



ST. ANDREW'S LENT 2022

A Season of Preparation and Anticipation

PARTY! PRACTICE! PARTY!

*We invite you to join us on a Lenten journey as we
give up "normal" for Lent*

What you hold in your hand is a suggestion for this year's Lenten practice. As a general theme, we are "giving up normal for Lent" this year. After 2 long years of pandemic, we long for a return to normal – but at the same time, we are more aware than ever that what we have called "normal" is not good for us, not good for the planet, and not good for the church. So this Lent, we're experimenting with giving up the old normal, and trying to find a new normal.

But we don't just want to think about giving up normal – we'd also like to practice it. We'd like to try some spiritual practices that might practically, in our bodies and our real lives, build up a new, healthier, more faithful normal.

We invite you to try it! We hope this program will be a way to reconnect as a church, to experience some real growth, and even to have a bit of fun along the way.



ST. ANDREW'S UNITED CHURCH

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PARTY!

We invite you first of all to start with a bit of a party. Oh, it may be a bit early to have a big crowd and share a meal together, but we hope there's a small group with whom you can gather over coffee, or to share a meal.

We won't be doing a big pancake dinner on Shrove Tuesday this year (though we might just manage it later in Lent!) so we invite you to do something on a smaller scale.



- If you're comfortable doing this in person, find one or two other households – folks in your “cohort” – with whom you can gather close to the beginning of Lent. You might have a pancake supper, meet for coffee, go out for a meal, or something else!
- If not in person, perhaps you can gather your cohort on Zoom (or equivalent) – have a “happy hour” or something, just to make a connection.
- As part of your gathering, bring these guides to practice, and talk together about what sort of a practice you'd like to try for Lent.
- This is important: when you choose one or more practices, don't do it as if you are making a resolution, or a hard-and-fast promise. **Rather, set an intention – say to each other, “this is what I intend to do this Lent.” As you go, things may change – and that's okay.**
- After Easter, we'll invite you to get together with these same people and tell each other how it's gone!

PICK A PRACTICE!

We'd like to invite those who are interested to pick a practice, for this Lent, and try it out through the entire Lenten period, if at all possible. Doing a spiritual practice for a day or a week is a novelty; doing it for 6 weeks through Lent might just be a beginning. Pick any of these practices or design your own! Be careful, though, of picking too many; we want this to be a joyful, curious exploration and not a burden. Each of these suggested practices is connected with one or more of the Sunday themes through Lent.

Our overall theme is Giving up normal for Lent, and the idea is to identify aspects of our "normal" that are causing harm to us, our society, and our world. We are hoping to let go, to "give up," these harmful aspects of normal. But these practices work in a different way -- they are something to take up, as a way of building a new normal, an alternative to the normal we know.

These are all practices that might be done individually or in groups, or families. I am hoping that the practices are all (potentially) simple and concrete enough for children to participate, and deep enough that they can challenge any of us. If you choose to do one or more of these as a family, talk it through as a family, to decide how best to do it so that it fits with who you are and what your life is like. Any of these practices can certainly be adapted as you see fit -- this is a resource for you! And feel absolutely free to design and choose your own practice.

LISTENING



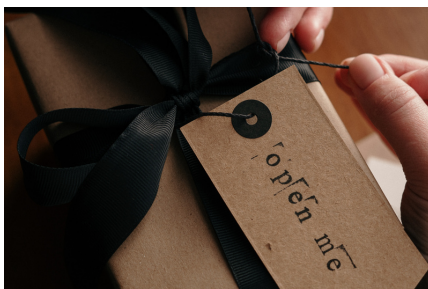
REVERENCE



CONTEMPLATION



GENEROSITY



COMMON GOOD



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PRACTICE 1: APPRECIATIVE LISTENING



GIVE UP THINKING WE'RE THE BEST, TAKE UP CURIOSITY: THE PRACTICE OF APPRECIATIVE LISTENING

The idea of this practice is to pay attention to another culture -- or other aspect of diversity in our society -- and look for what is good, what is beautiful, what is a blessing.

