighbors by walking the Way of Love.

Reflect:

This week, we’ll get to know each other by reviewing our individual inventory results.

1. Did your inventory include any surprises?
2. Are you excited or anxious about beginning this journey?
3. What are some comfort items you include in your real-life travel kit (hard candy, room spray, comfy pillow, etc.)? What similar items might you include in your spiritual journey kit (rosary, guided meditation, a timer, new journal, etc.)?

Recommit:

Invite each person to pick up their own written intention and spend a silent moment focusing intentions for ourselves and each other.

Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

(The Book of Common Prayer, pg. 210)

Week 2:

TURN: Pause, listen and choose to follow Jesus

Pray:

Father in heaven, who at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit: Grant that all who are baptized into his Name may keep the covenant they have made, and boldly confess him as Lord and Savior; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.

(The Book of Common Prayer, pg. 214)

Read:

Begin your time together by reading the following selection. Ask each participant to share a word or phrase that stands out for them—just the word, no explanation needed. Then ask them to write the word on a slip of paper and set it aside until the end of the session.

The Baptismal Covenant

| | |
|------------------|---|
| <i>Celebrant</i> | Do you believe in God the Father? |
| <i>People</i> | I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. |
| | |
| <i>Celebrant</i> | Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God? |
| <i>People</i> | I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. |
| | |
| <i>Celebrant</i> | Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit? |
| <i>People</i> | I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. |
| | |

| | |
|------------------|---|
| <i>Celebrant</i> | Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers? |
| <i>People</i> | I will, with God's help. |
| <i>Celebrant</i> | Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord? |
| <i>People</i> | I will, with God's help. |
| <i>Celebrant</i> | Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ? |
| <i>People</i> | I will, with God's help. |
| <i>Celebrant</i> | Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? |
| <i>People</i> | I will, with God's help. |
| <i>Celebrant</i> | Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being? |
| <i>People</i> | I will, with God's help. |

(The Book of Common Prayer, pgs. 304-305)

Relate:

TURN: Pause, listen and choose to follow Jesus

As we begin walking the Way of Love, we focus on what it means to “turn”: pause, listen, and choose to follow Jesus. It’s really all about where we start, about taking a look at whether what we are doing and being is what we are called to do and be. It’s a matter of taking a spiritual gut-check as we think about the direction in which we are headed.

For some folks, making a turn may involve repentance, a sometimes difficult word that suggests turning around. It may involve being honest about what is getting in the way of your own spiritual vitality, focusing on how you are using the gifts you’ve been given, and whether that look leads you to make any changes in your life.

Reflect:

- What was helpful in this week’s email?
- What was challenging?
- How can the group support you in your practice?

Recommit:

Invite each person to pick up their own written intention and spend a silent moment focusing on intentions for themselves and each other.

O God of peace, who has taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be our strength: By the might of your Spirit lift us, we pray you,

to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(The Book of Common Prayer, pg. 832)

Week 3:

LEARN: Reflect on Scripture each day, especially on Jesus' life and teachings

Pray:

Almighty God, by our baptism into the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ, you turn us from the old life of sin: Grant that we, being reborn to new life in him, may live in righteousness and holiness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

(The Book of Common Prayer, pg. 254)

Read:

Begin your time together by reading the following selection. Ask each participant to share a word or phrase that stands out for them—just the word, no explanation needed. Then ask them to write the word on a slip of paper and set it aside until the end of the session.

John 14: [Jesus said,] “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.” Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?” Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You

heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us be on our way."

Relate:

LEARN: Reflect on Scripture each day, especially on Jesus' life and teachings.

This week, we focus on what it means to practice "learn." We often hear how Jesus gathered his disciples, but the experience of discipleship didn't stop with that original crew. We too are disciples of Jesus, which means that we are students and learners of his Way of Love. Each one of us on the journey of faith is called to learn, continue to explore, and engage with what it means to live, move, and have our being as a follower of Jesus. And this practice never stops. We're never done with learning how to be more like Jesus.

Reflect:

What was helpful in this week's email?

What was challenging?

How can the group support you in your practice?

Recommit:

Invite each person to pick up their own written intention and spend a silent moment focusing on intentions for themselves and each other.

O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent your blessed Son to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near: Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you, bring the nations into your fold, pour out your Spirit upon all flesh, and hasten the coming of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen*

(The Book of Common Prayer, pg. 257)

Week 4:

PRAY: Dwell intentionally with God daily

Pray:

Grant, O God, that, following the example of your servant James the Just, brother of our Lord, your Church may give itself continually to prayer and to the reconciliation of all who are at variance and enmity; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

(The Book of Common Prayer, pg. 245)

Read:

Begin your time together by reading the following selection. Ask each participant to share a word or phrase that stands out for them—just the word, no explanation needed. Then ask them to write the word on a slip of paper and set it aside until the end of the session.

