

Appendix I. Liturgical Resources

Liturgy means “an order plan or format for gathering.” Not every learning circle that works with *We Make the Road by Walking* will want to use the following liturgical resources, but many will find them helpful. They have been kept simple enough that participants can easily learn the responses by heart. Ideally, only the leader or leaders will need print or digital versions in front of them, since the goal is for the liturgy to be a shared social and spiritual experience rather than a script that is read.

The prayers and other resources in this liturgy are derived from traditional sources, but they are simplified here and adapted for use by a wide range of people from a wide range of religious backgrounds. If you wish that more traditional material were included, of course you can add it. If you wish things were stated differently, of course you can revise them, in keeping with your convictions and commitments. These resources avoid masculine or feminine pronouns for God. They frequently use the direct address Living God, but you may wish to substitute other direct addresses as well, such as Holy One, Living Creator, Spirit of Life, and so on.

Many groups won't be able to make a one-year commitment. For them, one quarter will be more doable. Church membership classes will find chapters 34–39 on church life especially helpful. At www.brianmclaren.net, you'll find suggestions for using the lessons in a weekend retreat setting, and it's easy to imagine groups using a chapter a day to complete the book in less than two months.

Whenever possible, leadership should be shared widely among group participants so all can develop leadership skills. Whenever school-aged children are present, encourage them to

participate to the degree they are able and willing; show them uncommon respect as fellow learners. The group convener or host can assign responsibilities in advance or spontaneously.

For churches using this liturgy for public worship, appropriate music—vocal or instrumental—can be added before, during, or after any of the elements. Care should be taken to avoid songs that are contrary to the spirit or content of the lessons. At www.brianmclaren.net, you will find links to suggested musical resources.

For many groups, a shorter liturgy is recommended: Opening (5 minutes), Scripture Readings (5–7 minutes), Lesson (10–12 minutes), Engagement (20–40 minutes), Benediction (5 minutes). If a group tries the shorter format and is hungry for more, they can experiment with the longer liturgy: Opening, Prayer (5–10 minutes), Scripture Readings, Lesson, Engagement, Offering (2–3 minutes), Eucharist (15 minutes), Benediction.

The context for these liturgical resources may be a meal, worship service, class, home group, choir rehearsal, hike (where the hikers pause periodically along the journey), sports event, drum circle, yoga session, vespers, or some other shared activity. Whatever the context, the tone should be joyful, reverent, energetic, and personal.

During a meal or informal gathering time, people can use queries like these to invite one another into meaningful conversation:

How is your life? How is your work? How is your soul?

How have you experienced God at work in you or through you this week?

What was your experience in applying last week's Activate prompt (#5 in the Engage section)?

What have been some of your joys and sorrows (or high points and low points) since we last met?

At the beginning of a meal, the following prayer of thanksgiving can be used. The response (in italics) can be signaled by a pause or gesture.

Let us give thanks for this meal, saying, We thank you, Living God.

For this breath, for this heartbeat, for the gift of these companions, we thank you, Living God.

For this nourishment and flavor, for soil and sunlight, air and rainfall, we thank you, Living God.

For all to whom this food connects us, from field to farm and store to table, we thank you, Living God.

As we share this meal together, may our thirst for peace be strengthened and our hunger for justice deepened, until all are fed, and safe, and well.

We thank you, Living God. Amen.

Opening

Whenever it is time to move from the meal or other activity to the lesson and conversation, the convener or host can begin with these words, spoken with joy and energy, never in a dull or mechanical monotone:

One: The Living God is with us!

All: And with all creation!

Then, each line of an invocation like the following can be preceded by a bell, a singing bowl, the lighting of a candle, or another simple action that helps participants focus their attention and open their hearts. (Responses are in italics.)

Let us awaken our hearts to the presence of God, saying: we praise you for your glory.

God before us, behind us, above us, upholding us...we praise you for your glory.

God with us, among us, beside us, befriending us...we praise you for your glory.

God within us, flowing through us, animating, harmonizing...we praise you for your glory. Amen.

The following invocation may be read—again, with sincerity and joy (adapted from the Book of Common Prayer, 355):

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

Prayer

If one of the following forms of prayer is used each week, over the course of a month, groups can move from thanksgiving (perhaps with hands raised high, palms up) to intercession (perhaps with hands raised shoulder height, palms out in blessing) to confession (perhaps with hands placed over the heart or chest) to contemplation (with hands lowered, palms open). Responses should be spoken with energy and sincerity.

Week 1. A prayer of thanksgiving (adapted from the Book of Common Prayer, 836–837).

Let us give thanks to the living God for all the gifts that we enjoy,
saying, We thank you, living God.

For the beauty and wonder of your creation, in earth and sky and
sea: We thank you, Living God.

