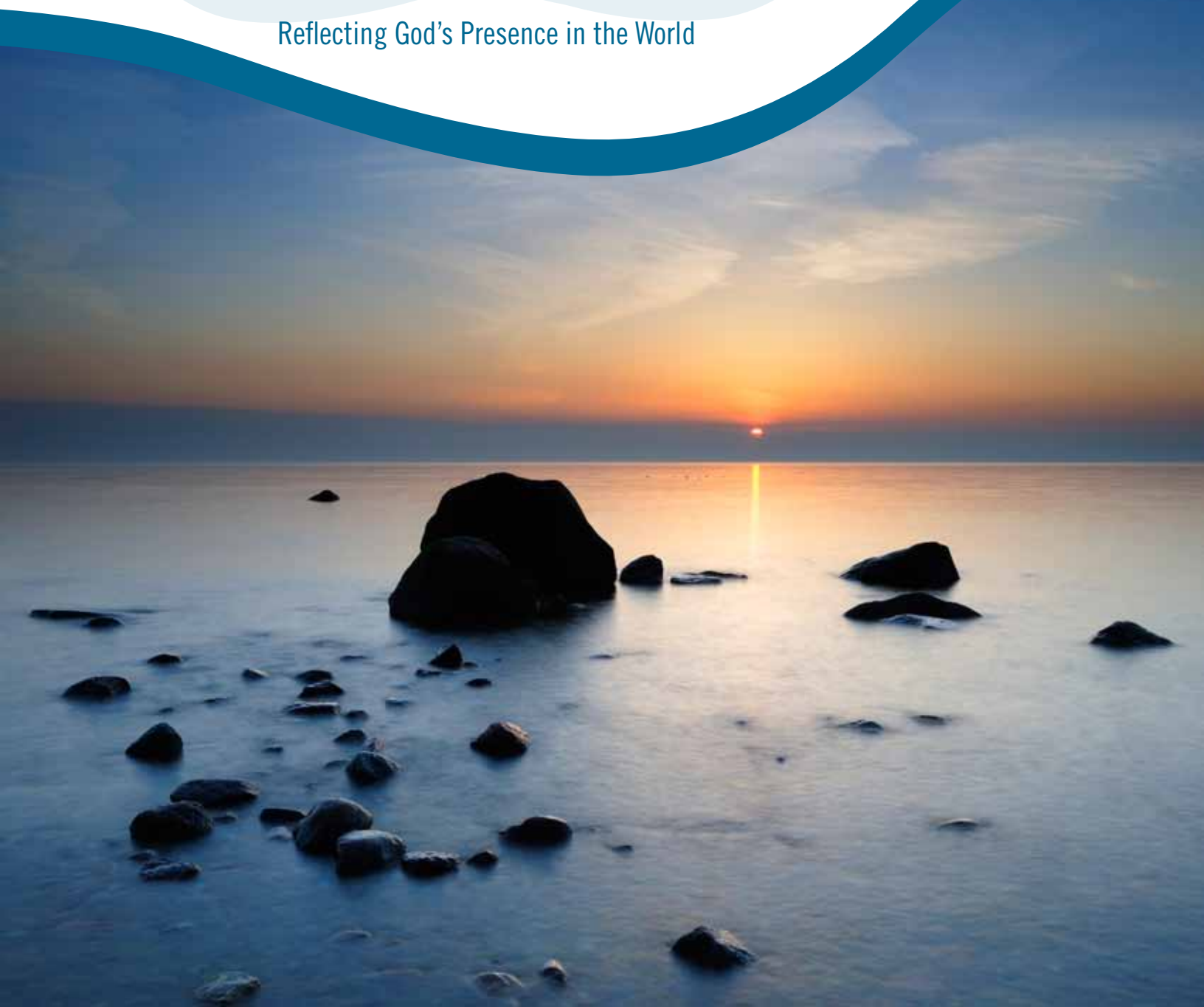




Sacred Space as Metaphor

Reflecting God's Presence in the World



*Women need real moments of solitude and
self-reflection to balance out
how much of ourselves we give away.*

Barbara De Angelis

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How to use this resource

Sacred Space as Metaphor follows an earlier Women of the ELCA resource, *Sacred Spaces*. If you have recently used *Sacred Spaces*, you will experience a natural flow from that resource to this one. If you have not recently or have never used *Sacred Spaces*, it would be beneficial for you to refer to that resource prior to experiencing this one. A free [download](#) is available from the Women of the ELCA Website.

This resource contains a great deal of material. It has been marked off into smaller sections for easier use. Just as *Sacred Spaces* leads participants through the process of creating physical space as a place to be intentional about personal practices and disciplines, this resource takes the next step of organizing our hearts and minds to embody the sacred.

You may successfully complete this resource in a single day or over several consecutive periods. Just as your life experiences continue to shape how you navigate your way in this world, this resource will continue to take on new meaning for you over time if you find this resource calling you back.

