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# Sacred Spaces





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*Sacred Spaces* was written by Inez Torres Davis, director for justice, Women of the ELCA.

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## Why Your Own Sacred Space

**We all have a need to spiritually grow and heal,** and to seek inspiration and motivation. In our growth as disciples, one of the things we develop well is the capacity to act with kindness and healing intention and to identify good and evil in our lives, community, and world. Because contributing our resources and ourselves in service is a healing act and an inspiration by itself, the idea of having a personal place where we nurture our spirit is not generally seen as necessary for regular folk. This resource disagrees.

Self-care tends to be understood as regular doctor visits and taking a break from the busy-ness of life to participate in fun, distracting activities. And the Lutheran tradition of the West tends to relegate our spiritual care mostly to a communal worship discipline, such as attending Sunday services and engaging in Bible study. These are absolutely essential, but they are not all-encompassing. The Christ life within us seeks a fuller expression into all areas of our lives.

Just as good nutrition, hygiene, diet, and exercise are part of the continuum of care for the body, a personal sacred space for prayer, meditation and spiritual thought is part of the spiritual self-care that enriches and supports our good practice of regular worship within a community of faith. This resource provides a helpful and open framework for creating such a sacred space.

As a disciple of Jesus Christ set apart for God's purpose in the world, you have a need to develop your ability to feast on the word of God and strengthen your faith. Your personal sacred space is where you can explore the questions and needs that naturally arise in the normal course of living by faith. Your sacred space is also where you can spend time pondering in meditation or silence. Your sacred space will address and support your personal needs around the Holy Spirit's work within and through you. It is a private place where you can practice and strengthen your relationship with God.

### Creating Your Own Sacred Space

The terms sacred place and sacred landscape are often used interchangeably with sacred space. Sacred landscapes and places are distinct, though, from sacred spaces.

*Sacred places* often have structures built upon them—such as Stonehenge, the Dome of the Rock, and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher—because these ancient locations were identified as sacred by civilizations long ago. They are points of intersection along the electromagnetic (energetic) grid that covers the earth. Sometimes something of great significance happened in the place because the energy of the place drew the event to it.

*Sacred landscapes* mark memorable events with wide community impact. A sacred landscape is sacred to

a community because of what took place there. It becomes sacred, in effect, after the fact. Some examples are Ground Zero, the Oklahoma City National Memorial, the Big Horn Medicine Wheel in Wyoming, and the Black Hills.

*Sacred spaces*, though, are designated or created by an individual, family, or community for a pre-selected purpose. Examples would be a labyrinth, meditation garden, burial ground or cemetery, and an otherwise neutral site chosen for a church, temple, or synagogue. An individual might create a personal altar or a prayer closet.

This sacred space resource will help you explore and create your own sacred space, set aside and dedicated to your spiritual growth and/or healing.

# Creating Your Sacred Space: Choosing and Clearing

*A guide for do-it-yourself sacred space creation*

**Creating your sacred space** begins with choosing its location and energetically clearing the space before you do anything else. Energetic clearing and energetic healing are *not* New Age or new-fangled ideas! Christians have been doing both for centuries.



If you have ever participated in a house blessing or the dedication of a chapel or church, you have participated in the energetic clearing of a building. If you have ever laid your hands on someone as you have prayed for them and expected the energetic healing power of the Holy Spirit to be conveyed by the laying on of hands, you have participated in energetic healing.

If you have ever prayed for someone who was not present, who was perhaps hundreds of miles away, and you actually expected the Holy Spirit's healing energy to reach that person as you prayed, you have practiced distance healing.

These things are not mysterious or new to us Christians. These disciplines are natural outcomes of our faith!

## Choosing your space

### Your intention

When it comes to personal sacred spaces, one size does not fit all. Consider what has brought *you* to this point. From where does *your desire or curiosity* to create a personal sacred and healing space come? What needs are you hoping to meet?

In other words, what is your intention?

Are you seeking to deepen your spiritual life or enhance a particular part of your journey to the well of eternal life? Are you a survivor of trauma seeking a place in which you can find healing and solace? Or maybe you just need a place to have some quiet in the midst of a busy and often harried life.

What purpose will your sacred space satisfy? Will this be a place of prayer? Or will your sacred space be a place for meditation? Will it be a place of dreaming or reading? Will your personal sacred space be a refuge from all the responsibilities and distractions in your life? Is it a place that will help you forget the world "out there"? Or is it a place prepared to provide you with fresh energy and insight for your place in the world?