Luke 11:1-13: [Jesus] was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial.”

And [Jesus] said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

“So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Relate:

PRAY: Dwell intentionally with God daily

Jesus taught his disciples how to pray—and we are his disciples, so this lesson definitely applies to us! There are all kinds of ways to pray. At different stages in our spiritual journey, we may find ourselves praying in different ways. Prayer is about building a relationship with God.

When we want to learn how to play the piano, we bring in a music teacher. If we want to take up golf or tennis, we find a coach or pro. If we want to practice yoga, we do so under the guidance of an instructor. The same is true about our

prayer life. Jesus is the best teacher we know, and The Lord's Prayer is a master class in how to articulate our needs to God and leave space for God to speak to our hearts.

Reflect:

What was helpful in this week's email?

What was challenging?

How can the group support you in your practice?

Recommit:

Invite each person to pick up their own written intention and spend a silent moment focusing on intentions for themselves and each other.

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known,
and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our
hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may
perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name;
through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

(The Book of Common Prayer, pg. 355)

Week 5:

WORSHIP: Gather in community weekly to thank, praise, and dwell with God

Pray/Read:

Begin your time together by reading the following selection. Ask each participant to share a word or phrase that stands out for them—just the word, no explanation needed. Then ask them to write the word on a slip of paper and set it aside until the end of the session.

Venite *Psalm 95:1-7*

O come, let us sing unto the Lord;*
let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation.
Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving*
and show ourselves glad in him with psalms.
For the Lord is a great God,*
and a great King above all gods.
In his hand are all the corners of the earth,*
and the strength of the hills is his also.
The sea is his, and he made it,*
and his hands prepared the dry land.
O come, let us worship and fall down,*
and kneel before the Lord our Maker.
For he is the Lord our God,*
and we are the people of his pasture
and the sheep of his hand.
O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness;*
let the whole earth stand in awe of him.
For he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth,*
and with righteousness to judge the world
and the peoples with his truth.

(The Book of Common Prayer, pgs. 44-45)

Relate:

WORSHIP: Gather in community weekly to thank, praise, and dwell with God

Can you feel your faith muscles stretching? Have you noticed how you are gaining confidence in your practices each week? By sticking with this spiritual wellness plan, you are growing in strength and courage more than you may realize. The best is yet to come.

Over the past few weeks, you have probably either started or renewed a practice of daily devotional and quiet time with God. Together and on our own, we've spent the last couple of weeks contemplating and practicing the disciplines of learning and prayer. This week, the Way of Love invites us to think about the practice and discipline of worship.

Worship is at the heart of all we do in our relationship with God. For many of us, asking questions about why and how we worship helps us to learn more about the ways we worship and inspire us to continue in our practice of worship. As we continue to journey this Way of Love, we will continue to explore why worship is so important.

Reflect:

What was helpful in this week's email?

What was challenging?

How can the group support you in your practice?

Recommit:

Invite each person to pick up their own written intention and spend a silent moment focusing on intentions for themselves and each other.

O Gracious Light *Phos hilaron*

O gracious light,
pure brightness of the everliving Father in heaven,
O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed!

Now as we come to the setting of the sun,
and our eyes behold the vesper light,
we sing your praises, O God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices,
O Son of God, O Giver of Life,
and to be glorified through all the worlds.

(The Book of Common Prayer, pg. 118)

Week 6:

BLESS: Share faith and unselfishly give and serve

Pray:

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

(The Book of Common Prayer, pg. 815)

Read:

Acts 2:43-47: Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Relate:

BLESS: Share faith and unselfishly give and serve

Our spiritual journey asks us this week to think about the spiritual practice of “bless.” One translation of “bless” means to speak well of something. Blessing involves seeking, sharing, and proclaiming goodness any and every time we see it in the world. Blessing intimately involves offering up—through word or action—thanksgiving and sharing of blessings in response to blessings we’ve been given.

Remember when gentle Uncle Ben cautions his nephew Peter Parker (Spiderman), “With great power comes great responsibility?” Well, turns out Uncle Ben was paraphrasing from the Gospel of Luke: “From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.” So this week, we ask ourselves and each other, “What are you doing with what you’ve been given?” “Given the blessings we’ve received, how can we be a blessing?” “How can we keep our eyes open for ways we are being blessed and ways we can do some blessing?”