The resource can be used as a self-study or group study; as a complement to daily devotions; or as the program for a one-day or two-day retreat.

Page 20-23 of this resource are a reflection worksheet that provides many of the quotes of this resource for your own private (or shared) work. Your

responses to the quotes can be written in a special part of your love journal (see page 12) or another existing journal you may have.

If you use this resource along with one or more other people, the worksheet can be a place to share your insights and perceptions. Discussions around the quotations can take them in their order as they appear in the resource.

Whether using this resource alone or in a group, your experience can be enhanced by selecting a welcoming location and by decorating the space. As for location, select a room with windows opening onto some aspect of God's creation. If the weather permits, have those windows open so that participants might hear a bird call or the sound of a babbling brook. Ensure that the location is accessible for all participants.

As for the space itself, consider the following suggestions.

- Have comfortable seating available.
- Make prayer shawls available.
- Decorate with candles, crosses, prayer beads, fabrics, fresh flowers or plants.
- Provide restful background music.
- Provide a small journal for each participant.

Reflections as you begin

Read and reflect on these words as you begin this journey.

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire. Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?

Paul to the Corinthians, in 1 Corinthians 3:7–16

Sacred space as metaphor is about receiving from God the power and grace for embracing a life that reflects God’s presence in the world.

Inez Torres Davis

Director for justice, Women of the ELCA

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that frightens us most. We ask ourselves, “Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and famous?” Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that people won’t feel insecure around you. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It’s not just in some of us; it’s in all of us. And when we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

Marianne Williamson,

Christian spiritual activist, author, lecturer

Section One

God is the master builder, and we are God's temple. Throughout our lives God dwells within us, and that indwelling transforms us. As a result, how we care for ourselves is of utmost importance to living faithfully for and with God.

Section One

This first section provides a brief overview of how we are sacred spaces that contain the love and light of God.

In the *Sacred Spaces* resource you were invited to create a personal sacred space, a place set apart for your personal spiritual practices and disciplines. *Sacred Space as Metaphor* explores some of the ways God's intention for each of us as holders of God's light is the archetype (or the original model) of the sacred spaces we create here on earth.

God is the master builder, and we are God's temple. Throughout our lives God dwells within us, and that indwelling transforms us. As a result, how we care for ourselves is of utmost importance to living faithfully for and with God.

Pause to reflect

Small group discussion or individual meditation: With one or two other people discuss and compile a list of how you understand yourselves as being sacred or holy. (Take 10 minutes and then debrief.)

How awesome to stand under the arching buttresses of branches in Muir Woods in California as the aged, refined spirit of life within ancient trees speaks quietude to a quickly beating heart. When we are in sacred spaces, we recognize where we are, and we open ourselves to God's grace accordingly.

Consider when a baby is baptized. The water and the Word impart sacredness and the holiness of God's intention flows over and into the wee one with wet brow. The entire community bears witness. We call it eternal and abundant life. Growing into that grace is a life accomplishment. This is sacred space.

Sacred Space as Metaphor invites us to do in our lives—for ourselves and in our relationships—what we have done for a room, a garden or a bookshelf with *Sacred Spaces*. Just as there is thought and intention followed by action in creating and maintaining a personal sacred space, considering sacred space as metaphor for ourselves and how we live requires much the same. Our preparation and care of self is the essential internal and sacred work of growing into Christ as a bearer and reflector of God's grace and love for the world. We witness evidence of this throughout the Bible. Growing into the fullness of Christ is our ultimate aspiration (Philippians 3:12–15). It is a gift (Ephesians 2:8). It is God's intention for us (Ephesians 4:15).

Re-read the quotes in the section, *Reflections as you begin* on page 5. Marianne Williamson, the Christian spiritual activist, writes that we are born to make manifest the glory of God. Apostle Paul tells us to choose with care how we tend to the life of Christ within us.

Williamson suggests that we fear possessing such greatness as Christ in us, while Paul says that how we tend to our growth into Christ becomes evident in our lives. Sacred space becomes paradox as it is both *who we have been made* by God and, at the same time, it is *who we are to grow into* as God's people.

Pause to reflect

Small group discussion or individual meditation: How have you shown or expressed God's goodness and love for the world? How have you seen others express this goodness and love? (Take 10 minutes and then debrief.)



Regardless of how our lives begin, our seasons fall, or our days end, the mysteries of God's grace confront us throughout all of life because we each remain a sacred dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, which is God. The amazing thing about grace is that we are loved, forgiven and sent as we are—even though incomplete—to express God's perfect and complete love for each other and the world.

Perhaps you've seen the quote "It is who we become, not what we do, that changes the world." In the story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38–42), we are given an illustration of making the choice between doing and being. I do not make this distinction to place one way in opposition to the other; as the twentieth century Pulitzer Prize winning writer Edith Wharton has written, "There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it." Likewise, this resource explores how we can bring more of what Jesus described as the better choice into our daily lives.

