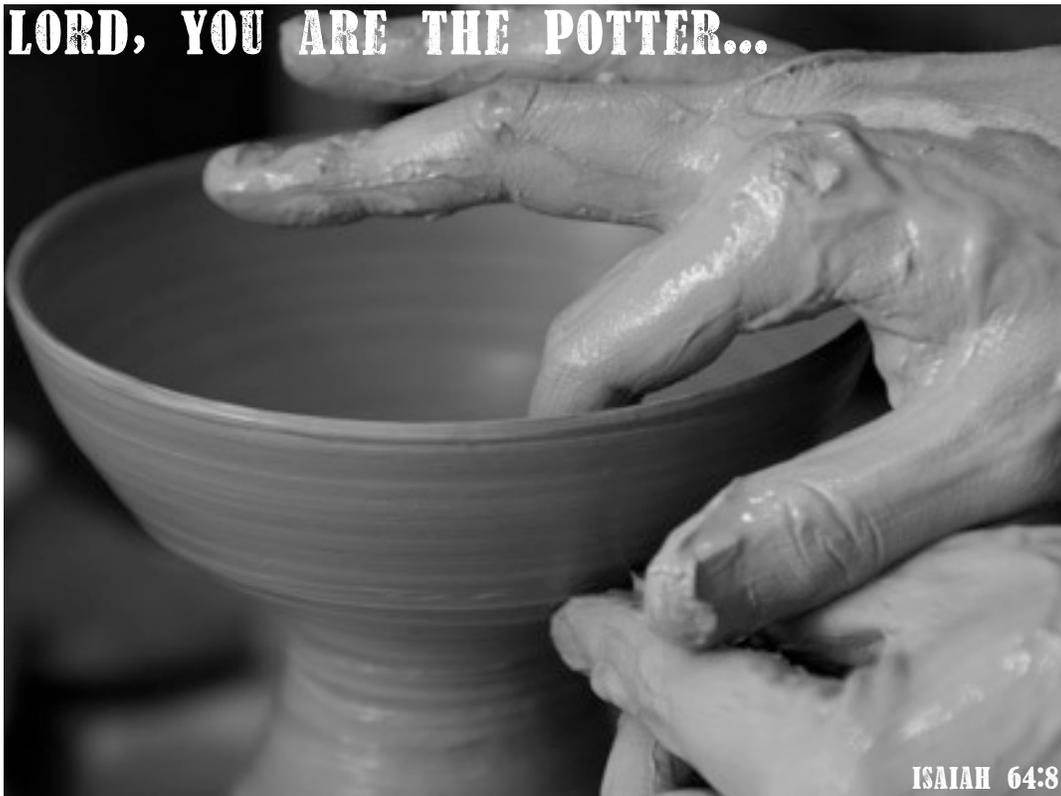


• PRAY • SERVE • LOVE • PRACTICE • FOLLOW • OBEY • LIVE • TRUST • LISTEN •

• INVITE • REJOICE • SEEK • PROCLAIM • TEACH • INSPIRE • WORSHIP • REPENT • NOTICE • GROW • HEAL • WELCOME •

• SHARE • GIVE • REFLECT • LEARN • RECONCILE • PRAISE • RETURN • BELIEVE • RESPECT • HOPE • RECEIVE • STUDY •

**LORD, YOU ARE THE POTTER...**



ISAIAH 64:8

**WE ARE THE CLAY**

**LIVING FAITH 24/7 • SAINT STEPHEN'S CHURCH • COHASSET, MA**

# 1 • WE ARE THE CLAY

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## **SESSION ONE ...FOLLOW AND OBEY...**

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE**

We've all heard the expression, "Practice what you preach." And thank heaven, God knows we try. But to practice what we preach with every breath we take—to live out our faith 24/7, is surely beyond even the most saintly! How often do we hear ourselves lamenting, "If only I could take what I have on Sunday morning and bring it with me the rest of the week"?

The Christian journey, however, is just that—a journey. It is, as the saying goes, all about the journey—not the destination. We will never, in this life, reach a place where we can sit back and say, "There, I've arrived. I'm a perfect Christian, I don't need to follow Jesus anymore."

So perhaps as we think about the challenge of practicing our faith 24/7, it would be helpful to use the metaphor used by the prophet Isaiah. "We are the clay," writes Isaiah, "and you are our potter." Whether bowls, coffee mugs or communion chalices, clay vessels don't form themselves, the potter does. The clay needs to be worked and reworked—to be kneaded and formed so it is malleable and responsive to the sometimes gentle, sometimes firm touch of the potter. But it is the potter who forms each piece into the singular creation that it is, each a unique reflection of the potter himself and vessel of his love.

