

8 HABITS OF EVANGELISM



Worship • Generosity • Justice
Radical Welcome • Sacraments
Teaching • Prayer • Fellowship

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**Office of Theology, Formation & Evangelism
Presbyterian Mission Agency**



Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Presbyterian Mission



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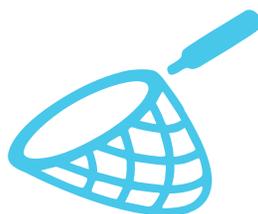
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SACRAMENTS

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I. OPENING PRAYER

God of grace and grand invitation,

We give you thanks for you have set a table before us filled with love, joy and peace.

You invite us to be nourished by your presence, purpose and power.

Give us the strength to taste and see that you are good.

Help us to know that you have declared that we are good and good enough.

We give you thanks for the waters of baptism wherein you have named us and claimed us as your own.

Through your sacred waters, we have been sealed and set apart to reflect your goodness and your mercy.

We are yours, children of the covenant, people of faith.

This day and always, let the waters of peace wash over us again.

Let the waters of renewal revive us again.

Let the waters of justice and courageous compassion fill our cups till they overflow to the lives of all we meet.

For the daily bread and cup that touch our lips and fill our bellies, nourish and nurture us throughout the day.

For the moments when we see water and feel water, may we remember our baptism and know that we are beautiful, whole, complete and wholly thine.

For those who cannot find daily bread and cup, for those who cannot feel and find water that renews, may we work, fight and pray until all may have their fill and be at peace.

*In the name of Jesus we pray,
Amen.*

II. THE PRACTICE OF SACRAMENTS

Be Present in the Participation of the Sacraments

One of the gifts of being a minister in the Reformed tradition is the rich language and imagery we have concerning the sacraments. We are taught and have witnessed for ourselves that baptism and the Lord's supper are visible signs of an invisible grace. We have been taught and adopt these essential tenets that declare that through the sacraments we see grace on display in accessible ways. Grace is God's divine gift of love. We cannot work for it. We cannot earn it. We cannot put our fingers on it. And yet, it is through the sacraments that we have an opportunity to experience God's love for us in extraordinary ways. Within our Book of Order, we are reminded that:

The Sacraments are both physical signs and spiritual gifts, including words and actions, surrounded by prayer, in the context of the Church's common worship. They employ ordinary things—the basic elements of water, bread, and wine—in proclaiming the extraordinary love of God.¹

I love that last line. Ordinary things are employed to proclaim the extraordinary love of God. This language invites us to be fully present in the participation of the sacraments. The shift from ordinary to extraordinary is an invitation to see God's extraordinary activity at work in the everyday and common things. It is an invitation to be present, to take and receive God's extraordinary love and to be made new once again. Participating in the sacraments invites us to practice being fully present in them.

As a minister, I must confess that there have been times when I was so consumed with

the logistics of administering the sacraments that I lost sight of what it meant to be present in the moment of the sacraments. For those in worship leadership, there can be a temptation to get caught up the preparations and mechanics of the day. We check to be sure the liturgy is just right. We want to be sure the families are in place and know exactly where to stand when you call them forth. We want to be sure that the elders and deacons have everything they need and that we don't get in the way of the instructions for administering the sacraments. If we are going to be honest, I know that I am not the only one. Just because we are bearing witness to the sacraments through worship leadership or participation in worship does not mean that we are being present as we do so. I think that it requires that we pause, breathe and remain aware of our surroundings. It requires us to sense the Spirit at work in the breaking of the bread, in the cup of salvation being raised, and in the water being placed on the beloved children of God.

