

This essay is the last chapter in *Churches: The Local Church and the Structures of Change* edited by Michael Warren (Portland, OR: Pastoral Press of Oregon Catholic Press, 2000).

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# **Christian Practices and Congregational Education in Faith<sup>i</sup>**

**by**  
**Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra**

Ours is a time of widespread spiritual hunger. People seem to be searching for something, though they often have a hard time articulating exactly what it is. Sometimes it seems that the search is for meaning, sometimes for worth or belonging. Sometimes this elusive something is called "spirituality." Whatever they call it, many people feel that something is missing from their lives. Yet it is clearly not some *thing* that they are lacking. This search is not for *more* but for *kind*, for a qualitative dimension. It is for a kind of life, a way of living, a way of being and doing that is truly alive to God, neighbor, and self – a way of life that, to use a biblical phrase, chooses life.

Helping people to see and grow stronger in such a way of life is what education and formation in Christian faith are all about, too. Though they can sometimes seem remote from the hungers of contemporary culture, faithful education and formation at their best involve Christians in a life-long process of learning to choose life in all its fullness. Within this process, however, our hunger is transformed: We discover that full, rich and meaningful ways of living take on patterns that are in accord with what is true and good.

This essay arises from our conviction that worshipping Christian communities *know* something about such patterns. Their knowledge appears not only in their written or spoken affirmations, however. It is also

embedded in "Christian practices," in the *things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs, in response to and in the light of God's active presence for the life of the world.*<sup>ii</sup> As the bearers of such practices, congregations are places where Christian people, as individuals and as communities, can take on the patterns of a way of life that chooses life. In the pages ahead, we shall explore this claim, suggest its usefulness to interpreters of congregational life, and propose a practices-focused approach to education and formation in Christian faith.

Let us begin with the example of a single practice: the practice of *hospitality to strangers.*<sup>iii</sup> This practice has been embodied in such places as the monasteries that have sheltered travelers in late antiquity and still do today; the urban soup kitchens run by Catholic Workers; and the French village of LeChambon, where Huguenots protected thousands of Jews from the Nazis during World War II. These communities' acts of kindness – often done at great risk and always at considerable cost – were remarkable. But *random* they were not. Each act was sustained by a way of life. Years of "practicing" prepared the members of these communities to answer a knock at their doors in a certain way. There was room in their lives and in their hearts for hospitable acts – not infinite, unboundaried room, but a certain kind of open space. In these places, hospitality has been grounded in a way of life made up of very real, everyday elements done in certain ways instead of other ways – elements like handshakes and words of greeting and food and furniture and the use of time.

This sort of profound participation in the practice of hospitality to strangers does not emerge naturally. It is taught and learned. Good hosts learn stories that frame the practice; they enact rituals that include words and gestures of hospitality; they reflect deliberately on the shape and limits of the practice in their community. In the course of all these, the how and why of the practice is implicated in some of the deepest affirmations of the tradition that shapes their way of life. The practice of hospitality becomes a response to God's own hospitality in preparing creation as our dwelling place. It is instructed by the glad surprise that came when Abraham welcomed three strangers to his tent and by the obligation of a people who had wandered in the wilderness always henceforth to welcome strangers, for they had been strangers themselves. It is empowered by seeing the practice in the life of Jesus, who accepted the hospitality of sinners and preached about a banquet to which people would come from east and west, from north and south. It continues within a centuries-long process of formation and reformation, as successive generations of Christians seek, in ever new contexts, to shape ways of life that show forth the love of God and the love of neighbor in the very concrete practice of hospitality to strangers.

At our own moment in history, when millions of people around the world and near at hand are displaced from their homes, it is easy to see that hospitality is a practice that addresses a fundamental human need. Also evident, however, is the fact that fitting and gracious responses are often absent, overcome by the widespread human fear of strangers. Where people are able to resist such fear, they do so most readily through a social practice that is shared by the members of a hospitable community. Hospitality is made up of hard work accomplished under risky conditions; without structures and commitments for welcoming strangers, fear crowds out what needs to be done. Hospitable places where guests can disclose the gifts they bear come into being only when people take up this practice and grow wise, by experience, in doing it well.