Just so, God in Christ forms us. When we are baptized in Christ, each of us promises (or adults promise on our behalf) to "follow and obey him as (y)our Lord." The challenge of our lives thereafter is the challenge of allowing our lives, our souls, and our spirits to be molded and formed by the Potter—cooperating with His work and His will for us, rather than by our own.

The promises we make each time we renew our Baptismal Covenant are a good place to look to see what kind of vessels our Potter is creating us to be. God is always at work, shaping us and forming us into vessels of His love who will:

1. Continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers;
2. Persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever we fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord;
3. Proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ;
4. Seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as themselves; and
5. Strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.



This six-week course offers a unique opportunity to anyone who is interested in trying out and reflecting on, a number of different ways to practice living those baptismal promises 24/7—very specific ways of bringing Sunday into the rest of the week.

The course focuses on how we participate in God’s shaping of us. But rather than teaching didactically and then reflecting and practicing, this class will be “practice-focused.” As Dr. John Seel so aptly articulated it, rather than moving “from head to heart to hands,” this program will move “from hands to heart to head.” Each week, you are invited to try specific “practices”—things you can actually do—to live out some aspect or another of one of the baptismal promises. Each week we’ll focus on one of the promises. Some of the suggested practices will be quite simple, others more challenging. Some participants will want to try one or two, others may be more ambitious. Then on Sunday mornings when we gather together, we’ll reflect in small groups on how the previous week went, how it felt trying these practices, what worked for us and what didn’t.

Our hope is that this program will be a cooperative one in which we are intentional about inviting God to form us and shape us into vessels who “follow and obey Christ as our Lord.” After all, we are the clay, and He is the potter... 24/7.

### **DO YOU PROMISE TO FOLLOW AND OBEY JESUS CHRIST AS YOUR LORD?**

Since we won’t have practices to discuss until next week, we will spend the rest of this session discussing a foundational question found in the baptismal service. If you were baptized in an Episcopal Church after 1979, either you or your parents and godparents answered a series of six questions. The last of which reads, “Do you promise to follow and obey [Jesus Christ] as your Lord?” Whether or not you were baptized under this particular liturgy, this is the fundamental question at the heart of the Christian faith. The answer, “I do,” is simply two little words, but these two words really aren’t the answer at all. The true answer to this question is the manner in which we choose to lead our lives in the wake of such a powerful promise. Let’s take a moment to break down this question to see what we are really getting ourselves into.

#### *Do you promise...*

Girls link pinkies. Guys spit on their hands and shake. Car dealers sell extended warranties. Banks make you sign the mortgage paperwork a dozen times. Each of these signals a promise: the secret is safe, the ex-girlfriend is off-limits, the car will be repaired free of charge, and the loan will be repaid. The act of making the promise itself means little compared to the continuous act of fulfilling the promise. Ex-friendships, fine print wielding salesmen, and foreclosures point to the fact that many promises do not last.

But there happens to be a significant difference between these promises and the one we make at baptism. In most promises, the other entity entering the trust is another human being—another fallible, flawed human being. When we promise to follow and obey Jesus Christ as our Lord, we make our promise to God. And God never breaks trust with us. So our promise to God follows God’s eternal promise to us to be faithful always, to be with us always, just *to be...always*.

Thus, our fulfillment of the promise always happens in response to God’s steadfastness. When we break the promise, it does not cease to hold sway because God continues to fulfill it. And God invites us to renew the promise again and again and again.

#### *...to follow...*

In the Gospel according to Matthew, the first words that Jesus says to Peter and Andrew, his prospective disciples, are “Follow me” (Matt. 4:18). In the Gospel according to John, the last words that Jesus says to Peter are (you guessed it) “Follow me” (John 21:22). Therefore, considering how the compilers of the New Testament chose to lay out the Gospel, the first and last words out of Jesus’ mouth are “Follow me.” What does it mean to follow Jesus? Like the main promise we are discussing, this question takes a lifetime to answer; but here are a few quick observations.

To follow means to come after or travel behind. You do this most often when you don’t know the way to, say, the movie theater, and the friends in the car ahead of you lead you there. Our Christian faith tells us that Jesus walks with us, leading us on right paths through our lives. He is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). In Greek, the “way” is literally the “road” on which we walk down. So not only is Jesus the guide for our feet; he paved the road on which our feet tread. The Letter to the Hebrews calls Jesus the “pioneer” of our faith: he is the trailblazer. He invites us to walk the difficult path he first walked, a path full of both pain and joy (Hebrew 12:2).