Please take some prayer and some thought to discern what it is you want your sacred space to provide you.

If lying down to pray is a particularly useful position for you, you require enough space for a divan or a mat to lie down on. Does bright daylight support your intention, or is a darkened space with candlelight more conducive to your desired outcome?

Take time to prayerfully consider such things, but do not let the need to get it right block your way. Your sacred space, like you, will evolve.

## Shared space

Will others also use your sacred space? This may affect what you will or will not place in it.

A shared space often means a larger space. A sacred space shared by two or three people requires more flexibility and more seating/cushions and supplies. A shared sacred space requires community input, whereas a personal sacred space is only about you.

How much control you have over who uses or enters your sacred space may vary. A shared space can be used simultaneously by more than one person, or it can be used by more than one person each in turn. You may wish to use a “privacy please” doorknob hanger on the outside of the door to this room during those times when the space is in use.

If you are creating a sacred space for yourself and your spouse, partner, or family, each of you should have a copy of this resource so that you can enjoy this discovery process together. You will need to have a few conversations about the space and arrive at a shared intention and understanding of its use.

## Choose a space that does not get a lot of traffic

If possible, your sacred space should be its own room. If this is not possible, perhaps one side of a guest room or a corner of your own bedroom that you keep for your sacred space practices will work for you. A long, narrow walk-in closet with a window can even be used as a sacred space.

*Begin with the heart,  
for the spring of life arises  
from the heart.*

Meister Eckhart

## Clearing a space

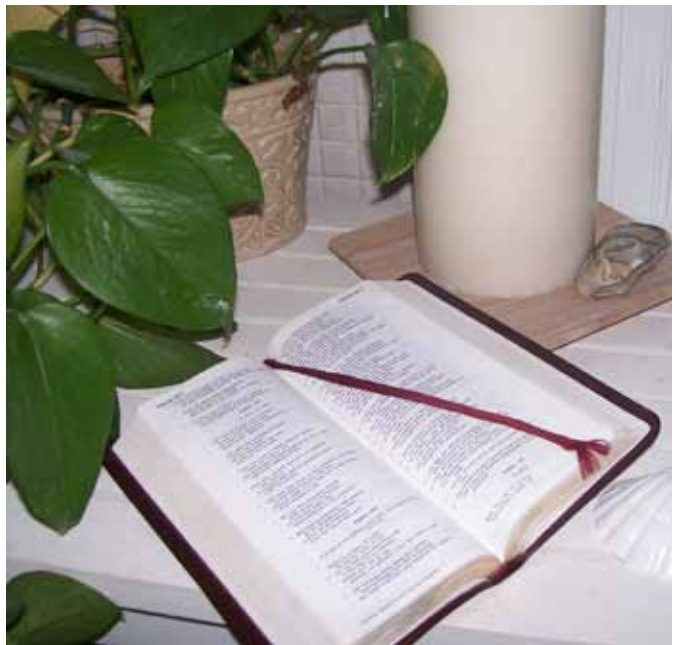
Once you have chosen your location, begin by removing everything from the space—even curtains and removable shelving. Then clean it with mild, environmentally friendly soap. Begin to speak your intention for this space as you scrub out the stale energy. Then clear the space.

Clearing space is removing all stagnant and negative energy from a particular area. There are different ways to clear space.

## Intention and prayer with ritual

You can bring greater importance and the value of ritual to clearing your space by using one or more of the following:

**Heart/loving breath**—Heart breathing focuses on your breath in a way that connects the inhalation and exhalation of air to your heart in the center of your chest. Gently hold your focus on your heart as you breathe in the negative or stagnant energy of your selected space. Then, focusing on your heart, gently breathe love out and into your space. Holding love in your heart, practice this breathing visualization for a few moments to clear your space.



**Incense and smudging**—Using smoke to clear a space is an ancient practice. It involves burning either incense or a dried plant, such as sage or cedar, and using your hand or a fanning object to waft the smoke into your space.

**Formal prayer**—Written prayers of blessing for the home from our Lutheran tradition can be used for your space. The prayer can even be led by a pastor or other leader, but you can use a prayer book or appropriate biblical passages to clear negative or stagnant energies from your space.

**Informal prayer**—Simply asking God to cleanse the area using praise and petitions that rise from your heart is a lovely way to clear a space as well as speak your intention into a space.