Practice Living Sacramentally in Our Ordinary Days

At the end of our worship services, we are sent out to be witnesses into the world. Our directory for worship reminds us again of this:

Christian worship and service does not end at the conclusion of the Service for the Lord's Day; we go forth to love and serve the Lord in daily living. In so doing, we seek to fulfill our chief end: to glorify and enjoy God forever.²

We are invited be present in the mystery of the moment when the ordinary become extraordinary during the sacraments. It is in the sending that we have a chance to depart from the extraordinary experience

of worship and enter into our ordinary days with hope, wonder, strength, power and peace. We depart the service with an invitation to be present in our daily living and to live sacramentally in our waking and sleeping, in our working and eating, in our resting and in our moments of unrest, in our joys and in our sorrow, and in all the ways we find ourselves in relationship with God, others and ourselves.

The practice of living sacramentally can be equated to the practice of mindfulness and being intentional. I am a latent and slightly reluctant practitioner of mindfulness. I think mindfulness is wonderful, but it does not come easy to me. I have learned that we shouldn't shy away from things just because they might not be easy. For me, it is difficult to quiet the mind in a busy world. It is difficult to center in a season of life that can be disorienting and distracting. Living sacramentally takes an intentional approach to daily practices of living and moves through them with prayer, thoughtfulness and eyes wide open to the miracle working power of God in small and subtle movements.

III. SCRIPTURAL REFERENCE

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.*

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.*

*You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.*

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.*
(Psalm 23)

*O taste and see that the Lord is good;
happy are those who take refuge in him.*
(Psalm 34:8)

*When you pass through the waters, I will be
with you; and through the river, they shall not
overwhelm you; when you walk through the
fire you shall not be burned, and the flames
shall not consume you.*
(Isaiah 43:2)

IV. ILLUSTRATION

I never imagined the joy I would receive in participating in and presiding over infant baptisms. The early part of my life was lived as a Baptist, which has an emphasis on baptizing disciples who can make a public profession of faith. I learned as a child that baptism was a blessing and baptism was serious business. I also remember taking classes in seminary on Reformed worship and how to properly administer the sacraments. We learned how to hold the baby, how to determine the appropriate amount of water to use, the proper place to stand in relationship to the family and the congregation, and other nuances that would be important for a new pastor. I learned that administering the sacraments in the Reformed tradition was beautiful but also serious business. I never

imagined the laughter and joy I would experience through grace on display in that way.

As a Black female leader in the church, a significant number of years of my parish ministry were spent in a predominantly white, suburban and affluent congregation. This congregation was my sending congregation for my theological education and holds a place of sentiment and significance in my heart to this day.

While I served as an associate minister, I can remember taking the time to meet with families in preparation for the baby's baptism day. I was concerned with logistics and everything running smoothly. I was also concerned with a small child being comfortable with a new face who may have been racially different than other faces they may have seen. I would sit with the family, talk about the meaning and beauty of baptism and also make sure I held the child in my arms as a "dry run" to be sure they were comfortable.

While the names and the faces of families and children flow together in my mind, I can remember one child in particular. This child was not weepy or sleepy but was filled with curiosity and wonder. I can remember being concerned with the logistics of walking up the stairs into the chancel, taking the proper stance, turning on the lapel mic, holding my small book of liturgical words and having everything in place. I can remember taking the child in my arms and the child began to smile and coo at all that was happening. I can remember laughing and even commenting that this child was excited about the



baptism. I raised my water-soaked hand and placed it on the child's head three times in the name of triune God of the universe, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The child responded with waving hands, dancing eyes and noises filled with delight. It was there in that moment that I experienced grace on display. It was there in the moment that I was called to be present in the participation of worship and not to be distracted by the logistics of worship. It reminded me of the mystery of God's own hand on us all giving us a chance to respond in joy, excitement and delight at the wonder-working power of God.

V. HABITS FOR SACRAMENTS

The image of a delight-filled child receiving the sacrament of baptism reminds me that I am invited to delight in God and connect to others on a daily basis. The sacraments are filled with mystery, ritual, intentionality and grace. I believe that we can practice daily intentional habits that remind us that God is present with us in our daily routines.

We can see God's grace on display in our daily living. Here are the habits that allow me to live sacramentally. I pray that they will offer you the space to do the same.



Rest.