To follow also means to learn by example. Again, to quote Dr. John Seel, we are “apprentices” of Jesus Christ. During the Renaissance, master painters directed their students to copy their works of art in order to learn the craft. More often than not, these apprentice copies couldn’t compare to the master’s, but they still learned how to apply paint to canvas, and they learned well. Likewise, we will never be able to reach the full example of Jesus Christ, but this shouldn’t stop us from following him just the same.

#### *...and obey...*

Obedience is a tricky thing because it involves something that many folks aren’t all that good at: listening. To obey means to listen carefully and then to act. Obedience to God begins with our intentional effort to discern God’s will in our lives and continues with our reliance on God to live out that will. The good news is that when we choose to obey God, God has already given us the gifts we need to accomplish that will. (Of course, this doesn’t mean the act of obeying will be easy.)

When Jesus commands the paralyzed man to stand up, take his mat, and walk, the man gets up immediately (John 5:8-9). Jesus speaks no word of healing at all. Rather, the act of healing is subsumed in the command. Jesus gives the man the gift of healing in order that the man can obey his command. Likewise, we discover new gifts when we listen for and obey God’s will in our lives.

#### *...[Jesus Christ] as your Lord...\**

In our Christian parlance, we call Jesus many things: friend, brother, teacher, savior. But in this question, we call Jesus “Lord.” We promise to follow Jesus as our “Lord.” How does “Lord” differ from other titles for Jesus? Leaving aside the masculine nature of the title, a lord is someone in a position of authority and respect. In the Gospel, the Greek word for “lord” (*kyrie*) can also be translated as “sir.” In the military, a person you call “sir” is someone who has the authority to command you to do something.

\* “Jesus Christ” is in brackets because the original question uses the pronoun “him.”

Likewise, when we promise to follow and obey Jesus as our *Lord*, we acknowledge that Jesus has the authority to direct our lives. This authority comes from the fact that God is the *author* of each of us.

God pens each day in the books of our lives; sometimes we are the protagonists and sometimes we are antagonists of our own stories. When we follow Jesus as our *author*, as our *Lord*, we consciously take on the protagonist role. To change the metaphor, we resonate with God's directing creativity in our lives. We are in tune with God.

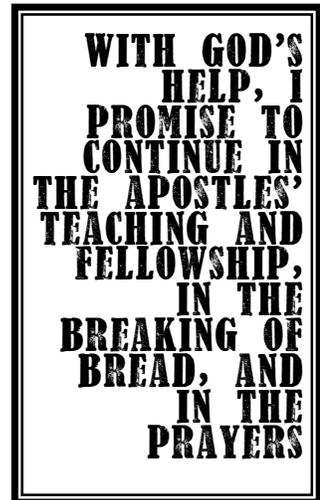
**A SELECTION OF SMALL GROUP PROMPTS**

1. What brings you today to *Living Faith 24/7*?
2. What are your hopes for these next six sessions? Fears?
3. What is a promise you have broken? How did you feel when you were keeping it? How did you feel after breaking it?
4. What is the biggest promise you continue to keep? What do you do to accomplish the promise on a continuing basis? How do you feel knowing that the promise survives?
5. How does your fulfillment of the promises you make with other people compare to your fulfillment of the promise to follow and obey Jesus Christ as your Lord?
6. Recall a time in your life when you knew you were following and obeying Jesus Christ. What happened?
7. Recall a time in your life when you knew you were not following and obeying Jesus Christ. What happened?

**PROMISE ONE  
...TEACHING AND FELLOWSHIP...**

**PRACTICES TO TRY DURING THE WEEK BEFORE THIS SESSION**

The following practices involve the first of five promises in the Baptismal Covenant (BCP p. 304-05). During the week between sessions one and two of this course, try on a few of these. Some are fairly simple. Others are more difficult or time-consuming. All are designed to help us fulfill our promise to “continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers.”



*Say Grace at Mealtimes*

Say a prayer of thanks each time you sit down to eat. Try praying both silently and aloud. If you are eating with others, invite one of them to pray at one or two of the meals as well. Giving thanks before eating makes each meal of sort of mini-Eucharist, because giving thanks is what we do before sharing the Body and Blood of Christ. Here are a few mealtime “graces.”