Eat in an ethnic restaurant and try to experience the “feel” of the place and the people there. Read a book that is from another culture or language, or which immerses you in another culture. Listen to some music that is outside of your usual comfort zone (and pay attention to the lyrics, if there are any!). See if there is an interfaith or cultural event during Lent. Look for what is good.

Suggested books (or drop by the library and ask for recommendations for books from other cultures):

- Here I Sit, by Rene Fumoleau
- The Inconvenient Indian by Thomas King
- Indian Horse by Richard Wagamese (or any of his books)
- Obasan by Joy Kagawa
- White Fragility by Robin Diangelo
- The Response of Weeds by Bertrand Bickersteth
- Queer Virtue by Elizabeth Edman

Other ideas: Read about or try a practice from another religion. You needn't go too far out of your comfort zone, or do anything that feels wrong – but some practices and prayers “translate” quite easily.

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PRACTICE 2: REVERENCE



GIVE UP DOMINANCE OVER NATURE, TAKE UP REVERENCE: THE PRACTICE OF REVERENCE

The idea of this practice is to get out into Creation and appreciate it as deeply as you can. Take a regular walk -- but don't simply walk! Say a prayer before you go, and as you walk, pay attention to the beauty around you. Open as many of your senses as you can. Look deeply, try to identify the birds and the trees and shrubs. If walking is an issue, try to find a place to sit outside, or look through a window as carefully and fully as you can. What do you see? Here are some other ideas for this practice:

- **All my relations:** This phrase in Mohawk is on the United Church crest, and is common to many indigenous spiritualities as well as being congenial with Christianity. We are made of the earth, and we breathe air that the plants and trees create, and our bodies are composed of the fruits of the earth that we eat. We are intimately connected to, and related to, all that is. Say the phrase to yourself as you walk or look out the window, and realize your connection to all that is.
- **Tree-hugging:** you might want to find a secluded place for this, but try hugging a tree (or otherwise being in physical contact). Trees remain in place, rooted in the ground, staying put for decades. What happens when you pay attention to a tree, when you attend to the world from the perspective of a tree?
- **Grab a field guide** -- birds, or trees and shrubs. It's a little difficult in winter/early spring, but see if you can learn the names of some of the creatures with which we share this place. Can you learn to identify the birds from their calls? Can you begin to sense what the calls mean? Which are alarm calls, territory calls, social calls?
- **Green Idea!** Support a green project or start your own.
- **Use your senses:** Close your eyes for instance, and pay attention to what you hear, feel, smell...
- **"Clean up":** outside – picking up garbage, for instance.
- **Be Environmentally Conscious:** Walk, rather than driving, whenever possible.

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PRACTICE 3: CONTEMPLATION



GIVING UP THE NEED TO BE RIGHT, TAKING UP AWARENESS: THE PRACTICE OF CONTEMPLATION

This practice is really foundational to many of the other practices -- it is designed to disconnect us a bit from our own thinking. We often are led to think that we ARE what we think; but there is a deeper self, with deeper connections.

What we think about God, and how we image God, can't do justice to God. But we all have a connection with God that is deeper than thought. This practice is an attempt to attend to that deeper self, and that deeper connection. The practice itself is quite simple:

- **Set a timer for 10 - 20 minutes:** 20 minutes is suggested (some may want more) so that you get a chance to experience the depth of this practice.
- **Sit comfortably:** Meditation teachers suggest feet on the floor, back straight, relaxed but alert.
- **Find a focus for your attention:** Most prefer the breath; focus on the feel of your breath as it moves in and out of your nose, or possibly your chest. Another option is a particular word, that you might repeat as a focus. Perhaps "Jesus" or "beloved."
- **Pray:** Say a brief prayer to the effect that your intention for this time is to simply spend time with God, to attend to that deep connection with God who is "nearer than breathing, closer than hands or feet."
- **Start the timer:** Simply keep your attention on your breath or your word, gently repeated.