Christian tradition makes normative claims about what truths shape this practice and mark its enactments as theologically and ethically sound. Using the term "hospitality" is not enough to mark the offering of shelter as an embodiment of this practice; even though there are fundamental human linkages between what is called "the hospitality industry" and a Catholic Worker House of Hospitality, these two forms of sheltering strangers arise from different motives and pursue different aims. When a practice such as hospitality to strangers takes shape in continuity with the narrative and content of Christian tradition, it embodies some of the wisdom of that tradition; and when that happens, living the practice shapes not only the behavior but also the spirits of the practitioners.

Often it is ritual that makes these connections manifest, crystallizing the meaning of the practice and holding it up in normative form for all to contemplate and enter, renewed. In the Hispanic community, for example, the ritual of Las Posadas provides a liturgical setting in which the whole community takes part in celebrating and affirming the practice of hospitality to strangers. In the days before Christmas Eve, community members reenact the drama of Joseph and Mary's search for a place to stay as the birth of their baby draws near; going from house to house, they sing their request for shelter, only to be turned away. When, on Christmas Eve, they are finally taken in, the community rejoices with a feast, having learned once again the goodness of receiving the stranger.

Today, as shared ways of life capable of sustaining hospitality change all around us, our culture is experiencing a crisis in this practice. Not only are most American Christians unlikely to risk the radical hospitality of the monk or the Chambonais, we retreat also from policies that would address homelessness or give decent welcome to immigrants. We turn away from the faces of those who are strange to us, and we rarely break bread with those from whom we are estranged. In fact, as *life style* replaces *way of life*, even the basic hospitality of the family table seems imperiled.

**Change is also rocking most of the other activities that address fundamental human needs in our society. Such change affects the most basic things people do, things like getting dressed, caring for the sick, playing games, resolving disputes, and forming households. Some of the change is good, insofar as it breaks ancient patterns of oppression; some is bad, insofar as it destroys communities; some we can't judge yet. In any case, rapid change heightens the urgency of thinking together about and growing stronger in the practices through which Christian communities over time characteristically address these needs in ways that respond to and reflect the light of God's active presence for the life of the world.**

**Hospitality is only one of the practices to which we need to attend. Many other shared Christian activities also cry out for reflection and strengthening. As a starting point, we propose a set of twelve: honoring the body, hospitality, household economics, saying yes and saying no, keeping sabbath, testimony, discernment, shaping communities, forgiveness, healing, dying well, and singing our lives.<sup>iv</sup> Each is fundamental to human well-being and informed by the wisdom of Christian tradition; each is also, sadly, in danger in our time.**

**We shall argue that Christian congregations are crucial places for teaching and learning practices such as these. First, however, we must explore more fully what Christian social practices are – and thus what we mean when we say that practices are *things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs, in response to and in the light of God's active presence for the life of the world.* Key features include the following.**

**(1) Practices address fundamental human needs and conditions. They are not trivial; they matter deeply to human well-being. In practices, a basic, often inarticulate, understanding of the human condition finds its fitting response in concrete, practical human acts. A fundamental human condition is that we all have bodies; a fundamental human need is that our bodies be honored – note violated, not ridiculed, not murdered. A fundamental human condition is that we are all mortal; a fundamental human need is to die with a sense of being upheld by the One who is the source of life itself and knowing that our life has somehow mattered to ourselves, to others and to God. A fundamental human condition is our vulnerability to being cast upon the mercy of strangers; a fundamental human need is for hospitality. Practices are thus congruent with the necessities of human existence.**

**(2) Practices involve us in God's activities in the world. They are the human activities in and through which people cooperate with God in doing what needs to be done, given the fact of our humanness. Thus needy travelers are beckoned inside, given some supper and shown where to**

sleep. The hosts may or may not be able to explain why they do these things, but in fact they are engaging in a practice that is informed by ancient wisdom: they are practicing hospitality to strangers. The other practices are like this, providing concrete help for human flourishing. In doing so they become the means of human participation in God's own care and redemption of the world.

(3) Practices involve a profound awareness, a deep knowing: they are activities imbued with thinking – imbued, in fact, with the knowledge of God. Moreover, participation in these practices is precisely how we come to such knowledge and awareness. To understand this point, we can take a lesson from Rabbi Samuel H. Dresner's explication of a central Jewish practice, the observance of the sabbath: "One can never truly know the inward feeling of the Sabbath without the outward form. The Sabbath is not a theory to be contemplated, a concept to be debated, or an idea to be toyed with. It is a day, a day filled with hours and minutes and seconds, all of which are hallowed by the wonderful pattern of living that the nobility of the human spirit has fashioned over the course of the centuries."<sup>v</sup> In a similar way, the Christian practices we are describing are not abstract obligations, rules, or ideas; rather, they are patterns of living that are full of meaning. Each practice carries particular convictions about what is good and true, embodying these convictions in physical, down-to-earth forms.