- “For these and all our many blessings, we give you thanks, O Lord. Amen.”
- “Bless this food to our use and us to your service, and make us ever mindful and responsive to the needs of others; in Jesus Christ’s name we pray. Amen.”
- “I should like a great lake of finest ale for the King of kings. I should like a table of the choicest food for the family of heaven. Let the ale be made from the fruits of faith, and the food be forgiving love. I should welcome the poor to my feast, for they are God’s children. I should welcome the sick to my feast, for they are God’s joy. Let the poor sit with Jesus at the highest place, and the sick dance with the angels. God bless the poor, God bless the sick, and bless our human race. God bless our food, God bless our drink, all homes, O God embrace.” (St. Brigid’s Table Grace)

*Forward Day by Day*

Pray "The Morning Resolve" from Forward Movement's *Day by Day*. This is a monthly periodical full of prayers and meditations. You can pick up a copy before the end of class.

*Morning Prayer*

Pray Morning Prayer at least once this week. Either follow the form in the Book of Common Prayer (p. 75) or follow the link “Click for Today’s Prayer Service” on the webpage <http://www.missionstclare.com/english/> to see Morning Prayer laid out for the given day. (This second option makes it easy to navigate all the choices you have to make while praying Morning Prayer.)

*Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families*

On BCP pp. 136-140, pray through these very simple daily devotions. There are opportunities to pray four times each day, which mimics the monastic practice of praying at set hours during the day.

*Breath Prayer*

Develop a “breath prayer” for yourself – a short sentence that you can remember by heart. Say this breath prayer when you are anxious, frustrated, angry, or sad. Also, say it when you are in the midst of mundane, everyday activities: brushing your teeth, commuting, riding the elevator, etc. Here are a few sample “breath prayers.”

- “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” (The Jesus Prayer)
- “Thank you, God for creating, redeeming, and sustaining me.”
- “Lord, make me whole, make me holy, make me wholly new.”
- “I am in your presence Lord; help me see you move.”
- “Lord, grant me peace.” (love, grace, joy...)

### *Read the Bible*

Read a chapter of the Bible when you wake up. Read another when you go to bed. If this is already your practice, try to vary it with these suggestions:

- Read aloud.
- Read from a translation you’ve never read before.
- Read a book or letter that you have little knowledge of.
- Read with your spouse or friend. Discuss what you have read.
- Make notes in the margin of your Bible (hey, medieval monks did it!). Underline verses that speak to you so you can find them again.
- Keep your Bible with you all day; pull it out of your briefcase if you find yourself idling away a dull hour.
- Give yourself permission to not understand everything you read. Perhaps you will understand at the time when you need those difficult verses.

### *Attend a Bible Study*

Attend a Bible study. Studying the Bible by yourself can be fruitful, but often it is not until you hear how the Bible encounters other people that you realize how it can encounter you. Bible studies at St. Stephen’s take place on Saturday morning at 7:00Am and Wednesday morning at 10:30AM. If you work during the week, there are Bible study groups that meet in office buildings or lunch restaurants. If you can’t find one, start one!

### *Go to Church*

Continue to be faithful in attending normally scheduled worship services. But also, attend a church service you don’t normally attend.

### *Fellowship*

Think of an event you'd like to be a part of that would promote fellowship at church.

### *Simplicity*

Take stock of your daily life, focusing on what you consume (in food, materials, and services). Make a list of how you could simplify your life. Start working on the first item on the list.

- It will help to look at your budget. Or to make one if you don’t have one.
- What are your spending priorities?
- Do you spend above your needs?
- What would you need to do to live comfortably as if you made less than \$50,000 a year?
- For example, if you eat out ten times a month, try to eat out five times this month instead.
- Where does giving to the work of God through the church fall on your list of priorities?

**A SELECTION OF SMALL GROUP PROMPTS**

1. How was your week? When did you feel closest to God? When did you feel farthest away from God?
2. Which practices did you attempt? How did they work for you? If you didn't attempt any, what prevented you from doing so?
3. Pick the practice that made you feel closest to God. What about the practice helped you enter God's presence?
4. Pick the practice that worked least for you. What about the practice kept you from experience God? What about you rubbed uncomfortably against what this practice was attempting to get you to do?
5. Which practice(s) will you continue doing in the weeks to come? Why?
6. What other practices do you do to accomplish this promise that were not on the list of suggested practices?

## **PROMISE TWO ...REPENT AND RETURN...**

### **PRACTICES TO TRY DURING THE WEEK BEFORE THIS SESSION**

The following practices involve the second of five promises in the Baptismal Covenant (BCP p. 304-05). During the week between sessions two and three of this course, try on a few of these. Some are fairly simple. Others are more difficult or time-consuming. All are designed to help us fulfill our promise to “persevere in resisting evil, and whenever we fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord.”