For all that is gracious in the lives of men and women, revealing
the image of Christ: We thank you, Living God.

For our daily food and drink, our homes and families, and our
friends: We thank you, Living God.

For minds to think, hearts to love, and hands to serve: We thank
you, Living God.

For health and strength to work, and leisure to rest and play: We
thank you, Living God.

For challenges which call forth new strength, for failures which
teach greater humility, and for encouragement to persevere when
life is hard: We thank you, Living God.

For all who have gone before us, for all who walk beside us, and
for all children, who are precious to us and to you: We thank you,
Living God.

And for the great wisdom and hope that you reveal to us through Jesus, our leader, example, teacher, liberator, and friend: We thank you, Living God.

Week 2. A prayer of intercession: After each request, pause for a moment of silent prayer.

With all our heart and with all our mind and with all our strength, let us pray to the Living God, saying, Lord, hear our prayer.

For this good earth, this holy creation, and for the wisdom and will to cherish, understand, reverence, rightly use, and conserve it, we pray to the living God: Lord, hear our prayer.

For all in danger, hunger, or sorrow, for the aged and infirm, the widowed and orphaned, the sick and suffering in body or mind, for prisoners and refugees, the poor and oppressed, the unemployed and destitute, the bereaved and alone, the war-torn and wounded, and for all who care for them, we pray to the living God: Lord, hear our prayer.

For all who hold positions of trust in the worlds of religion, education, government, business, community, culture, and family, that they may promote the well-being of all creation, we pray to the living God: Lord, hear our prayer.

For any who have caused us pain, for those we struggle to understand and strain to love, for all who do not love us or consider themselves our enemies, that they may be truly blessed and that we may be fully reconciled, we pray to the living God: Lord, hear our prayer.

For ourselves and our circles of family and friends, for the grace to learn, desire, and do your will humbly in our daily life and work, we pray to the living God. Lord, hear our prayer.

Week 3. A prayer of confession: One of the following can be used, read line by line by a leader and repeated by the group, followed by a few moments of silence.

Gracious God, we have hurt others, and we have been hurt./ We have presumed upon others, and we have been presumed upon./ We have taken others for granted, and we have been taken for granted./ We have dishonored others, and we have been dishonored./ As we receive Your forgiveness for our wrongs,/ we extend forgiveness to others who have wronged us./ Have mercy upon us all. Amen.

Gracious God, our sins are too heavy to carry,/ too real to hide,/ and too deep to undo./ Forgive what our lips tremble to name/ and what our hearts can no longer bear./ Set us free from a past that we cannot change;/ open to us a future in which we can be changed;/ and grant us grace to grow

more and more in your likeness and image,/ through Jesus Christ, the light of the world. Amen. (Adapted from the PCUSA Book of Common Worship)

Most merciful God,/ we confess that we have sinned against you/ in thought, word, and deed,/ by what we have done, and by what we have left undone./ We have not loved you with our whole heart;/ we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves./ We are truly sorry and we humbly repent./ For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,/ have mercy on us and forgive us;/ that we may delight in your will,/ and walk in your ways,/ to the glory of your Name. Amen./ (From the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer)

Week 4. Contemplative prayer can be introduced with words like these:

Let us in stillness hold our hearts open to God. When thoughts and worries come, let us release them and return to restful openness, enjoying the companionship of God, who is closer to us than we are to ourselves. We trust that in quietness and surrender, as we breathe out trust and breathe in grace, the deepest part of us will find our home more deeply in the gracious heart of God.

Scripture Readings

Most of the Bible was an oral composition before it was a written text, and most of the written texts were meant to be heard aloud and “live.” In that spirit, whenever possible,

participants can learn passages by heart and share them as a form of performance art.¹ Where that isn't possible, each passage should be read by a child or adult who has had time to become familiar with it in advance so it can be read naturally and with feeling. Or participants can take turns reading the passages aloud around the circle. Your group should agree on which Bible translation(s) you will use in your gatherings, such as the New Revised Standard Version or the Contemporary English Bible. The passages may be introduced like this:

One: The Living God is with us!

All: And with all creation!

One: A passage from [the first passage is presented]. May we be equipped by these words to walk in love for God, ourselves, our neighbors, all people, and all God's creation.

All: Thanks be to God.

One: A passage from [additional passages are presented]. May we be enlivened by these words to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. [Or:] Through these words, may we see God more clearly, love God more dearly, and follow God more nearly, day by day.

All: Thanks be to God.

Lesson/Engagement

The chapter can be presented aloud by one person as a short sermon or homily. Or it may be presented by several people reading a few paragraphs each. It should be read with feeling and energy, not in a wooden or mechanical way. If there are Scripture references in parentheses (e.g.,

¹ For training to appreciate and present the biblical text in this way, see the Network of Biblical Storytellers website (www.nbsint.org).