In Jesus, we are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). This process of renewal and rebirth is expressed with these words, "everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" First we experience the redemptive work of Christ and then our re-creation as God's grace blesses. This is the holy order of transformation that continues to pull us into a cycle of discovery, cleansing and movement toward wholeness.

A sacramental way of being

Living a sacramental life is not about living perfectly. God created us with the freewill that makes our development as people of God a sacramental way of being. It is both privilege and practice to hold a healing attitude of openness toward God. As we learn how easily our own freewill opposes God's way, we also learn how to surrender ourselves to God's love. Our struggles become conscious ones similar to that described by the Apostle Paul in Romans 7 where he ends his torment with these words, "So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin."

Thankfully, Paul's written testimony continues with a focus on God's love as he begins Romans 8: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." In the rest of this chapter, Paul warmly wraps this freeing truth in a marvelous telling of how the Spirit of God carries us past perceptions and illusions, changing us into those who overcome evil with love.

We can find ourselves teetering and like Paul, we can become discouraged by our own inability to resist the temptations of both the spirit as well as the body. Vanity is as devastating as gluttony is as devastating as backbiting is as devastating as judging and the list can go on. All such things are contrary to the Holy Spirit and collude to compromise the beloved community that God would have us experience. So it is important for us, from time to time, to seriously look at what kind of defenses we can use to maintain our focus and intention.

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption.

Ephesians 4:30

Pause to reflect

Small group discussion or individual meditation:
What kinds of spiritual practices or disciplines help you focus on the guidance of the Holy Spirit? (Take 10 minutes and then debrief.)



The fruit of the Spirit sustains us

The fruit of the Spirit is the sweet, succulent evidence of God's work in our lives.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

Galatians 5:22–23a

The gifts of the Spirit are given to each of us for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7). It is possible to use our gifts for our own exaltation; Paul addressed this with the Corinthians. The fruit of the Spirit is not given; it must be grown. This fruit's seeds are sown in our baptism and as we surrender and receive God's grace, this fruit grows. It provides sustenance to us throughout our lives.

Maintaining ourselves within the sacramental way of being

The more intentional we are about our surrender and embrace of God's grace, the more we avoid dangerous pitfalls such as growing bitter from disappointment or arrogant over any accomplishment. Because pride shuns the light and holds perceptions and assumptions tightly against grace's healing rain, we all fall short and require dusting off from time to time so we can fully embrace the light. Because fear prefers judging to understanding and cultivates anger and resentment rather than compassion, we all require a reality check from time to time to see beyond closely held assumptions.

Being a sacred space in which God's Spirit dwells with joy requires that we make choices. We can repent and be cleansed rather than excuse ourselves of our sins. We can insist upon the true, nourishing juiciness of the Spirit's fragrant fruit and wait on the Lord rather than use a feigned, saccharine sweetness that lacks depth. We can choose the freedom of

walking by faith rather than living in a cloud of discontent that we may even call righteous anger. As we grow in grace, God's sacred space within also grows in size and strength. See Ephesians 4:15, 1 Peter 2:2, 2 Peter 3:17–18 and James 1:4.

So, how do we create a fruitful garden for God within? Such a garden of spiritual fruit is not provided by being busy, spinning tops. For those of us who have learned the joy of service and the exultation of a job well done, this can be difficult to grasp. Mother Theresa expressed it this way, "We can not do great things. We can only do small things with great love."

Mother Teresa's declaration of God's sufficient grace turns us toward God for the grace needed to face both our own needs and the needs of the world. Being spiritually fruitful is as much about waiting *on* God as it is working *for* God. Christian service that flows from spiritual fruitfulness flows with true kindness and splashes loving and healing intention upon all who witness it.

Section Two

We can regard our lives as sacred spaces in which God's Spirit dwells. Our daily choices become freewill offerings within God's grace that makes living a life dedicated to God in today's world not just possible, but joyful.

Section Two

This second section references the previous *Sacred Spaces* resource and further illustrates how we are God's sacred spaces.

Creating Your Sacred Space: Choosing and Clearing

The first *Sacred Spaces* resource gave direction and inspiration regarding how to choose and clear a chosen physical space for spiritual use and practices. In this resource, we revel in the understanding that this process has already been done. Within God's grace, each of us has already been chosen and cleansed for God's use! This was done in our baptism by the water and the Word.

Now that we know the space has been prepared, we are encouraged to keep our internal sacred space directed toward God. Knowing this, we can regard our lives as sacred spaces in which God's Spirit dwells. Our daily choices become freewill offerings within God's grace that makes living a life dedicated to God in today's world not just possible, but joyful.

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption.

Ephesians 4:30

Since we know God creates a sacred space within each of us, we can live into this metaphor, embracing all that is ours in Christ. Such embrace brings forward the questions, "In what ways am I experiencing the life of Christ?" and "In what ways might I be grieving the Spirit of God?"