The Scriptures command us keep sabbath and to rest as God rested. It is not easy for people to slow down or even stop. Over the past 10 years, I have been more and more convinced and convicted that the spiritual practice of sabbath keeping and rest allows us to be present, mindful and experience a deeper relationship with God and others. Study the Scriptures and theological work on the significance of sabbath keeping and learning to rest. Ask God to help you take a spiritual inventory of how you invest your time. Ask yourself and those in your close circles what would happen if you took the time to sit beside still waters for the renewal of your soul. Ask God for the courage to practice this grace-filled command.



Reflect.

As you take the time to keep sabbath and rest, it will create space in your life to reflect. We must take the time to look at our lives and reflect on our encounters and experiences. In my work with clergy and congregations, we often talk about crafting a spiritual autobiography. During those times, individuals will create a timeline and chart of God's activity in their own lives. We talk about labeling the "blessings" and the "beat-downs" we have experienced in our lives. It is through the practice of reflection that we can give thanks, ask questions, ponder, work through difficult emotions and dream about our hopes for the future.



Rediscover.

In the practice of routine rest and reflecting on our lives, we can rediscover who we imagine ourselves to be as beloved children of God. When we practice rest and reflection, we can rediscover God's vision for our own lives that may have gotten lost or overlooked along the way. We need to rediscover our gifts and dreams. We need to rediscover our love and passion for living. We need to rediscover the promises nestled in Scripture. We need to rediscover hope for a world that is hurting. In our own rediscovery, we can invite others to walk close with the risen Savior who fills our lives with new mercies each morning.



Resist.

In practice of rest, reflection and rediscovery, we must never forget the daily habit of resisting all things that would take us from God's will and intention for our lives. I have been a follower of Jesus since I was a wee one for Christ. In my own experience, it seems to be a tad easier to resist the things that are blatantly offensive to God and others. In this habit, I am talking about resisting the temptation to go through the motions of daily living. For many busy people in the world, we can skate by going through the motions of work, family, church and recreation. We get up, we get it done, we check in with others, we get a little more work done, we call it night, and then we hit repeat the next day. Resist the temptation of going through the motions. Resist living in a way that seamlessly goes from one day to the next. Resist the numbing of your soul so that your heart may remain tender and filled with care and concern for all.

VI. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways can you be prepared and present before, during and following a sacrament-filled worship experience? What would change if you were more intentional about this practice?
2. How would you explain the ordinary turned extraordinary nature of the sacraments to a child? What words, pictures, songs or images would you utilize to help them understand?
3. Do you regularly participate in a sabbath-keeping period of time wherein you allow God to place you beside still waters? How could regular sabbath-keeping allow you to live sacramentally in your everyday life?
4. Consider the rhythm of your moments and your days. How could you incorporate mindfulness and intentional practices into your everyday life?
5. In what ways could living sacramentally (mindful, aware, intentional) impact your connection with God? In what ways could living sacramentally proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to others through both your words and your actions?

VII. CLOSING PRAYER

Wonder-working God,

*Take our lives and shape us
in the image of our faithful Savior,
Jesus Christ.*

*Take our ordinary days and fill them with
extraordinary wisdom, endurance, passion,
mercy and grace that can only come from you.*

*Take our attraction to distraction and
exchange it for a peaceful pursuit of
righteousness, hope, truth and love.*

*By the Holy Spirit's power, give us spiritual
senses that allow us to perceive your presence
in each moment and to be present with you
and others each day.*

*Through grace on display for all to see,
Give us eyes filled with compassion.*

Give us ears ever ready to hear.

Give us hearts reflecting your glory.

Keep us mindful.

Keep us tender.

Keep us present.

Keep us gentle.

Keep us strong.

*By your power and by your ever-flowing
spirit, make us more and more like you.*

Amen.

NOTES 1. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *The Book of Order* (2019–2021), W-3.0401.
2. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *The Book of Order* (2019–2021), W-3.0503.

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