John 3:16), don't read them aloud. After the chapter is presented, a facilitator should introduce the Engage time. For large groups, it will be best to break into smaller groups of four people to engage with the questions. (In a church service, people can easily stand and form groups of two or three.) Depending on available time, the leader may need to select which questions will be used and how much time can be allotted to each question.

Engagement should initially be introduced with the Five Guidelines for Learning Circles (Appendix II).² After a few weeks, when everyone is familiar with these five guidelines, the leader can simply use a reminder like this to begin the interaction time: "Let's recall our five guidelines as we begin: mutual participation, honor, silence, understanding, and brevity." When new people join the group, the five guidelines can be reviewed.

Whenever possible, children should be included in the Engage time, and when that's the case, adults should avoid language that would be inappropriate for children. Some groups may find it helpful to use a talking stick or some other physical object for a person to hold as he or she responds to a question. The speaker then hands off the talking stick to the next person who will share. Anyone is free to pass the stick on to someone else if they would rather not speak.

The Engage questions follow this pattern:

1. What one thought or idea from today's lesson especially intrigued, provoked, disturbed, challenged, encouraged, warmed, warned, helped, or surprised you? This question invites simple self-reporting and gives a lot of freedom—including the freedom to question, disagree with, or object to anything in the Scripture reading or reflection/sermon. The

² Some groups may prefer to replace the Engage time with a Create time, in which they respond creatively to the lesson through poetry, drawing, painting, music, or other artistic media.

response should begin like this: “I was intrigued [or disturbed, etc.] by...,” followed by an explanation of why the person felt this response.

2. Share a story about... This question invites the sharing of personal experience. Not everyone will have a response to every question, but often, after a few moments of silence, stories will come to mind and begin to flow.
3. How do you respond to... These questions invite personal response to an idea, an image, or a proposal from the lesson. When people respond in different ways to the same prompt, it’s an excellent opportunity for learning and growth. There’s no need to validate or invalidate any response as long as it is expressed in line with the five guidelines for learning circles.
4. For children... These questions are fine for adults, too, but they’re intended to invite school-aged kids to have a voice in the group as equals. It’s important for adults not to respond to kids’ sharing in ways that kids will experience as dismissive or demeaning. The goal should be for adults and children alike to be taken seriously, to be drawn into honest thinking and free speech, and to learn together.
5. Activate... These questions invite participants to move from reflection to action.

6. Meditate... These prompts create space for participants to open deeper parts of themselves to God.

Offering

This is a good time to include a financial offering as an expression of worship, discipleship, and stewardship. Someone can lead in a prayer like this to introduce the offering:

Our gracious and generous Creator,/ you have blessed us with abundance:/ This beautiful earth and all we enjoy,/ health and strength, family and friends;/ work and rest; home and belongings./ We are blessed indeed./ To support this community and provide for those who serve us,/ To help those in need and extend our mission,/ In proportion to what we have earned and saved,/ In gratitude we now joyfully give./ Amen.

A basket may be passed or people may come forward to give, accompanied by joyful music, if possible, to demonstrate that it is indeed more blessed to give than receive. Be sure to handle finances transparently and ethically.

Eucharist

If your tradition and convictions allow you to do so, you may use or adapt the words below to celebrate the eucharist. Many faith communities require an authorized person to preside in the blessing or consecration of bread and wine. In that case, you may invite that authorized person to join your group and serve in this way. Some traditions allow for previously consecrated

bread and wine to be brought to the homebound, prisoners, and so on. A representative from your group may be able to arrange for your group to receive in this way.

The first few weeks of a gathering, these words may be shared on paper or digitally, or, better, the leader can coach people in the responses. After even a few weeks, the responses are easy enough that they will flow from memory.

The Living God is with us!

And with all creation!

Lift up your hearts!

We lift them to the living God.

Let us give thanks to the Creator of all.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Living God, who loves us with the faithful care of a father and mother. For this reason, we join with all creation to proclaim your glory:

Holy, Holy, Holy One, God of power, God of love.

Earth, sea, and sky are full of your glory.

With joy we praise you! With joy we praise you! Amen!

We praise you and we bless you, holy and gracious Creator, source of life. Your Spirit has always been with creation, guiding its development,

calling forth life, infusing beauty, inspiring joy and love. In your infinite love you created us in your image and allowed us to share in the precious gift of life. You gave us a home in this beautiful world to live in harmony with you, with one another, and with all your creatures.

But we have so often turned from your love and wisdom. We have chosen our own way and broken faith with you, our neighbors, and our fellow creatures. Now all around us we see the tragic harvest of the bitter seed we have sown.