#### *The Sacrament of Reconciliation*

Read through the forms for the liturgy of “The Reconciliation of a Penitent” found on pages 447-452 on the BCP. While the Episcopal Church does not require private “confession” to God through a priest, the service is available. Pray about whether you might need this sacrament. Write out a list of sins and mistakes and bad decisions and shortcomings that weigh on your heart and keep you from being fully present to God. Perhaps taking advantage of the sacrament of reconciliation is for you.

#### *The Ignatian Examen*

At the end of your day, practice a form of St. Ignatius’s “Examen,” a process by which you prayerfully reflect on your day: how did you feel blessed? When did you feel close to God? When did you feel far away from God? What is God calling you to next? Use this five step format. Write down the Examen in journal form if that is helpful for you.

1. *Be Mindful:* With reverence, recall that you are in the presence of God. Realize that you are surrounded by God’s compassionate love, and that every moment God is breathing creation—and you—into being. (“Yes, Lord, you are here...”)
2. *Be Thankful:* Search your day for graces received for which you are thankful...no gift is too small for thanks- giving: A hot shower, the smell of good coffee, a word of kindness from a friend, a smile from a stranger; the beauty of the trees, the sound of rain, the warmth of the sun, the feel of wind. The successful completion of a project, the birth of a new idea, time well spent with colleagues, friends or family. (“Thank you, Lord, for reminding me that all is gift...”)
3. *Be Humble:* Ask for help: Pray for the grace that God may guide and illumine this time of prayer to show you inner experiences, desires, emotional reactions, and impulses of the day and how—through them—the Spirit is leading you. (“Show me, Lord, what you would have me see...”)
4. *Be Reflective:* Chronologically review your day from the beginning, trusting that you will remember what the Spirit wants you to remember: Is there one event, encounter, or experience to which I feel particularly drawn? What were my feelings around this experience? What feelings did others have around this experience and how did I respond? How was I present or absent to God’s spirit? What about this drew me toward or away from God’s spirit? What made me feel “right” with God and what left me feeling out of sorts? What attracted me, and what distracted me, from attentiveness to God?
5. *Be Responsive:* Is God calling you to some sort of response now? Or to a change in attitude or behavior? In closing, be mindful God has been with you during this time; be sure to thank

**WITH GOD’S  
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SIN, REPENT  
AND RETURN  
TO THE LORD**

God for loving you so much; and pray for the grace to "see you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly." (M.D.C. from Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*)

### *Forgiveness*

Forgiveness is about repairing relationships. Writer Anne Lamott says famously: "Not forgiving is like drinking rat poison and then waiting for the rat to die." Remember that forgiveness does not mean overlooking a wrong or pretending the wrong doesn't matter. In fact, practicing forgiveness does just the opposite. Practicing forgiveness confronts the wrong, brings it out into the open, and removes from it the power to estrange. As a practice for this week, ask for forgiveness from someone you have wronged. Then forgive someone who has wronged you.

### *Confession of Sin*

Read the Confession of Sin on page 360 of the BCP. This confession is less about personal sin and more about sins of the whole corporate body of society, in which each of us is complicit. Examine how your daily life – at home, at work, in the community – contributes to the corporate sins of the body. How can you lessen your contribution to those sins?

### *Repentance*

Repentance means to turn around, to change your heart and mind. What is the one thing in your life that you know pushes you away from God, but that you continue to do anyway? Pray about how you might finally rid yourself of that potential for separation.

### *Temptation*

The Google Corporation (the folks behind the Google search engine) have a company motto: "Don't be evil." This is a great phrase to remember when you have all of the world's information at your fingertips. Temptation is a tricky thing. Indeed, the statistics about people who would steal if they knew they'd get away with it are staggering. Examine your values. What keeps you from doing things you know are wrong? What tells you those things are wrong?

### *Relying on God*

Consider how you resist temptation. Do you rely on the strength of your own will, or do you ask God for help? In your prayer this week, try asking God for help in resisting a specific temptation, regardless of how seemingly "trivial." Try relying on God instead of yourself.

### *Evil*

Are there things you do despite knowing that they create distance between you and God? If so, what? Is that evil? One definition of evil is "that which intentionally opposes the will of God." Is there a time you remember doing that?

### *Litany of Penitence*

Read through the Litany of Penitence on pages 267-269 in The Book of Common Prayer. Choose one of the intercessions, and reflect on how it applies in your own life. You might do this in the form of a letter to God or to Jesus.