**Song**—Songs of praise and thanksgiving with a clearing intention is a simple and effective way to clear a space.

**Rattles, bells, gongs, drums, or tingshas**—True and clear sounds clear negative or stagnant energy. Sound your tool in the corners, along the floor, and along the ceiling to clear away the negative and bring forth the healing energies you desire.



**Blessed oil or blessed water**—Marking a cross on the doorposts, each wall, each corner of the floor and ceiling is another way to clear your space. Misting a clean/new broom with blessed water and then ceremonially sweeping out the negative also clears space. (Water or oil that has been blessed can be purchased or can simply be water or oil that your bishop or pastor has blessed.)

Whichever method you use, choose the one that speaks to you and your intention. It is common to use more than one method as part of a ritual.

If your sacred space will be used by others as well as yourself, decide together which tools and methods you will use together. You can create your own ritual.

A ritual can be as simple as a walk through your space with whatever tool you have chosen and using that tool and chosen words in all of the corners, depths, and heights of the selected space. Or it can be as festive as having friends or family assist you in song and dance. Begin and end whatever method(s) and ritual you use with a heartfelt thank-you to God.

*Remember that the most precious and sacred thing that will ever be in your sacred space will be your own breath in praise and prayer.*

- Inez Torres Davis



## Creating Your Space: The Feeling and the Filling

Creating your space is a pleasurable experience. There is really no right or wrong way to do this. Keep your intention for your sacred space in mind, and creating your own sacred space will bring you a great deal of joy.

### Create the feel of your space

Think about color, sounds, textures, light, shadows, and fragrances as you create your space. We are each unique, so if you are creating your own personal sacred space, your personal taste rules. If you are creating this space with others, these can be shared decisions with perhaps some compromises involved.

The weight and texture of any rug, drape, or furniture for your sacred space can be as important as its color and size.

If you are going to paint your space, you may wish to research and reflect upon the spiritual meanings associated with different colors. However, more important than any meaning a color expert may give is the feeling your color choice gives to you!

Choose colors and patterns that feed and soothe your soul. The only real way to discover what works best for you is to try it out. Whatever you choose, you can always change your mind later. The wonderful freedom of a personal sacred space is that changes do not have to go through any committee or face the weight of longstanding tradition! You can allow your space to evolve as you yourself evolve.

### Shelf or table top as sacred space

Small or crowded living space may mean that your sacred space is an altar set up in your bedroom. This personal altar can be a shelf on a wall or a table top that is reserved and used only as your personal altar. In this case, you should prepare your entire bedroom with the cleaning and clearing steps described.

A shelf or table top can support your intention in as personal a way as a room can. A glowing icon or a simple cross can each be elegant alone or with other elements that support the development and progress of your spiritual disciplines. The use and

maintenance of your sacred space is the same for a shelf or table top as it is for an entire room.

### Fill your space (or not)

The items you use in your space will further create the focus and atmosphere you have chosen. Place items in your sacred space one at a time so that you can experience the changes in your space as you add each new item. If you make sure to use your sacred space for prayer or meditation at least once after adding each new item, you will be able to easily identify which items support your intention and which do not. Keep only what speaks to you.



For those of us who prefer austerity, a chenille rug, a small meditation cushion, a yoga mat and a Tibetan bell (or singing bowl) in an otherwise empty room provide a cleansing and clearing environment. You may bring in a prayer book or softly smudge the room prior to each use. Such a space supports the intention of opening up the energy flow of the physical body to God's Spirit for enriched prayer and meditation.



Some of us prefer to have dear mementos in our sacred space. A more furnished sacred space to provide focus and healing might have a large comfortable chair or a chaise with pillows, a floor lamp, a small bookcase, and a long bench on which rests many small personal mementos. A low shelf with an altar can be opposite the bench. Such a space supports the intention of reading scripture or devotionals, writing in journals, or practicing quiet prayer.

We all have different seasons in our lives. Regardless of whether your sacred space is a table top or an entire room, you can change out your sacred space whenever and as often as your intention requires. Your sacred space is about your growth and healing. The list of possible elements that follows is not intended to limit your expression.