(4) Practices are social and historical. Practices are activities people do with and for one another over time. Since each of us is mortal, only corporate, social action can be extended over long periods of time and in a wide variety of social and cultural circumstances. Practices are patterned, human activities carried on by whole communities of people, not just in one particular location but across nations and generations. Even when we do them alone – praying silently in our own rooms, for example – we do them after learning them from, and in continuity with, those who have done them in the past and who do them around the world today. The specific forms are flexible, taking on the contours of many societies and cultures; but something about the Christian way of forgiving or resting or testifying ties the separate instances together. The Christian practices of a contemporary Christian congregation are intricately, though mysteriously, linked to the practices of communities long ago. At the same time, they are also oriented toward the future, as communities today search for ways to give full expression to the good purposes of the practices in the contemporary context.

(5) Thus each practice can – indeed, must – be crafted in varied ways and forms, depending on the specific cultural and social situations in which it is manifest. In a sense, practices sweep through history, seeming somehow larger than any person or specific community. But when a practice is vital and authentic, it is also very concrete and particular, very

here-and-now. It is made up of many apparently small gestures and words and images and objects, taking fresh form each day as it subtly adapts to find expression in each neighborhood or cultural group. The particular elements that compose it change from time to time and place to place; some of them, indeed, have yet to be imagined. And yet they are recognizably appropriate to and part of a discernible, historical Christian practice. The content of Christian practices resists those features of contemporaneous cultural practices that are not congruent with human well-being; but at the same time, practices that are explicitly identified as Christian practices often overlap and merge with good activities arising from other traditions.

(6) Practices pursue the good, involving us in life patterns that reflect God's grace and love. When a teenager knows with certainty that her parents honor her body, she begins to understand her God-given strength and beauty. When the bereaved are surrounded by mourners who sing and pray, they become able to thank God for the life of their beloved. When an overstressed worker takes one day every week to worship, feast, and play, he is renewed in relation to God, other people and the work that he does on the other days of the week. In all these things, people share in the practices of God, who has also honored the human body, embraced death and rested, calling creation good.

(7) At the same time, there is no denying that actual communities rarely if ever attain transparent participation in Christian practices. Both our individual failings and the wrongs embedded in economic or political structures set obstacles in the way of practices that are good for all people. Indeed, any given practice can become so distorted that its outcome becomes evil rather than good. Thus much of the thinking we need to do about practices is critical thinking, thinking that can disclose how destructively the basic activities of human life can actually be organized – globally, in American society, in our churches and in our homes. If we are willing to risk further change, however, this kind of thinking can also guide us into renewed ways of life.

(8) Participating in practices shapes people in certain ways, developing in them certain habits, virtues and capacities of mind and spirit. Communities become hospitable – and so do individuals – as they move from fear to openness. Such becoming involves an increasing generosity that can stretch not only the purse but also the heart. The content of each practice challenges, lures, coaxes and sometimes drags its practitioners into new capacities and ways of being that are commensurate with that practice. It is easy to see how singers acquire skills in their practice, taking a pitch from others, developing a repertoire, and learning when to stand, when to breathe and when to boost or diminish the volume. Sometimes – often, we hope – music even happens! Though harder to

recognize, other practices – practices like forgiving, discerning, healing, and sabbath keeping – develop capacities in their practitioners as well.

(9) All of the practices of daily life come to a focus in worship. As the community gathers to share words, gestures, images and material things that make manifest the presence of God, each of the Christian practices is rendered more visible, more articulate, more pure. Worshipers glimpse what Christian hospitality or forgiveness or healing can more fully be, encountering them afresh in the rich thickness of song and scripture, greeting and giving. In one sense, we learn something about the practices by participating in their liturgical expressions. In a deeper sense this process is not didactic for at worship both we and the practices encounter the *mystery* of God. Sacraments, after all, are not practices but gifts, gifts greater than our own power to conceive them, gifts greater even than the power of death. Receiving them together in worship, we receive anew the way of life we have entered, now not as task but as gift.