Yet through it all, you have remained faithful to us. You graciously called us to turn from our destructive ways and return to you. You sent us prophets, priests, sages, storytellers, and poets to lead us to repentance and wisdom. In the fullness of time, through Mary, a humble woman full of faith, you sent Jesus into the world.

Living among us, Jesus loved us. In word and deed, he proclaimed the good news of your reign. He broke bread with outcasts and sinners, and in imitation of your perfect love, he taught us to love neighbor, stranger, outsider, and enemy. He redirected us from violence to peace, from fear to faith, from rivalry to mutual service, and from worry and greed to generosity and joy. He taught us to pray:

A version of the Lord's prayer may be said or sung here. For groups unfamiliar with the version that is being used, it can be read by the leader and echoed by the group. Eventually it can be spoken by heart.

The following version of the prayer can be chanted to a scale of five ascending and descending notes (see www.brianmclaren.net for a sample):

1. O God, whose love makes us one family,
2. May your unspeakable name be revered.
3. Now, here on earth, may your commonwealth come,
4. On earth as in heaven, may your dreams come true.
5. Give us today our bread for today.
4. Forgive us our wrongs as we forgive.
3. Lead us away from the perilous trial.
2. Liberate us from the evil.
1. For the kingdom is yours and yours alone.
2. The power is yours and yours alone.
3. The glory is yours and yours alone.
4. Now and forever amen.
5. Alleluia...4. Alleluia...3. Alleluia...2. Alleluia...1. Amen.

On the night before he showed us the full extent of his love, Jesus took a loaf of bread, gave thanks, broke it, gave it to his friends, and said, “Take, eat. This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” As supper was ending, he took a cup of wine. Again he gave thanks

and gave it to his friends, saying, “Drink from this, all of you, for this is my blood of the New Covenant, which is poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink this cup, remember me.”

Now, gathered as one family around this table of joyful reconciliation and fellowship, united in your Spirit, we receive these gifts, and we gratefully offer you our lives as a living sacrifice. As Christ stretched out his arms upon the cross to welcome the whole world into your gracious embrace, we rejoice to enter that embrace and with you, extend it to all. Through Christ and with Christ and in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, to the living God be honor, glory, and praise, forever and ever. Amen.

The group should decide in advance how the eucharist will be observed. If the group is small, the elements can easily be shared around a table. In larger groups, people can come forward and be served. Intinction (where the bread is dipped into the wine) is often advisable for larger groups. Those serving others can say words like these:

The body of Christ, broken for you. Amen. (or Hallelujah, or Thanks be to God, etc.)

The cup of liberation, poured out for you. Amen. (or Hallelujah, or Thanks be to God, etc.)

Or these:

Take this bread in remembrance of Christ’s great love for you, and for all.

Drink this cup in remembrance of Christ’s great love for you, and for all.

When everyone has participated, the leader may close with words like these:

As Christ's body and blood were separated on the cross, so now they have been rejoined in us. Let us, then, by faith, now arise, filled with the Spirit, to be the embodiment of Christ in our world.

[Or:] As we have been fed around God's table of grace, let us go forth in grace and hospitality to others.

Some people may be prohibited by conscience or tradition from including the eucharist in their gathering. In that case, the following words may be used at some point during a shared meal—not as a formal eucharist, but as a spontaneous “toast to Jesus and the kingdom* of God.”

One: Let us celebrate Jesus and the kingdom* of God: we lift our bread in memory of Jesus.

All: To Jesus and the kingdom* of God.

(A moment of reverent silence is observed before and after eating.)

One: We lift our glasses in honor of Jesus.

All: To Jesus and the kingdom* of God.

(A moment of reverent silence is observed before and after drinking.)

One: Amen.

(Amen, Hallelujah, or other joyful expressions follow.)

*You may substitute commonwealth, reign, dream, or another suitable word for kingdom.

Benediction

There are many ways to conclude the gathering. The Lord's Prayer may be recited, if it hasn't been already. A special theme song may be sung, such as the doxology, an amen or a hallelujah, or a benediction song. Each member of the group may be asked to share a single word that describes their response to the time together, or a single sentence of gratitude to God or the group. An individual could recite a benediction (see www.brianmclaren.net for links), or your group could compose its own benediction to learn and say by heart in unison as a special way of concluding your time together. The following can be spoken by a leader and echoed by all:

We are a circle/ Of learners and seekers/ Alive in God's story of
creation.

We are disciples/ who follow our leader/ Alive in the adventure of
Jesus.

We are uprising/ in a new way of living/ Transformed by the Spirit
of God.

Let us go forth in joy and peace/ To love and serve God and our
neighbors./ Amen.