The best research on how the brain works tells us that frequency of practice has the ability to change us. Therefore, the more often we focus on being open to God, the more open to God we become. Being open to God does a new thing *in us*. God's love takes

us deeper into grace. When we follow this love, we find grace in abundance. We need this grace to heal. It enriches the soil where our spiritual self grows.

The only law in grace is that of love; seek God's way through your love for God. Consider what new ways can take you further on your faith journey. The ideas that are contained in the following section have proven successful for others on this path (Matthew 22:36–40).

Creating Your Space: The Feeling

Do you recall being invited to sense or feel your chosen space in *Sacred Spaces*? If so, it should come as no surprise that you are invited to sense and feel the life of Christ within you. As St. Teresa of Avila once wrote, "Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours, Yours are the eyes through which is to look out Christ's compassion to the world; Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good; Yours are the hands with which he is to bless (all) now." This statement of empowerment not only drives home the gravity of what we are doing, but also flings wide the doors of anticipation about what lies ahead.

God accepts us just as we are. When we aspire to serve God in more efficient and effective ways we are asking to be changed, transformed. When I ask God to show me how to be helpful to others when their need is great, I am not asking God to merely tag along with me—I am asking God to direct me. We must rely upon God to move us with compassion.

Owning this ambition to be changed for God's sake greatly assists us in making needed changes. This kind of change is not a forced adaptation to a loss or a challenge as much as it is a leaving behind of habits. We all have habitual thought patterns, responses, approaches, diets, activities and so on. As we focus on God's grace, we can replace unhelpful

habits with intentional responses to God's grace. We are given this ability through love; both the love shown us and the love God has shown to the world.

As your heart practices receiving God's love, it will rise boldly to any occasion. As we begin to receive this love, the feeling aspect we experience nurtures gratitude and joyfulness.

Memorializing God's Love toward Yourself

One way to nurture this feeling of being a sacred space belonging to God is to keep a love journal or scrapbook. These tools will nurture your sense of gratitude for God's incomparable grace in your life. Not intended to be a chronological review, this is a special place where you write about the times you were so filled with God's love that you thought you could either melt or explode into glory. Moments or events (such as your confirmation, holding your first child or grandchild, your mission trips, that mind-blowing sunset this past summer, the joy of companions, a healing or when you met your soul mate) can be memorialized in your reflections.

Use this personal tool to describe such times in intimate detail. Tuck in mementos that help capture the essence of the experience. Write about these experiences as you remember them; don't worry about putting them in chronological order. Be as descriptive as possible. Creating such a personal treasure will allow you to revisit these feelings at any time, particularly when you feel down or need encouragement.

(At this point, if you have such a blank journal or scrapbook you can set this resource aside and begin to write about your own experiences with God's grace and love.)

Flip through your journal or scrapbook on a regular basis. Store it in or near your sacred space. Consider sketching, painting, molding with clay, playing on an instrument, writing a song or creating a tiny tabletop garden as a memorial to God's faithfulness or as a commemoration of a special blessing. This can be

done at the initial recording or at a later time when a particular occurrence grows in your estimation. We do not always realize the importance of what happens in our lives.

Visualization can also be a helpful and healing tool. Honor these blessings by visualizing these feelings as colors and images and place these colors and images into a small sky-blue bubble that rests in your heart. Place a hand over your heart as you visualize the grateful blue bubble spreading God's faithfulness and rich grace to fill you entirely. This healing visualization can be done at any time and in any place. Think of it as portable joy.

The Filling

Just as you prayerfully considered what to put into your personal physical sacred space, in this resource we suggest ways to fill yourself and your time with things that support your growth in grace. Contrary to the traditional Western dualism that provides a clear divide between our bodies and our minds, a simpler truth is found in our design. God placed our minds *in* our bodies so the connection is evident. While our spirits are eternal and our earthly bodies are not, as Christians we understand our sojourn as being a time for learning God. The lists and suggestions in this resource are not a road map. They are things others have found strengthening to the life of Christ within.

Do not be confused. This is not works righteousness. *Sacred Space as Metaphor* refers to both the cultivator of a life surrendered to God as well as the result of a life surrendered to God as being God's work in and through us. We do not imagine we can reach nor do we seek perfection. What we seek is greater intimacy with our God.

Pause to reflect

Small group discussion or individual meditation:
In what ways do you fill your time and days with things that support your being built up in Christ? What new ways have you found to do this in the last few years? What new practices might you be curious about learning? See what kind of list you can come up with.
(Take 10 minutes and then debrief.)

Eat this bread

Receive the sacrament of the Lord's Table on a regular basis. The Eucharist is truly a cosmic, universe-bending, cleansing, strengthening, entirely integrated exercise that imparts God's holy grace. Take! Eat! Consider!