Reflect:

What was helpful in this week’s email?

What was challenging?

How can the group support you in your practice?

Recommit:

Invite each person to pick up their own written intention and spend a silent moment focusing on intentions for themselves and each other.

Almighty God, Father of all mercies,
we your unworthy servants give you humble thanks
for all your goodness and loving-kindness
to us and to all whom you have made.
We bless you for our creation, preservation,
and all the blessings of this life;
but above all for your immeasurable love
in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ;
for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.
And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies,
that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise,
not only with our lips, but in our lives,
by giving up our selves to your service,
and by walking before you
in holiness and righteousness all our days;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit,
be honor and glory throughout all ages. *Amen.*

(The Book of Common Prayer, pg. 125)

Week 7:

GO: Cross boundaries, listen deeply and live like Jesus

Pray:

O God, you have brought us near to an innumerable company of angels, and to the spirits of just men made perfect: Grant us during our earthly pilgrimage to abide in their fellowship, and in our heavenly country to become partakers of their joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen*

(The Book of Common Prayer, pg. 250)

Read:

Begin your time together by reading the following selection. Ask each participant to share a word or phrase that stands out for them—just the word, no explanation needed. Then ask them to write the word on a slip of paper and set it aside until the end of the session.

Mark 6:1-13: [Jesus] left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

Relate:

GO: Cross boundaries, listen deeply and live like Jesus

This week, *My Way of Love* invites us to consider the spiritual practice of “go”—to cross boundaries and live like Jesus. Pope Francis has said that there is no such thing as a stationary Christian. The work of the Way of Love is to move with Jesus, to be the hands and feet of Jesus to a world in need of a savior. Just a quick look at the reading from Mark, and we can see that Jesus’ ministry is one of physical movement—Jesus and his friends are always crossing the Sea of Galilee or walking all over Judea. Jesus expects those who say they follow him to actually, for real, follow him. He’s honest with us about what the costs of going along his Way of Love are likely to be, but his love and example encourage us to take up our own crosses and by the power of the Holy Spirit follow him.

It’s been said that the most important part of the Sunday service is the dismissal when we’re encouraged to go out into the world, to love and serve the Lord. That’s what going is all about—to seek and serve Jesus in all people and loving our neighbors as ourselves.

Reflect:

What was helpful in this week's email?

What was challenging?

How can the group support you in your practice?

Recommit:

Invite each person to pick up their own written intention and spend a silent moment focusing on intentions for themselves and each other.

Heavenly Father, whose blessed Son came not to be served but to serve: Bless all who, following in his steps, give themselves to the service of others; that with wisdom, patience, and courage, they may minister in his Name to the suffering, the friendless, and the needy; for the love of him who laid down his life for us, your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

(The Book of Common Prayer, pg. 260)

Week 8:

REST: Receive the gift of God’s grace, peace, and restoration

Pray:

O God of peace, who has taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be our strength: By the might of your Spirit lift us, we pray you, to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

(The Book of Common Prayer, pg. 832)

Begin your time together by reading the following selection. Ask each participant to share a word or phrase that stands out for them—just the word, no explanation needed. Then ask them to write the word on a slip of paper and set it aside until the end of the session.

Read:

Matthew 6:25-34: [Jesus said,] “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

“So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”

Relate:

REST: Receive the gift of God’s grace, peace, and restoration

This week, *My Way of Love* invites us to practice “rest.” Mindful that God rested after six days of creative work, a mandatory section of our spiritual journey involves stillness, restoration, and delight.

A typical resting heart rate for adults is somewhere between 60 to 100 beats per minute. Many factors influence heart rate—age, fitness, emotional state, medications, and more. Imagine if we could measure our resting soul rate? What if we could measure our soul’s rest? What do you think soul rest looks and feels like?

God knows our bodies need rest—there’s a whole commandment about resting, and endless arguments in all kinds of theological debates about what resting really means. Jesus cuts right to the heart of the matter in our reading from Matthew—resting means not worrying, not fretting, and relaxing into the comfort of belonging to an abundant God who is in the business of meeting the needs of creation and our own precious selves.

Reflect:

What was helpful in this week's email?

What was challenging?

How can the group support you in your practice?

Recommit:

Invite each person to pick up their own written intention and spend a silent moment focusing on intentions for themselves and each other.

Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for your love's sake. *Amen.*

(The Book of Common Prayer, pg. 124)

Week 9:

Wrapping Up

Pray:

Almighty and everlasting God, you made the universe with all its marvelous order, its atoms, worlds, and galaxies, and the infinite complexity of living creatures: Grant that, as we probe the mysteries of your creation, we may come to know you more truly, and more surely fulfill our role in your eternal purpose; in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

(The Book of Common Prayer, pg. 827)

Begin your time together by reading the following selection. Ask each participant to share a word or phrase that stands out for them—just the word, no explanation needed. Then ask them to write the word on a slip of paper and set it aside until the end of the session.

Read:

John 15:1-17: [Jesus said,] “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.”

Relate:

Our small group journey with *My Way of Love* began with a focus on the practice of “turn”—a way to orient ourselves to the ways we are already following Jesus and some areas we can improve. As you move into a regular rhythm of spiritual practices, you will need to set aside periodic times to ask, “Am I doing and being all that I am being called to do and be? Am I continuing to move with Jesus and following his Way of Love?” During this last meeting, we focus on celebrating the ways following the Way of Love is bearing fruit in our lives and how far we have come together.

Reflect:

What was your favorite session?

What was the most challenging session? What was the most comforting or encouraging?

How will this small group maintain contact and support after this last meeting?

Recommit:

Invite each person to pick up their own written intention and spend a silent moment focusing on intentions for themselves and each other.

Accept, O Lord, our thanks and praise for all that you have done for us. We thank you for the splendor of the whole creation, for the beauty of this world, for the wonder of life, and for the mystery of love.

We thank you for the blessing of family and friends, and for the loving care which surrounds us on every side.

We thank you for setting us at tasks which demand our best efforts, and for leading us to accomplishments which satisfy and delight us.

We thank you also for those disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on you alone.

Above all, we thank you for your Son Jesus Christ; for the truth of his Word and the example of his life; for his steadfast obedience, by which he overcame temptation; for his dying, through which he overcame death; and for his rising to life again, in which we are raised to the life of your kingdom.

Grant us the gift of your Spirit, that we may know Christ and make him known; and through him, at all times and in all places, may give thanks to you in all things. *Amen.*

(The Book of Common Prayer, pg. 836)

Additional Resources

Resources Mentioned in this Guide

Building an Intentional Small Group Ministry Guide - https://www.episcopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/02/wol_building_intentional_small_group_ministry.pdf

Beloved Community Storysharing Resources - <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/ministries/racial-reconciliation/beloved-community-storysharing/>

Renewal Works - <https://renewalworks.org/>

Additional Resources

Intentional Small Group Resources - <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/way-of-love/building-intentional-small-groups/>

Small Groups that Work from ChurchNEXT - <https://www.churchnext.tv/library/small-groups-that-work/about/>

What Comes Next?

Recommended materials for additional Small Group Programs

Transforming Questions - <https://www.forwardmovement.org/Products/2394/transforming-questions-brdownloadable-course.aspx>

Embracing Evangelism - <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/embracing-evangelism/>

The Way of Love Book Study - <https://www.forwardmovement.org/Products/2586/the-way-of-love.aspx>

Walk in Love course via ChurchNEXT- <https://www.churchnext.tv/library/?author=Scott+Gunn+and+Melody+Shobe&search=Walk+in+Love>

Note: If the links above do not work, please search for the titles on the appropriate website using the Search function.

For more information on Way of Love or Episcopal discipleship and evangelism, email wayoflove@episcopalchurch.org.

Helpful Hints and Encouragement from the Field

Here's the story of how one congregation put My Way of Love to work:

At St. James' Parish in Wilmington, North Carolina, we invited the whole congregation to join in this process. The invitation was made in parish publications, Sunday announcements, online communications, and by personal contact. We offered an introductory session during which we explained how and why the process works. This open invitation could certainly be more targeted to a specific group, like a vestry, committee, or small study group. We explained that the process included each individual taking the inventory in a certain week. Then we would begin a series of weekly gatherings. Since this took place during the recent social distancing brought on by COVID-19, we met on Zoom. But these weekly gatherings could certainly take place in person.

These weekly, one-hour meetings (ours was held at 7 p.m. Thursday) were facilitated by clergy, but a facilitator need not be clergy. It's good to have someone who will facilitate and also do limited administrative work. Each night, we began with prayer and scripture, using the liturgy for Early Evening from the Prayer Book (Devotions for Families and Individuals). Those beginning times of devotion included brief reflection on scripture, lasting about 15 minutes. Then we simply went around the circle and invited each person to say what they had focused on over the past week, what had been helpful, what had been hard. When a person was done speaking, they then invited another person to share, until all had had an opportunity to speak. Ours was a group of about 12 people, and that allowed everyone some airtime. If your group is larger than that, we would suggest forming a couple of groups. If there was time left over, we opened for general comments, but we closed with the Lord's prayer and a concluding prayer. Before we ended our meeting, we selected prayer partners for the coming week, inviting two people to pray for each other daily. The next week, we'd assign different prayer partners. The facilitator sent out reminders about the meeting each week, and especially in COVID-tide, included the link for the meeting.