### *Re-turning*

How might you symbolically "Re-turn to the Lord" each morning? One way might be to pray the *Prayer of Self-Dedication* on page 832 of the Book of Common Prayer: "Almighty and eternal God, so

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

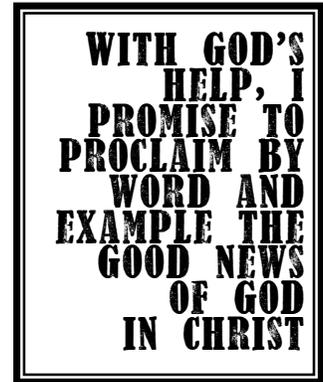
**A SELECTION OF SMALL GROUP PROMPTS**

1. How was your week? When did you feel closest to God? When did you feel farthest away from God?
2. Which practices did you attempt? How did they work for you? If you didn't attempt any, what prevented you from doing so?
3. What was your experience of confronting those things that keep you from being fully present to God? How did the act of confronting them affect your relationship with God?
4. After doing these practices, you may be wondering what is this “evil” you promise to persevere in resisting. Discuss what “evil” is. How have you thought about that concept as you have grown in age and faith?
5. Self-reliance is a prized trait in our society. What are the positive aspects of self-reliance? What are the negatives? How does self-reliance affect a relationship with God?
6. Which practice(s) will you continue doing in the weeks to come? Why?

**PROMISE THREE  
...WORD AND EXAMPLE...**

**PRACTICES TO TRY DURING THE WEEK BEFORE THIS SESSION**

The following practices involve the third of five promises in the Baptismal Covenant (BCP p. 304-05). During the week between sessions three and four of this course, try on a few of these. Some are fairly simple. Others are more difficult or time-consuming. All are designed to help us fulfill our promise to “proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ.”



*If necessary, use words*

St. Francis of Assisi said, “Preach the Gospel at all times; if necessary, use words.” This wonderful statement reframes what proclaiming the Gospel means. The ten to fifteen minute sermon on Sunday morning is only a tiny portion of proclamation: it is a catalyst that sets off the explosion of proclaiming by word and example in the lives of all Christians each day of the week. Listen to the sermon today. Take notes even. What moves you in the sermon? What call to action do you hear? What might you do differently this week because of the sermon?

*Preparing your elevator speech about church*

Preparing for when someone asks you why you go to church.

1. Start with yourself: take out a sheet of paper and write down in one paragraph why you go to church.
2. Then write down how this connects to how you experience God?
3. Prayerfully consider with whom you might share this reflection. Then share it with someone you really trust (partner, friend, priest, dog). It's okay to tell that person that this is an assignment for class!
4. Imagine yourself meeting someone on the elevator who asks you, “So why do you go to church?” Do you feel more prepared to answer the question? If not, try the exercise again.
5. Try sharing your reflection with someone less close to you than the trusted person in step 3.

*Preparing your elevator speech about God*

Write down in one paragraph why you believe in God. Using the steps above, share this with your trusted person.

*Preparing your elevator speech about Jesus and the Gospel*

Of the abundant reasons that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is good news, which reason has been the best news to you personally and why? (Here's a woefully incomplete list to get you started)

1. Freedom
2. Unconditional love
3. Forgiveness
4. Healing
5. Resurrection life
6. Grace
7. Hope
8. Purpose and Meaning

Using the steps above, share this best news with your trusted person.

*The prayer of St. Francis*

Pray this prayer every morning. At the end of the day, reflect on how you have lived out the words of the prayer today. How have you been an instrument of peace today?

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that I receive; it is in pardoning that I am pardoned; and it is in dying that I am born to eternal life. Amen.*

*Incarnating the good news*

You can talk about the good news, but another aspect of this promise is embodying the good news. How might you be an embodiment of the Gospel in the lives of others? How might you be a forgiving influence? A loving influence? A healing influence? A hopeful influence?

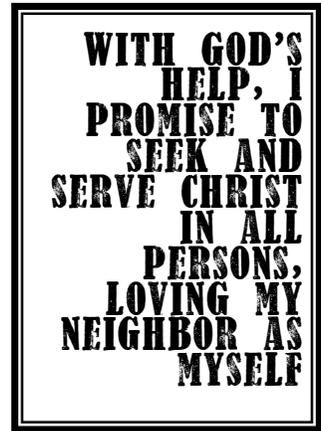
**A SELECTION OF SMALL GROUP PROMPTS**

1. How was your week? When did you feel closest to God? When did you feel farthest away from God?
2. Which practices did you attempt? How did they work for you? If you didn't attempt any, what prevented you from doing so?
3. What emotions did you feel when doing the elevator speech practice?
4. What memories, challenges, hopes, and questions did these exercises bring up for you?
5. Which practice(s) will you continue doing in the weeks to come? Why?