Practice reading

Go beyond the prescribed lectionary or monthly Bible study. Have a Bible in your car for those times you have a few minutes waiting for the kids to come out of school or practice. Have a travel size Bible in your carry-on luggage or on your eReader to read at the gate and on the plane. If you have several Bibles, set one in each of your rooms. It will be there to just pick up and read when the moment is there. Keep other inspirational readings within reach. Snacking on the Word gives spiritual energy boosts—a quick power bar for our spirit-connection. A psalm at bedtime and a proverb (read the one corresponding to the day of the month) upon rising is a simple, yet enriching spiritual supplement. Enhance this supplement with meditation after each reading and by reading additional writings on the proverbs and psalms.

Care for your spirit and mind

Recognize that all of your thoughts are *not* you. You are who listens to the thoughts that go through your head. And, thoughts—like emotions—can change and even vanish to the mysterious places from which they come. Stilling the mind not only relaxes us, it allows us to grow. You may find your mind will be stilled after spending time with your love journal or with a collection of prayers. Practicing the stilling of the mind allows us to be open to new and healthier ways of being.

As you learn to release toxic thoughts and toxic thought patterns, cultivate healing and encouraging thoughts in their place. Many of us are survivors of trauma, and past traumatic experiences produce toxic thoughts and toxic thought patterns.

Here are some healing practices that some have used successfully for cultivating a peaceful mind:

- **Speak helpful self-affirmations.** Not about vanity, these focus on God. For example: God is with me. God is for me. God has me fall forward. God loves me. The Lord is my Shepherd, my shield, and so forth.
- **Collect prayers.** Begin a prayer journal or prayer box. Collect prayers from the spiritual retreats and events you attend. Write your own. Periodically sit and read your prayer collection, particularly when you feel your thoughts or emotions stampeding.
- **Confess and forgive.** There are times when only a good hearing out and absolution will do. Don't hesitate. This can be done with or without a confessor.
- **Judge the thought and dismiss it.** Sometimes this is all it takes. Try it.
- **Practice Heart breathing.** (Refer to *Sacred Spaces*.)

- **Use healing rituals.** For example, bury a tiny pebble (representing the negative, plaguing thought) in a clay pot filled with sand. Pat the sand over the pebble with a heartfelt prayer of release. Or try embracing life's balance by planting a tree, a shrub, a flower, or vegetable seedling whenever great sorrow or loss visits you. Write down plaguing thoughts on paper and then burn them in a fireproof dish on your personal altar. (Always use caution with fire. Never leave burning embers or burning candles unattended.)
- **Trace plaguing or negative thoughts to their root, and prayerfully release them from there.** Do not hesitate to seek professional assistance such as talk therapy, spiritual direction or other supporting care to help you in this discovery or to address tenacious toxic thoughts that refuse to depart. God has given to many the wisdom to help us be healed and restored.
- **Practice meditation.** Studies have shown how mindful meditation has assisted people who are chronically ill with not only their healing but also their perspective on life itself. Other studies show relaxation meditation supports creativity and problem solving.
- **Surrender to the present moment.** By doing so you will not be captured or frozen by things that no longer exist. Surrendering to the present moment pulls us from the worry of what may or may not come.
- **Visualize your heart center alive and strong with the fire of God's love for you and the world.** Slowly draw the toxic thought to that fire, melting it into God's ever-present grace until it is completely consumed.
- **Try the Emotional Freedom Technique, a tapping exercise that many have found helpful.** Some report relief with its use. You can learn more about EFT online. Perform a Google search and select from the written or video results.

As stated, these are all ideas and some of them will resonate with you more than others. Thankfully, this life on earth is not a pass/fail test. Our salvation is

secure, and it is good to remember this when we are most vulnerable to spiritual attack. In *Sacred Space as Metaphor*, we are encouraged to keep our *internal sacred space*—our heart, mind, and body—directed toward God. Our daily choices can become free will offerings within God's grace that makes living a life dedicated to God in today's world not just possible, but joyful!

Pause to reflect

Small group discussion or individual meditation: What kind of actions and thoughts do you think “grieve the Holy Spirit”? See what kind of things appear on your list. (Take 10 minutes and then debrief.)

You can take this discussion farther by exploring the ways you think the Holy Spirit is grieved by God's people in the world today. In your discussion or deliberation, see if you can do more exploring of the reason for such behaviors rather than agreeing on a judgment of these behaviors. (Take 10 minutes and then debrief.)

This Body in Which We Live and Love

As members of the body of Christ and as human beings, we are amazing and wonderfully made. We live within skin. We are long and short, wide and narrow. We also have backs that can go out and knees that can need replacement. Some of our bodies can run marathons and are amazing in their ability to heal. Some of our bodies require us to pick and choose what we attempt based on limited abilities and limiting situations. All of us, as we continue on this earth, have

bodies that age and slow down. But within the one body we are given, we live our lives, come to know God and are presented to the universe. All of us possess the same brow that was made wet in our baptism.

Loving Your Body

Love your body. Thank God for what works and what doesn't work because God created you whole and complete even if you or the world does not see you as whole and complete. Wholeness can be a puzzling concept that is not helped by living in a society where athletes are superstars and beauty, youth and models of airbrushed physical perfection are honored.