Honoring the body, hospitality, household economics, saying yes and saying no, keeping sabbath, testimony, discernment, shaping communities, forgiveness, healing, dying well, singing our lives – woven together, these constitute a *way of life*. Each of these practices could be found somewhere in the life of every Christian congregation. Sometimes one practice, or more, might be so frail that detecting it would be quite a job, while finding distortions at many points would be easy. Yet sometimes a certain congregation knows a certain practice by heart, and we can see the practice taking shape with great profundity in that concrete setting. Reading the practices as they take shape in the life of a particular congregation can help us to discern what knowledge of God's active presence in the world these little bands of human beings bear.

Viewing congregations in this way, we would see the practices not only in the activities done in or by the congregation officially acting as congregation, however. We would also see practices in the activities of members in their homes and schools, in their places of work and play, sometimes conflicting, and sometimes congruent with those of the congregation. And in this doubleness would lie a dimension of challenge and complexity, not only for those who look *at* congregations, but more importantly, for those who seek to live faithfully under their guidance.

So it has been since Christian congregations came into being. In *The Origins of Christian Morality*, the New Testament scholar Wayne Meeks examines early Christian congregations as communities of shared practices. Practices, he argues, shaped and reinforced the moral sensibilities of the earliest Christians and defined the tensions they experienced in daily life beyond their communities. Upon entering the church, Christians took up a set of specific communal activities that taught them the way of life they were entering: baptism, eucharist, hours of

prayer, and certain patterns of eating, hospitality, giving, admonition and healing. Belief and behavior, action and thought were integrally related in these activities; theological convictions were woven into the social forms of community life. But when these Christians went home from their communal meetings, these clear patterns frayed. Meeks continues, "One way of thinking about the great monastic movements that developed in the fourth century and later is as an attempt to resolve the tension between the practices of 'the world' and the practices of the Christian community, by renouncing the former to the maximum extent possible. For most Christians, however, . . . the Christian life was an amphibian life, life at the same time in the old world that was passing away and in the new world that was coming."<sup>vi</sup>

Anyone who has studied even a little church history and Christian ethics – or looked closely at the contemporary religious scene – is aware that the tensions Meeks describes are enduring ones. But it is precisely this "amphibian" quality of Christian life that makes the combination of practices and congregations so generative, for practices are inextricably tied to God and to the gathered life of the church *and also* thoroughly entangled in the stuff of everyday living. The twelve practices we have named do not happen only within the gathered Christian community; they also become manifest in the daily lives of practitioners in other spheres. Moreover, in the public realm Christian practitioners find themselves working with the members of many different communities of practice to address fundamental human needs or to resist the cultural, economic and social forces that erode such practices and leave fundamental human needs unmet. They move from one context of practice to another, in other words, like amphibians, though perhaps not conscious that they are doing so.

More than any places, however, congregations are the settings where people look for the resources to bridge these contexts – the places where they hope to learn about life-giving patterns of life suited to the multiple complex contexts in which they now live. Joining a congregation is not the same as going into the desert – it leaves one an amphibian – but congregations do resemble monasteries in aspiring to model the way things are supposed to be in their own internal life; they aim to develop shared internal practices that are theologically sound and, indeed, continuous with communal practices of early Christianity. Yet congregations are also significantly different from monasteries, for they are perpetually and unavoidably open to what Meeks calls "the practices of 'the world.'" They do not draw only highly dedicated adherents, nor do their members usually journey great distances for the sake of joining. Rather, congregations are deeply embedded in very specific localities, where members live always elbow-to-elbow with nonmembers. They are much more porous than monasteries; the members, and the surrounding

**culture, seep in and out all the time, mixing the worlds of home, school, work, the media, a city and the congregation willy-nilly every day.**

**Congregations are brilliantly adaptive institutions in that they become immersed in their own unique local settings. Critical theologians are aware that this can be a liability, as congregations lose their theological distinctiveness over/against the surrounding culture; but this peril is only one side of the story of congregational adaptiveness. At the same time, congregations are also, remarkably, the places where people encounter Christian practices that more or less resist the social forms through which the surrounding culture addresses fundamental human needs. Indeed, congregations are among the few places where people deliberately expose themselves to that which is strange to both local cultures and the mass media. Sometimes, as at LeChambon, the resultant call to participate in the startling practices of God is sharp and clear, while in other settings it may be barely perceptible. But the strangeness is there nonetheless, in the Biblical text and the liturgy.**