**Possible elements or features to include in your sacred space are:**

- A cross
- A bubbling fountain
- Rocks, carvings
- Sacred art or icons
- Rattles, a drum, or tingshas
- An essential oil diffuser or burner
- A CD player or iPod speakers
- Candles
- Blessed oil or blessed water
- Photos of those who have already made their transition to the church triumphant
- Other personal and precious items
- **Collect items that speak to you and that support the intention of your sacred space. This is a personal sacred space, so what you place into it is a personal choice.**

You are encouraged to remember the simple guideline of adding elements or features to your sacred space one at a time. Allow each to speak to you and to inform your experience of your space by itself rather than beginning with a bunch of things that may or may not feel right.





## Using Your Sacred Space

Developing the healing and life-enhancing habit of using your sacred space takes time and authenticity. Using your space *only* for spiritual practices is important. This point cannot be stressed enough.

Your sacred space can be where you will pray for others. It can be where you go for some peace and perhaps some healing tears. It can be where you go to read scripture, or it can be where you go when you just need quiet. It can be where you dance before the Lord or where you journal your dreams as well as your experiences. Whatever affirming and healing activities support your intention to know God more intimately, you can practice in your sacred space.

But you compromise your own intention as soon as you pull in today's newspaper because that chair is just so comfortable. Resist the temptation to compromise your intention by using your sacred space for other purposes. Keep the use of your sacred space clear of anything that is not directly supportive of your intention.

One suggestion for developing good habits is to attach the use of your space to a particular time of day, such as upon rising or before going to bed, or upon returning home from work. Such an attachment helps you develop the helpful and healing practice

of going to your sacred space and engaging in your personal spiritual practice each day at about the same time.

However you choose to use your space—daily, on weekends, on weekdays, to assist you in keeping Sabbath—be focused but gentle with yourself as you establish your rhythm and methods. Just know that the more used, the more blessings your space will provide.



## Maintaining the Space

If you find yourself wanting to read or listen to music in your sacred space—for purposes other than supporting a devotional or meditative focus—consider creating a small reading niche using the same care in the selection of colors, furniture, and fabrics as you did for your sacred space.

It is possible to dedicate an entire home as sacred space with each room providing the needed support for a particular aspect of your spiritual development. A bit like praying without ceasing, to consciously move from room to room within your own home with each room having its own intention is one way to make your home a marvelous, healing retreat resplendent with the graceful presence of God. People will begin to share with you how a feeling of well-being and wholeness comes to them when they visit your home.

Always, before or as you leave your sacred space, say thank you to God.

Maintain your space by periodically clearing it (see the section on clearing). The actual cleaning of your sacred space can also become a ritual of thanksgiving and as such can further enhance your spiritual journey and increase your feeling of intimacy with our Lord. Simply speaking your heart to the Lord can make all housework a ritual—but particularly, while dusting your sacred space or hand-washing your prayer cloths or throws, the maintaining of your sacred space can become a healing and restorative ritual.

### Extending your sacred space

You can extend the positive energy and healing properties of your sacred space into your entire home by asking God to bless, preserve, support, heal, and lead all who enter into and leave the rooms of your house (and even the areas of your yard). Consider doing this before entertaining or hosting Bible study (as well as afterwards). You can pray for your time together as you walk through the room(s) you will use. After everyone leaves, you can walk through with or without a clearing tool giving thanks.

### When there has been illness or suffering

In this day of modern antibiotics, we seldom air out or scrub down a sick room anymore. But the clearing of the stagnant and even sorrowful energies of illness or suffering can become a way of extending as well as strengthening your personal intention. Airing out a space and gathering up any lingering evidence of a sickness (such as a tissue-filled waste basket and cluttered bedside table) and using a clearing tool under and around the sickbed or couch with prayers of thanksgiving is a healing practice. Even in the case of death or violence, a room can be cleared.

You or others can also bring the suffering of negative situations into your home. If your ministry involves having people come into your home for counseling or some other healing practice, you will certainly wish to use a clearing tool after such sessions. The periodic clearing of your home is one way to refresh your intention of good spiritual self-care and to invite God's Healing Spirit to move freely throughout your home.

## Sacred Spaces in Your Garden

Choosing a sacred space in your yard involves the same discernment of intention as an indoor sacred space. What is it that you want your sacred space garden to provide?

It should be a private location, one that feels “right.” Your sacred space garden can be tucked away in a corner of your yard, or it can be a special spot in a corner of your deck or balcony.

Clear your outdoor sacred space with your intention firmly in mind, using, from your heart, the tools or elements of your choice. Use the same prayers and method(s) used for indoor sacred space, or create something new. It is up to you.