PRACTICE 3: CONTEMPLATION



GIVING UP THE NEED TO BE RIGHT, TAKING UP AWARENESS: THE PRACTICE OF CONTEMPLATION

- You will notice that your mind is frequently distracted. It will wander off; lists, daydreams, worries, the pain in your knee. Don't beat yourself up, this is what minds do! Whenever you notice you are distracted, simply turn your attention back to your focus. You might identify the distraction (List. Worry. Daydream.) but don't pursue it -- just return to the breath.
- When the time is up, simply give thanks to God for the time spent, and go back to the day!

This practice is NOT a quick fix -- but you may notice a bit of a sense of rest or peace that comes with it, eventually, and you might notice that deeper self within you that is able to notice and watch your own thinking. This is a practice best done daily.

Note: if children are involved in this, you might consider a shorter time, and doing this practice as a family.

Other ideas for giving up the need to be right:

- Set an intention to listen first before arguing or stating your own case. Write the affirmation down somewhere you'll see it regularly...
- There's always someone who drives us nuts! Pray, in particular, for that person. Try to think of positive things about them. Pray for their wholeness, healing, and well-being.
- Read something from a perspective very different from your own, or have a curious conversation with someone who disagrees with you about something significant. Seek for a better understanding, not to win an argument.

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PRACTICE 4: GENEROSITY



GIVING UP "UPWARD MOBILITY" AND CONSUMER DISSATISFACTION, TAKING UP KENOSIS OR EMPTYING: THE PRACTICE OF GENEROSITY

"I was taught that when we share, we share our best -- not what we no longer want." There is a form of generosity that gives away what is extra. There's nothing wrong with that! It seems helpful in many ways. But generosity is something more -- it is giving what is truly valuable to us and to others.

In this practice, we invite you to consider, and grow, your giving. Perhaps it might be financial gifts, to the church or another charity. Perhaps there is something you can give to someone you know -- something that will express love and care and might open an opportunity for that person. But this season, consider giving of your best, rather than what you no longer want or need.

Other ideas:

- At least once a week, do something "childish" – dance, sing, catch snowflakes on your tongue. Play! Experience a joy that doesn't cost money.
- Declutter your life: find 7 things in your household that are in good shape but you don't really need, and give them away where they might do some good.
- Offer your time and attention – perhaps to a clerk in a store, or a neighbour. If time is most precious, offer it as a gift!

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PRACTICE 5: COMMON GOOD



GIVING UP OTHER-WORLDLY OR INDIVIDUALISTIC RELIGION, TAKING UP JESUS' CALL TO "SEEK FIRST THE KIN-DOM": THE PRACTICE OF THE COMMON GOOD.

This practice has two parts. The first part is simply to pray the Lord's Prayer every day. Say it slowly, letting each line sink into your soul.

In the second part, think in particular about this part of the prayer: "Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth..." What might that mean for us right now? Are there ways that you (and your family) might take a step or two into God's Kin-dom here and now?

Are there particular ways in which you feel called to participate in helping bring about environmental sustainability, deeper community, truth and reconciliation, justice and sanctuary for LGBTQ+ persons, some other issue of importance to you? Think and pray about what might be a fitting action. Try to find something concrete and practical for you and/or your family to do.

Some ideas:

- Find some way to donate something, or do something, to "spruce up" the church and make it ready for an energetic re-start after COVID.
- Find something that your family cares about, in church or community, and do something together to support that cause, activity, or group.
- Look for people who may be left out somehow, and find a way to include them – perhaps with a regular visit, or phone call... Do some random acts of kindness...



PARTY AGAIN!

When Lent and Easter are over, gather again with the little group with whom you gathered at the beginning of Lent. Have some Easter fun! Hopefully by mid April we will be much more able to go out for a meal, or share a meal in someone's home.

As part of your gathering, share some stories. How did your Lenten practice go? What did you do, and how did things change through the season? Don't beat yourself up if this season hasn't perfected you in saintliness! (Um... it almost certainly won't!) But did you learn something? Did you have some interesting experiences? Did you notice something in yourself, the church, the world around?

Thanks for taking part in this experiment! May you be blessed, and in all of this, may you be touched by the love and healing Spirit of God.