**Such qualities make congregations places where the patterns of people's daily lives beyond the church can encounter the critical challenge, the gracious help and the transforming power of Christian faith over long periods of time. They are places where members can *practice* the practices of Christian faith.**

**What foundation does this way of thinking provide for education and formation in Christian faith, particularly in a time when many people are searching for something they can barely name?**

**To act with and for other people over time in response to fundamental human needs and in the light of God's active presence is to have a *way of life* that adds up to something, and not merely a *life style*. It is a way that can draw on the wisdom and testimony of past generations while also being alert to the urgent needs of contemporary people. Educating and forming one another in this way is a guiding purpose of Christian education.**

**Yet obstacles arise – and one of these is the problem we might call "the problem of the too big and the too small." The problem of the too big is that our purposes as Christian educators are rightly and necessarily large: they have to do ultimately with learning a whole way of life. But that kind of purpose is too large, too grand, too big to be of much directly useful guidance. Something that large is impossible to get your mind around. It's too big to do.**

**The problem of the too small is the opposite. In our actual work of educating we do a little of this and a little of that and a little of something**

else. But too often it doesn't seem to add up to much. We can't tell what larger wholes these smaller pieces are parts of. The connections get lost, and we lose any sense of the significance and import of particular educational activities and projects and events. That's the problem of the too small.

Part of the educational significance of the idea and social reality of Christian practices is that this concept provides a good answer to the problem of the too big and the too small. It breaks down a way of life into a set of constructive practices. At the same time, it draws together the shards and pieces of particular events, behaviors, actions, relationships, inquiries and skills into large enough wholes to show how they might add up to a way of life.

In the present cultural context, Christian educators need to think about how to lead people beyond a reliance on "random acts of kindness" into shared patterns of life that are informed by the deepest insights of our tradition, and about how to lead people beyond privatized spiritualities into more thoughtful participation in God's activity in the world. In the mainstream Protestant communions to which the two of us belong, large numbers of members – and even some leaders – often seem to be unaware of the rich insights and strong help the Christian tradition can bring to today's concerns. Thinking about our *way of life* as standing in dynamic continuity with our Christian heritage and with the world-wide church today opens fresh sources of insight into how the practices that pattern our days can shape our lives in ways that respond to the active presence of God for the life of the world. Reflecting together on the shared activities we are calling "Christian practices" can help us learn from the generous spirituality of historic Christian faith even while we walk the unfamiliar path that lies ahead, through the surprising realities of each new context.

Thus the practical theological assessment and transformation of practices can be a generative focus for congregation-based efforts in Christian education, as Christians try to assist one another and the larger society towards a future whose patterns of life are wholesome and just. What is required is thoughtful attention to practices and Christian mindfulness of them as we enter them in church and society in a time of rapid social reconfiguration.

Let us once again consider as an example the practice of hospitality to strangers. Many congregations have already come to closer attention to this practice in response to specific challenges. An urban Presbyterian church was forced to consider this, for example, when homeless people came into the after-service coffee hour and swept all the cookies off the platters into their shopping bags. After considerable debate over how to respond, the congregation founded Rosie's Place, which now serves

**lunches to homeless women several days a week. In this same congregation, meanwhile, some of the other hospitable events by which they had welcomed newcomers over the years were dying out; as the generations turned, fewer members had time to prepare casseroles for potluck suppers, and a gap was opening in the communal patterns of the congregation. Some of the gap was filled by small groups formed around special interests; several of these became warm friendship circles, small enough to meet in a member's home or to fit around a restaurant table and open enough to absorb new members at an appropriate pace.**

**Through these new patterns of shared life, this congregation was responding to fundamental human needs in ways that were both informed by the Christian tradition and alert to the concrete possibilities of its own context. Reflection on these new patterns as aspects of a single Christian practice might lead them to consider other aspects of congregational life as well.**

**Does the congregation's worship life bespeak hospitality? Has it taken seriously the eschatological hospitality celebrated in its prime meal, the Lord's Supper? How is it helping children and other newcomers to learn the practice? What does Christian mindfulness about hospitality suggest for families or friendship groups in the congregation? What insights might the members' experience of practicing hospitality as a congregation enable them to contribute to the larger society's debate over the practice of hospitality? Questions such as these will not be easy to answer. But it will be fruitful to take them up, however, not as a way of imposing abstract ethical norms but for the sake of strengthening a *practice* in which the congregation is already active.**