The adulation of specific female forms and ages has been particularly brutal on women throughout the ages. Elective plastic surgery (in which women and girls can attempt to recreate themselves) can be a gory illustration of what a life surrendered to physical beauty can become.

Prayerfully maintain your body and your reasonable health through diet, proper hydration, appropriate activity and proper rest. Don't underestimate how far you can take yourself by taking small steps. Every moment of every day is another chance to make healthy choices. One friend did her first marathon after the age of 50; another started wall climbing after turning 40. One friend learned how to re-create her life after becoming physically immobilized.

Pause to reflect

Small group discussion or individual meditation: **With one or two other people, come up with a list of easy and accessible ways to become more physically active, more physically centered and well. Use the list that follows to either get your discussion started or as suggestions you may wish to try. (Take 10 minutes and then debrief.)**

Here are some other ways you can begin to maintain your body. Please remember these ideas are just that, ideas for you to consider as well as build upon! Let God's Spirit lead you.

- **Make the appointments for the health exams** and screenings appropriate to your gender, age and lifestyle. If you have had medication prescribed for you, take it as directed. Do your own research about any health challenge with which you have been diagnosed.
- **Fit exercise at the appropriate levels into your life.** Start somewhere. Even a couch potato can begin to park further from the front door on a sunny day for a short walk to the front door. Even an obese person can begin to take the things that belong upstairs up the stairs each time rather than letting these items collect on a bottom stair to take up later. Walk. Take the stairs. Remember, you don't have to be fast, you just have to move.
- **Start stretching,** reaching and bending. If you are not terribly physical, be gentle with yourself but start moving. Maintaining flexibility is important but pushing yourself too hard can discourage you from pushing at all. There are many Christian yoga instructors (and, thankfully, this number is growing).
- **Dance.** Play that music and dance. Take a dance class to help you keep moving.
- **Lift weights.** Two dictionaries can make a healing difference. Hands too weak or too arthritic to grab and hold such items? Take two same-weight books and place each in a cloth grocery bag and lift these bags by their handles. You don't have to lift tons, just lift. Place these bags somewhere you will see them daily and use them. Start gently and slowly. Just start.
- **Join a women's fitness program** in your community.

What we eat has nothing to do with our acceptance before God. How we use the earth and its resources, however, *is* about stewardship of God's earth. As God's people on earth we can agree to do our best to care for God's creation.

For the sake of the earth and future generations, try some strategies for simple eating:

- **Begin by designating four days a week to be your processed food days.** These are days when you will eat processed foods such as snack items, processed meats, sugary or flavored cereals, easy-supper mixes, soft drinks and so on. On the other days, eat more healthful items, including fresh fruits and vegetables. Work your way down to only one day a week of eating processed foods.
- **The environmental effects of meat production include pollution** and the use of resources such as fossil fuels, water and land. Begin to lessen the amount of animal protein in your diet by designating two days a week as meatless days. Work your way up to four or even five days a week or go completely vegetarian. Do your research so you will maintain your vigor as a vegetarian as you move from a high-animal protein diet to a high plant-protein diet.
- **Drink enough water.** Pick up a reusable water bottle and use it.
- **Grow some of your own food.** Healthy, organically grown vegetables and berries are delicious! There are many ways to grow edibles using pots and earth boxes as well as the conventional garden plot. Everyone can grow something. Start with herbs or a pepper plant on a bright windowsill.
- **Limit caffeine intake.** It *is* possible to have too much of a good thing.
- **Plant fruit and seed-bearing bushes and trees.** This not only will give you food, they feed the birds and pollinators and help replenish the earth.
- **Plant your own herbs.** It is amazing the taste difference freshly chopped herbs give vegetables, beans, pasta, rice and even salads!

Can You See Me Now?

We all live within community. How we behave when we are under pressure as well as when things are going our way speaks volumes. How we interact and respond to others can be habitual with some habits

more socially welcomed than others. How does this fit into our living as sacred spaces in which God lives and dwells?

Pause to reflect

Small group discussion or individual meditation: Reread the paragraph above and consider the list that follows to come up with ideas for how women in our organization can better support one another in our callings as a community of women mobilized to act boldly on our faith in Jesus Christ? *(Take 10 minutes and then debrief.)*

Jesus said that Christians would be recognizable. He said people would know us by our love. Love does have more than one face, as love can be reproofing as well as approving, instructive and corrective as well as awarding and affirming. In 1 Corinthians 13, we read a great deal about love, and there is no attempt here to add to that description.

The practices that follow can help us see how we contribute to and support community with love.