Remove grass, weeds, and any undesired plants from your sacred space garden. Mark out your sacred space. Prepare the soil of your sacred space with rich, organic compost. Refrain from using herbicides or any

other toxins. Select plants that are appropriate to your growing zone and that appeal to you in color and size. (You can find out what growing zone you are in by visiting [www.usna.usda.gov/Hardzone/ushzmap.html](http://www.usna.usda.gov/Hardzone/ushzmap.html).)



Add a bench or create a space for sitting on the grass. Maintain your garden sacred space by using it for the spiritual discipline you intend. An outdoor sacred space provides a freshness that cannot be captured within four walls. Songbirds and butterflies can be attracted by the plants you select. Many enjoyable moments can be spent in communion with God watching these creatures with a thankful heart. Such practice of gratitude is a healing discipline.

## Creating Sacred Space as You Travel or at Work

Consider sharpening your intention and staying within your spiritual practice away from home by creating sacred space when you travel or even at work.

Creating sacred spaces when you travel or at work provides more opportunity to sharpen your intention of spiritual self-development. Creating a travel sacred space kit is easy.

A small pouch can hold a small cross (and stand or a small lump of school clay), three tea lights, a book of matches, a set of tingshas or small hand bell, and a prayer cloth. Such a kit takes very little space in your luggage.

Simply setting up your small personal altar does not adequately support your intention. Begin by clearing your hotel room or office.

Clear the space by using your preferred tool and speaking your intention. (In the case of your office, you may need to come in early or stay late to accomplish this clearing.) A small vial of blessed oil or water tucks neatly into a desk drawer or cosmetic bag. You can use this to make the sign of a cross whenever and wherever you wish.

Particularly in a hotel room, where many people have come and gone in the same space where you will be tending to many of your own personal needs, you will want to clear the stagnant or negative energies from over (and under) the bed and from the bathroom. Use the tingshas or a small hand bell from your travel altar kit to clear your room.

Use the clearing tool in your travel kit, along with prayer. Begin at the door and ask God to bless all who enter. Ask God to bar anyone with unhelpful or unhealthy intentions from entering your room.

Sound your clearing tool over, around, and under the bed, asking the Holy Spirit to cleanse away any sadness or sickness that may have been experienced in that bed and in that room. Ask God's Spirit to grant you healthy, restful sleep and helpful dreams.

Clear the four corners of the room, extending your clearing tool and your prayer to sweep away any

residual energy that is not helpful or healthful. Ask God to guide and guard all conversations and intentions that will be in your room.

Include the bathroom in your clearing. Bathrooms are not always cleaned of all traces of previous occupants. Ask God to bless you as you use the bathroom in caring for and in preparing yourself for each day and each night.

It is now time to set up your altar. Choose a place that you will not have to remove it from until it is time for you to leave. Unfold and spread out your prayer cloth. Place your cross in its stand, or stand it up in the small lump of school clay. Lay out your three votive candles. (Three candles are more than adequate for three days, as you will only have them lit while you are engaged in your spiritual practice.) Use your travel altar the same way you use your home altar.

### A prayer that can be used with three candles follows:

*Mother and Father God, I thank you for all that you have revealed to me in all of my yesterdays, for I have come to know your mercy and grace endures forever.*

*Redeeming Lord and Savior, I thank you for all that you will reveal to me in all of my tomorrows, for I expect your mercy and your grace to endure forever.*

*Gracious, guiding Spirit of God, I thank you for all that you are revealing to me now; I open my heart to your mercy and your grace in this moment. May I learn to live in each moment for you and your love.*

After you have spoken this or a similar prayer, speak final prayers for those left at home and for those who are present with you in this place. Give thanks and then close with "Amen."

## Sacred Space as Metaphor

The most sacred space we each have to maintain is our own heart, where the light and life of Christ resides. The fruits of the Spirit come from a humble life surrendered to God’s guidance and healing.

Regardless of how much natural beauty, time or money we expend in creating a personal sacred space, it is in the practice of our faith that growth comes.

There are many ways to practice our faith. The apostle Paul spoke of putting away childish ways and developing a mature, focused and practiced faith (1 Corinthians 13:11). There are the works of mercy and relief efforts that we do for Jesus (Matthew 25) when we do for others.

But there are also those things that we must surrender of ourselves for the sake of Christ and others in the development of the fruits of God’s Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. A personal sacred space can assist you with such personal spiritual growth. May God’s Spirit bless you richly as you practice your faith.