**Christian practices appear in slightly different forms in each unique local congregation and surrounding community. Deliberate and ordered thinking, observing and participating could enable people to notice, analyze, renew and publicly explain the practices in their own situations.<sup>vii</sup> The concreteness of practices and their grounding in the Bible and theology make them an excellent way to focus on many dimensions of a congregation's life, both as they are and as we yearn for them to be. An exploration of this sort could focus on any of the twelve practices we have named, as well as on other practices identified in particular communities. They would include attention to questions such as these:**

**(a) How is this congregation already participating in each practice in its life together? What would an analysis of a week's schedule disclose about how various church activities embody specific practices? What practices are provided with room and resources within the church building itself? Where in the church building do people participate in specific practices?**

**(b) How does this congregation's participation in the practices prepare members to engage in the practices in their daily lives, at home and at work? Conversely, how does their participation in the practices in those places influence what happens among the people gathered as church?**

**(c) Are some of the practices done especially well here? Certain congregations have a gift for a certain practice, such as singing our lives or surrounding one another with care when death comes. Similarly, certain denominational or cultural streams within Christianity are more closely attuned to a certain practice, such as testimony, forgiveness, or sabbath keeping. Congregations can be helped by this way of thinking to identify the gifts they bear.**

**(d) Where are the practices missing or broken in this congregation? Is there evidence of pain or yearning that suggests that a certain practice is in trouble? With what practice does this congregation need help? What biblical, theological, historical and practical resources can help to cleanse and amplify their participation in the practice?**

**(e) How are the practices related to one another in this congregation? How does participating in one of them lead people into the others? Or does it?**

**(f) How does what happens in Sunday morning worship help the gathered people to understand and grow in Christian practices? Do the words, gestures, images, sounds and feel of the liturgy vividly manifest the active presence of God in and for the life of the world and warmly invite worshipers to offer response?**

**If, as we claim, worshiping Christian congregations know something about a way of life that is in accord with what is good and true, the explicit exploration of Christian practices can provide a means of articulating, amplifying and clarifying that knowledge, so that each unique congregation might grow stronger in that way and better able to invite others to walk it as well. Such an exploration would make an important contribution alongside the everyday learning and growth that take place within the ordinary flow of congregational and daily life, as members enter into the practices with and for one another and the world. This is of great importance, particularly in a fast-paced, divided and violent society where fundamental human needs often go unmet, and where the patterns of life even of Christian congregations and individuals are too often misshapen. Alert to Christian practices, we may learn in our congregations to comprehend more fully the knowledge they bear and to embody more wholly the divine grace and love they reflect.**

## NOTES

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<sup>ii</sup> We originally developed this definition as part of the working group that produced *Practicing Our Faith*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997). The idea of "practices" has received much attention from philosophers and social scientists in recent years. Our use of the term is loosely based on the work of the moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre (see *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2d ed. [Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984], pp. 187-88). Craig Dykstra led the way in exploring how this idea can helpfully address our yearning for a Christian way of life. See his *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education in Christian Practice* (Louisville KY: Geneva Press, 1999), and "Reconceiving Practice," in *Shifting Boundaries: Contextual Approaches to the Structure of Theological Education*, ed. Barbara G. Wheeler and Edward Farley (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991).

<sup>iii</sup> A brilliant exposition of the Christian practice of hospitality to strangers is Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

<sup>iv</sup> *Practicing Our Faith* includes an essay on each of these twelve.

<sup>v</sup> Samuel H. Dresner, *The Sabbath* (New York: Burning Bush Press, 1970), p. 21.

<sup>vi</sup> Wayne Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 109.

<sup>vii</sup> Suggestions for this process are in Dorothy C. Bass et al., *Practicing Our Faith: A Guide for Learning, Conversation, and Growth* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997). The questions in the next few paragraphs are adapted from this source.

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**Michael Warren, ed. *Churches: The Local Church and the Structures of Change*. Portland, OR: Pastoral Press of Oregon Catholic Press, 2000.**

Available from Pastoral Press, A Division of OCP Publications, 5536 N.E. Hassalo, Portland OR 97213. Phone 800.LITURGY (548.8749).  
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