**PROMISE FOUR  
...SEEK AND SERVE...**

**PRACTICES TO TRY DURING THE WEEK BEFORE THIS SESSION**

The following practices involve the fourth of five promises in the Baptismal Covenant (BCP p. 304-05). During the week between sessions four and five of this course, try on a few of these. Some are fairly simple. Others are more difficult or time-consuming. All are designed to help us fulfill our promise to “seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves.”



*Seeking for Christ*

What does it mean to you to “seek for Christ?” Make a list of what you look for in other people that shows that Christ is present in them. When your list is complete, evaluate it with these queries:

- Does your list comprise attributes that, through a combination of those attributes, the list covers all people? If not, what could you add to your list to make it more universal? (After all, we promise to seek Christ in *all* people.)
- Does your list make you think of a single individual in particular? If so, what do you see in that person’s life that make him or her such a wonderful beacon of Christ’s presence?
- How much of yourself do you see in the list? How readily would other people see Christ in you based on what you listed?
- What items on your list do you struggle with? How can you invite God into that struggle so you can display Christ more fully?

*A Stranger on the Bus*

The next time you ride public transportation (bus, train, ferry, plane), take notice of the people around you. There’s a good chance that they will be complete strangers. They may look like you and they may not. They may be reading a novel you just finished or one you’d never in a million years pick up. They may be bopping their heads to a beat from their iPods or adding letters to a crossword. They may be staring off into the distance, or crying, or resting their eyes. No matter who those strangers are, pick one out. Notice that person. Ask yourself: “How might I see Christ in this person?”

*Encountering the Homeless*

The next time you walk past a homeless person, do not ignore him or her. Do one or more of these things instead:

- Make eye contact
- Say “Hello”
- If the person has a cup for change, put some in.
- If you have a paper bill in your pocket, consider putting that in, as well. (For prudent safety reasons, do not take out your wallet.)
- Carry a small gift card to the grocery store in your pocket to give to someone on the street who is in need.

*Next-Door Neighbors*

In our increasingly globalized, tech-driven world, everyone is a potential neighbor. The trouble is, the same forces that allow us to make neighbors with folks who live countries apart from us also

keep us from making neighbors with the people next door. If you have neighbors you've not met, introduce yourself. Invite them over for lemonade or tea.

### *Christ in All Persons*

All persons means *all* persons. Reflect on the one person in your life that you are absolutely sure Christ is *not* in. Then, pray for God to change your mind. Acknowledge that Christ is in that person, too. How does this realization change the way you relate to that person?

### *Teach Me to Love*

One of the greatest challenges and greatest joys in a life of following Jesus Christ is loving others. As Jesus says in the Gospel According to John:

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.” (John 15:12-17)

If you find yourself struggling to love others (and all of us do!), try praying this mantra throughout your day: “Teach me to love as you love.” These words put us in the humble mindset of students learning how to love, and they show God our willingness to live out Jesus' commandment.

### *Self Care*

“Loving your neighbor as yourself” presupposes that you love yourself. Make a list of the ways you take care of yourself. Make a second list of the ways you abuse and overextend yourself. What steps can you take to promote the former and resolve the latter?

## **A SELECTION OF SMALL GROUP PROMPTS**

1. How was your week? When did you feel closest to God? When did you feel farthest away from God?
2. Which practices did you attempt? How did they work for you? If you didn't attempt any, what prevented you from doing so?
3. How does your behavior either promote or inhibit the Christ-self to emerge in others?
4. What did seeking for Christ in others reveal about you?

## **PROMISE FIVE ...JUSTICE AND PEACE...**

### **PRACTICES TO TRY DURING THE WEEK BEFORE THIS SESSION**

The following practices involve the fifth of five promises in the Baptismal Covenant (BCP p. 304-05). During the week between sessions five and six of this course, try on a few of these. Some are fairly simple. Others are more difficult or time-consuming. All are designed to help us fulfill our promise to “strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.”