What we found was that in this kind of sharing, a beautiful community was formed. There was not a lot of extra work for anyone, not much to prepare, but it provided an opportunity for Episcopalians to talk about God in their lives, which doesn't always happen in our churches.

Here are a few comments from participants. (Note that the process was referred to as RenewalWorks for Me but is now called My Way of Love.)

"RenewalWorks for Me" encouraged me to return to the heart of worship, ministry, and faith through prayer, reflection, and worship. Through daily practices I am seeking to follow Jesus more closely...to be "covered by the dust of the rabbi, Jesus."

The catalyst for how well this worked was how open, loving and supportive our small group became as we met and talked honestly about what we were experiencing.

The gift of "RenewalWorks For Me" was in making me aware of the power of daily prayer and meditation done in an organized way. Being given definite guidelines for a time of solitude and quiet reflection, followed by the opportunity and responsibility to share faith and love with the larger community, was another reminder that we are, indeed, one in the spirit. Our commitment to God is reflected in our commitment to each other.

About The Way of Love

An Invitation from Presiding Bishop Michael B. Curry to Practice the Way of Love

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

– Ephesians 3:17-19

In the first century, Jesus of Nazareth inspired a movement—a community of people whose lives were centered on Jesus Christ and committed to living the way of God's unconditional, unselfish, sacrificial, and redemptive love. Before they were called “church” or “Christian,” this Jesus Movement was simply called “the way.”

Today I believe our vocation is to live as the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement. But how can we together grow more deeply with Jesus Christ at the center of our lives, so we can bear witness to his way of love in and for the world?

The deep roots of our Christian tradition may offer just such a path. For centuries, monastic communities have shaped their lives around rhythms and disciplines for following Jesus together. Such a pattern is known as a “rule of life.” The framework you now hold, which we call **The Way of Love: Practices for a Jesus-Centered Life**, outlines a rule for the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement.

It is designed to be spare and spacious, so that individuals, ministry groups, congregations, and networks can flesh it out in unique ways and build a churchwide treasure trove of stories and resources. There is no specific order you need to follow. If you already keep a Rule or spiritual discipline, you might reflect and discover how that path intersects with this one. By entering into reflection, discernment, and commitment around the practices of **turn, learn, pray, worship, bless, go, and rest**, I pray we will grow as communities following the loving, liberating, life-giving way of Jesus. His way has the power to change each of our lives and to change this world.

Your brother in the Way of Jesus,
+Michael

The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry
Presiding Bishop and Primate
The Episcopal Church

About RenewalWorks, My Way of Love, and Forward Movement

“My Way of Love” grew out of RenewalWorks, a ministry of Forward Movement. RenewalWorks has been referred to as spiritual strategic planning. It helps congregations get a picture of where they are spiritually, an important step in knowing how to move forward. RenewalWorks invites all members of a congregation to take an online, anonymous inventory that explores the beliefs, practices, and commitment to service of those congregants. It also seeks to understand congregants’ satisfaction with how the church and its leadership are helping them grow spiritually. Based on what is learned from this inventory, a group within the congregation charts a course forward for that community.

RenewalWorks has engaged with more than 300 congregations over the past eight years. Early on in this work, people asked if they could get a sense not only of their congregation’s spiritual profile but also where they were as individuals and what they might do to grow spiritually. The intentional anonymity of RenewalWorks precluded that kind of individual feedback. So we looked for another solution.

We came up with the idea of RenewalWorks for Me. The process begins with an individual inventory which immediately generates a personal profile, sent by email. Then that person can opt for an eight-week series of emails that provide a spiritual program with varied exercises reflective of that person’s profile.

About the same time, the Presiding Bishop’s Way of Love was taking off in The Episcopal Church, part of the Jesus Movement. The seven verbs which make up that Way of Love seemed like a great way to shape a spiritual plan, which is how RenewalWorks for Me became My Way of Love.

About Episcopal Evangelism

Episcopalians are passionate about proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ in our words and actions.

Through the spiritual practice of evangelism, we seek, name, and celebrate Jesus’ loving presence in the stories of all people – then invite everyone to MORE.

To see a growing list of evangelism initiatives across The Episcopal Church, please visit www.episcopalchurch.org/evangelism.