- **Pay attention to the impact your words have on others.** Practice self-editing. Consider the way you say things. If people look away as you speak, you might want to consider *how* you speak can be as important as what you say.
- **Everyone enjoys being appreciated—show genuine appreciation for others.** Never hold back heartfelt acknowledgement or praise. Treat yourself and others with small gifts or healthy treats to encourage sacred space practices—fresh beeswax or soy candles, a new water bottle, one dark chocolate truffle, prayer cards, quilting or craft supplies, a vegetarian cookbook or the like.
- **Listen to your mind, spirit and body** as being united. Sometimes we are hungry for rest or quiet and solitude rather than food but we eat food because of habit. Sometimes we just need

some physical exercise to ease the tension after a grueling day or week instead of a cocktail or more television.

- **Start getting enough rest.** The lack of proper rest has been linked to everything from diabetes to heart disease to obesity. It is a myth that we can catch up on lost sleep. When we cheat ourselves of needed rest, we simply make ourselves more tired. Learn your own circadian rhythm and then work from there. If you have trouble falling asleep, develop a ritual that works for you. It may be the reading of psalms, soft music, praying for others or using a sound machine to block out street traffic. Use room-darkening curtains in your bedroom. See that your mattress provides the support and comfort you need. Learn biofeedback and other relaxation techniques. Consider seeking professional, homeopathic assistance if nothing you try helps you get a good nights rest. Or, talk to your physician. You are *worth* the effort to find out what gives you the rest you need.

Using Your Sacred Space

The fruit of God's Spirit is the evidence of our bold choice to be filled and used by God's grace. In the "Fruit of the Spirit" Bible study session in the September 2005 issue of *Lutheran Woman Today*, Sue Gamelin wrote: "Acting boldly can take many forms. We can act boldly with love, with joy, in peace, with patience, with kindness, with generosity, with faithfulness, with gentleness and with self-control."

Gamelin points out how "Paul likes to draw us into thinking about the contrast between a life lived to satisfy ourselves and a life offered to and blessed by God. Martin Luther describes the first kind of living as being 'curved in on ourselves' (in Latin, *incurvatus in se*). When we're curved in on ourselves, we want to grab all we can get—at the expense of others. We create a 'me, myself and I' world that ends up trashing the neighborhood."

Sacred Space as Metaphor asks us to look at

ourselves not for our own purposes but to consider how we live for God's use and God's purpose. Preparing and establishing our selves to reflect God's goodness and love for others and the world in personal ways is as essential as all other forms of stewardship.

As Sue Gamelin wrote later in that same study, when we ask to be bold for God, we pray this knowing that "the fruit of the Spirit flavors our boldness. It is a contrast to the foul smell of the aggressiveness that grows out of being curved in on ourselves. Of the many ways of acting boldly, acting with the gifts of the Spirit can be a fruitful way to proceed."

Sacred Space as Metaphor addresses how we live out our intention to reflect God's goodness and love in and for the world. Here you are offered ideas for seeing your life as sacred and to live in ways that open you to reflect God's sacred nature to others and the world.

Maintaining Your Space

One section in the *Sacred Spaces* resource speaks of periodically clearing the space as a way to maintain your intention for that space. It speaks of how events and time require such clearing. *Sacred Space as Metaphor* recognizes our being open to God's grace also requires a cleansing by re-commitment. Sin, sorrow, disappointment and bitterness (among other things) can clog us up or even keep us from embracing God's intention for us.

Pause to reflect

Small group discussion or individual meditation: **How has sin, sorrow, disappointment or bitterness (among others) clogged you up or blocked you in the past from embracing God's intention for you? You can use the list that follows to support your exploration of this question.** *(Take 10 minutes and then debrief.)*

Many of the things already mentioned in this resource help keep us openly facing God's grace. We are all sinners so we do not hold God's grace perfectly or even consistently. There is always room for growth in grace.

Please remember these are ideas that have worked for others. A couple may work for you! Here are some suggestions for your consideration:

- **Recommit daily.** In our western civilization, we have been enculturated to see our minds and spirits as separate from our bodies and heart. We will even hear people caution us, encouraging us to either think with our heads rather than our hearts or vice versa. It is God's intention to claim us entirely. The Holy Spirit will journey with us into our deepest challenges and concerns if we ask her to do so. Recommitting ourselves to God's will is something we can do daily.
- **Bad things can happen.** While any kind of event or situation can distract us from our intention, sorrow is a great drain on spiritual energy. God prunes us to produce more fruit. And that pruning is seldom a feel-good experience (John 15:14, Hebrew 12:10–12). Not everything that pulls us down is good for us, helpful to us or even authored by God.
- **The daily news can pull us down.** Being informed of what is going on is not the same thing as being immersed in what is going on. If waking to the morning news is your habit, consider finding another channel or listen to some uplifting music to start your day. A weekend without knowing what is going on in the world will not end the world or your involvement in and with it. It can, however, decrease your personal stress level and allow you to focus on God in your life.
- **Carefully consider how much violence (movies, television and spectator sports) you will allow in your life.** Do you really want to become accustomed to graphic depictions of violence and human suffering?
- **Use the confession and forgiveness part of our worship service.** It can bring great relief and hope to come together with brothers and sisters of the same faith, acknowledge shortfalls and receive the words of forgiveness and the affirmation that are needed to start fresh. Daily confession refreshes the clean slate of amnesty so we can aspire to walk more closely to and more reflectively with God's love.
- **Learn how to forgive.** "Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice." Ephesians 4:31. Some say that holding something against someone is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die. Forgiveness is the only thing we are given to do in the Lord's Prayer. Learning how to forgive is healing. St. John of the Cross (from whom humanity culled the seven deadly sins) did amazing spiritual work in understanding our root desire to punish those who have hurt us and how our inability to forgive these others is housed in both our desire for revenge and our own felt need to be judged. Many of us transfer our inability to forgive ourselves onto others. Find helpful instruction in St. John's writings.
- **Practice speaking to yourself and to each other in psalms.** Perhaps more than anything else, such practice of focus and attention as this can support our living lives of gratitude! Nurturing gratitude can take many forms. Make a new habit of recounting God's faithfulness with each other by asking over a shared meal this one question: How did you see or sense the Lord today? Speaking about God throughout your day is a cultivated form of devotion and intention. (Philippians 4:4–9, Ephesians 5:18–19) It is very strengthening and helps us resist unnecessary suffering such as the negative interpretation of others as well as ourselves.