#### *Framing Stories*

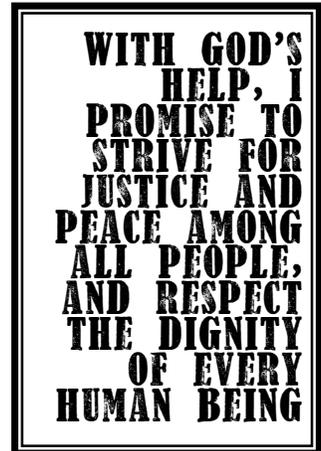
Awareness of peace and justice issues often starts with awareness of the “framing stories” under which we live. These stories are the unseen narratives that shape our lives. They combine cultural, historical, societal, scientific, religious, philosophical, ethical, economic, and environmental forces, all of which push and pull our lives in multiple directions. In his book *Everything Must Change*, pastor and theologian Brian McLaren proposes that the overarching framing story of our lives is flawed on many levels, leading to the breakdown of society from the standpoints of prosperity, security, and equity. Prayerfully consider the framing story in which you operate. Take into consideration the forces listed above (cultural, historical, etc.) How can you participate with God in changing that framing story? Here are some examples:

1. Work to reduce your carbon footprint – the frame story tells Americans that it is okay to use up well more than our share of energy reserves, but we needn’t buy into that tale.
2. Lessen your consumption overall – Again, the frame story tells Americans to buy bigger houses, bigger cars, more stuff. But we don’t need those things.
3. Be open and accepting of others’ beliefs – the frame story pits religions and philosophical systems against one another, but there surely can be coexistence, sharing, and peace.
4. Learn about other cultures – cultural isolation generates erroneous frame stories; get to know someone from another continent and learn his or her story.
5. Examine your values – what does the frame story teach you to hold dear. How does this differ from the values you learned at home, school, or church?

#### *The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)*

Striving for justice, peace, and dignity happens on personal, local, national, and international levels. In 2000, the United Nations promulgated the list of eight “Millennium Development Goals,” which it pledged to address by 2015. This list has guided policy initiative and planning since. Churches have taken the list and used it to focus attention on the fifth Baptismal Promise. The eight goals are:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.
2. Achieve universal primary education.
3. Promote gender equality and empower women.
4. Reduce child mortality.
5. Improve maternal health.
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases.
7. Ensure environmental sustainability.
8. Develop a global partnership for development.



Prayerfully consider these issues. In the words of Frederick Buechner, where does the “world’s deep hunger,” (as expressed in the MDGs) meet your “deep gladness”? In other words, in what way do you feel God calling you to address these issues?

From an community standpoint, the United Nations Development Programme (*undp.org*) suggests that all organizations designate 0.7% of their budgets to addressing the MDGs. How can our church community work to address these on a parish-wide level?

### *Long Island Shelter*

Talk to a parishioner who has visited the Long Island Shelter, and learn about his or her experience. Then attend the next St. Stephen’s visit to the Long Island Shelter. Interact with the people the shelter serves. Monitor your feelings about being with people less fortunate than yourself. Do you feel humbled? Smug? Ashamed? Grateful? Unworthy? Frightened? Renewed? How can you make a difference in the lives of those whom Jesus deems “the least of these my children?” (Matthew 25)

### *Quincy Crisis Center*

Join other St. Stephen's parishioners in our kitchen and prepare a meal to take to the Quincy Crisis Center. This center feeds hundreds of people everyday, and dedicated people from St. Stephen’s help make this possible.

### *Cohasset Elder Affairs*

Respecting the dignity of all people includes respecting those on the margins, including the elders in our own community. Cohasset Elder Affairs does just that. Their mission “is to offer outstanding Programs and Services that provide for the physical, social and emotional needs of our older adults by assisting them to lead independent, stimulating and self-reliant lives as members of the Community.” Call Carol Barnett at CEA and see how you can respect the dignity of some of our oldest community members. (781-383-9112)

### *The Episcopal News Service*

The Episcopal News Service is a way to stay connected with the doings of other Episcopalians around the country and around the world. <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/ens>

### *The Episcopal Public Policy Network (EPPN)*

The Episcopal Public Policy Network is a grassroots advocacy group that raises awareness about issues of concern for Episcopalians who are attempting to live out this Baptismal Promise. According to the EPPN, “Advocacy involves efforts to educate, motivate, organize and empower Episcopalians to action for justice, peace and care for all of God’s creation.” The EPPN breaks down its advocacy policy into these three groups:

1. *Socio-Economic Justice:* At home and abroad, social and economic inequity breeds poverty, disease, violence and oppression. Socio-economic justice policy drives our work of racial justice, economic fairness and social outreach.
2. *Environmental Justice:* The Earth, and everything in it, is as much our neighbor as our fellow human beings. We live in fragile interdependence with all of God's creation. Environmental justice policy reminds us that ALL creation is good, and requires our attention and care.
3. *Global Justice:* Conflict and human rights abuses around the world lead to hunger, sickness, death and destruction. Our policies inform our work for justice and peace in the world.

Learn more about the EPPN here: <http://episcopal.grassroots.com>