Moving forward

Have you seen more clearly how your daily choices, habits and attitudes can support living a juicy, fruitful life dedicated to God? Your intention to show up as God's woman throughout the days of your life is a sacred hope held between you and God. There are many ways to show up as God's woman just as there are many ways to practice our faith. During each season of our lives we either feel we have found the practices that work for us or we are bid by God's Spirit to try something different as a way to go deeper, come closer. We pray you have found encouragement in this resource to help you go deeper into your commitment to be a reflection of God's love and grace for the world.

This reflection of God is diverse. You are not an imitation of another person. The revelation of this life is seeing how *you* look and act when *you* are feeling blessed, well and filled with God's love and Spirit as well as it is your opportunity to express grace and compassion for yourself when you feel you have fallen short.

The apostle Paul spoke of putting away childish ways and developing a mature, focused and practiced faith (1 Corinthians 13:11). We recognize that there are the works of mercy and relief efforts that we do for Jesus (Matthew 25) when we do for others. There are also the spiritual disciplines that produce the succulent, mature fruit of the surrendered life, open to receiving God's fullest grace. See Matthew 6:5–6, Philippians 4:4–9 and 1 Thessalonians 5:17 as examples. We aspire to all of this.

May you be encouraged toward developing a mature and focused faith rich in grace and love, compassion and forgiveness. Both the church and today's world need a vivid witness of God's healing compassion and forgiveness. We are God's people. We know that "if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything has passed away; see everything has become new! All this is from God, who is now reconciled to us through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation!" 2 Corinthians 5:17–18.

As we move forward in our faith we will discover that we encounter the lessons of this resource again and again. This is because God's Spirit continues to draw us forward and deeper into God, that we may more authentically enjoy and reflect God's love to and for all of creation. Your Sacred Space as Metaphor Worksheet responses will also change over time as you continue to spread and grow both your love for God and your faithfulness to God's leading.

May God's Spirit bless you richly as you continue to practice your faith!

Sacred Space as Metaphor Worksheet

Ponder and then write your own heart responses to the following quotes. You may use all or some of the following questions to prompt your consideration: What does this quote remind you of? How does this quote make you feel? How does this quote challenge you? How could this quote give you courage? How does this quote bring you comfort? How does this quote bring you hope? How can you see yourself using this quote in your own faith life at this time? When sharing this resource with others your responses to these quotes can be part of your sharing.

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire. Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?

—Paul to the Corinthians, in 1 Corinthians 3:7–16

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.

—Ephesians 2:8

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that frightens us most. We ask ourselves, ‘Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and famous?’ Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that people won’t feel insecure around you. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It’s not just in some of us; it’s in all of us. And when we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

—Marianne Williamson

But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.

—Ephesians 4:15

Sacred Space as Metaphor Worksheet

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

—2 Corinthians 5:17

Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation.

—1 Peter 2:1–2

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you.

—The Apostle Paul, *Philippians 3:12–15*

We can not do great things. We can only do small things with great love.

—Mother Teresa

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption.

—Ephesians 4:30

There are two ways of spreading light. To be the candle, or the mirror that reflects it.

—Edith Wharton

Sacred Space as Metaphor Worksheet

Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest? He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

—*Matthew 22:36–40*

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:17–18

Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours, Yours are the eyes through which is to look out Christ’s compassion to the world; Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good; Yours are the hands with which he is to bless (all) now.”

Teresa de Avila

Spiritual progress is like detoxification. Things have to come up in order to be released. Once we have asked to be healed, then our unhealed places are forced to the surface.

Marianne Williamson

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.

1 Corinthians 13:11

It is not how much we do, but how much love we put in the doing. It is not how much we give, but how much love we put in the giving.

Mother Teresa