

## **Spiritual Practices and Encountering God in Virtual Spaces**

Shared by MCEC pastors and youth workers on June 9, 2020

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### **What would we like to keep doing going forward from this time of pandemic and isolation?**

- Prayer groups on zoom
- Being more flexible and simple about sharing our faith and building relationships
- Faith exploration groups
- Embracing a season of being more real and talking about what is happening in our lives.

We observe that youth are more engaged, comfortable and open to participating online since it breaks the boundaries of distance, social unease and distractions.

When we see youth ministry as a spiritual practice, everything we do and everything we are, informs and engages our work. It is so important for us to engage in spiritual practices and invite youth to explore them as well.

### **What practices and resources are people using to invite youth to experience God?**

- Exploring the theme, “words having power”. One church explored Black Lives Matter stories through music and meditation. They reflected on the power of words to be violent and to propagate white supremacy. People from the church were also invited to share about their own stories of how words from scripture or encouraging words from others influenced them in life changing ways.
- With influence from the book, *The End of Youth Ministry* by Andrew Root <http://bakerpublishinggroup.com/books/the-end-of-youth-ministry/397581>, another church explores storytelling as interweaving God and Jesus into their lives. They practice telling their stories and looking at how God is part of our story. Instead of sharing highs and lows, they each share a story from their week.
- Another church invites youth to look for where they have seen God or experienced a “God moment”. They encourage youth to find something good from their life to share and take time to create times of experiencing God through reflection and liturgy.

### **How are we adapting ways to invite youth to experience God with and without technology?**

- Lead with a prayer online and the youth and junior youth type their prayer requests or responses in the chat with one-word responses. Youth are less likely to speak their prayer requests and responses so the chat option or texting frees them to participate as well.

- Zoom breakout rooms help to connect youth with smaller groups and they respond well to talking about a question or topic for a brief amount of time. The groups can be randomly chosen and used again. Or, in asking a new question new small groups can be formed.
- One leader uses the breakout rooms first so that youth or junior youth can connect and feel more comfortable in a smaller group before joining in a larger group. This way participants find it easier to talk to each other and are more comfortable when the whole group connects.
- Some churches are recognizing grads by delivering gifts to grads and taking pictures to be shared online during worship.
- A designated coffee night where everyone joins online with a hot beverage they have made themselves and share highs, lows and buffalo's, followed by an online game, a scripture reading and a prayer.
- Some churches are ending their online time together to give a degree of normalcy. Others are continuing a pared down online connection with youth or junior youth, acknowledging that the usual camp options are not available this summer.

Leaders also shared that one of the challenges of online leading and creating God experiences is the lack of being able to receive the energy back.

### **The Prayer of Examen**

*Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life* by Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn and Matthew Linn Paulist Press, 1995

*During the bombing raids of World War II, thousands of children were orphaned and left to starve. The fortunate ones were rescued and placed in refugee camps where they received food and good care. But many of these children who had lost so much could not sleep at night. They feared waking up to find themselves once again homeless and without food. Nothing seemed to reassure them. Finally, someone hit upon the idea of giving each child a piece of bread to hold at bedtime. Holding their bread, these children could finally sleep in peace. All through the night the bread reminded them, "Today I ate and I will eat again tomorrow."pg 1*

Why we need the Examen?

*"I need the examen to help me notice not only what goes wrong but especially what goes right. Each night I first get in touch with what I am grateful for from the day and I give thanks. Then I ask what I am not so grateful for. When I discover something I am not grateful for, I name it, feel it, and appreciate that I am not denying it and God is with me in it. Healing occurs to the degree I welcome all my feelings and let myself be loved in them. In this way I honestly acknowledge pain and I take in love. Then I can usually fall asleep with a grateful heart." Pg10*

Matt

Two Questions (pg 6,7):

- For what moment today am I most grateful?
- For what moment today am I least grateful?

Variations:

- When did you give and receive the most love this week?
- When did you give and receive the least love this week?

### **Lectio Divina**

- Experience scripture like a spiritual meal
- Emphasises the role of the Holy Spirit in reading scripture
- Nurtures the spiritual discipline of listening
- Approaching scripture with an open mind to hear what God is saying to us
- When practiced in community, sharing what we are hearing encourages everyone

To prepare:

- Ask each participant to have a simple snack in front of them, 4 items that are easy to eat like pretzels, crackers or a muffin cut in 4 pieces.
- Pick a simple story from scripture or a text that is from 3 to 5 verses long
- You as the leader will read the text or story 4 times. Take your time, be reflective and dramatic as you read.

1<sup>st</sup> reading

a. Nibble (Lectio)

- Be still and hear the text
- Be ready to share a word or phrase that stands out to you listen
- eat the first piece of snack while the leader reads the text/story
- leave some moments for silence then invite participants to share a word or phrase that stood out

2<sup>nd</sup> reading

b. Munch (Meditatio)

- Ponder
- Enter the text even deeper
- Let the text draw you closer to God
- Be ready to share a word or phrase that you are hearing that is different from the first one.
- Eat the second piece of snack while the leader reads the text/story

- Leave some moments for silence then invite participants to share the word or phrase that stood out to them this time

### 3<sup>rd</sup> reading

#### c. Taste (Oratio)

- Prayer is conversation with God
- As you hear the text/story for a 3<sup>rd</sup> time: What is God saying to you? What do you want to say to God?
- Eat the third piece of snack while the leader reads the text/story.
- Leave some moments for silence then invite participants to share what they hear God saying to them or what they would like to say to God.

### 4<sup>th</sup> reading

#### d. Swallow and Ingest (Contemplatio)

- Let the text be a part of you
- As you hear the text/story for a 4<sup>th</sup> time, listen for a word or phrase that you will take with you into this week to encourage you
- Eat the fourth piece of snack while the leader reads the text/story.
- Leave some moments for silence then invite participants to share what word or phrase they will take into this week to encourage them.

- ***Tent of Meeting: A 25-Day Adventure with God***, <https://www.commonword.ca/QuickSearch?maker=Ellison+White%2C+Julie>) by Julie Ellison White, is a wonderful curriculum that introduces youth to a variety of ways to pray and grow their connection to God on a daily basis. She encourages youth to see prayer as spending time with God in a tent like space and a campfire setting much like being at camp. Participants are invited to engage in prayer of examen, fasting, lectio divina, daily office, and intercessory prayer. This resource is great to use on a retreat or online. An accompanying participant journal is also available (<https://www.commonword.ca/ResourceView/16/6442>)
- When Sybil MacBeth found herself overwhelmed with news of challenges that family and friends were struggling with, words for her prayers were difficult. She found herself mindlessly doodling on paper with a handful of markers. As the doodles began to take shape, she put the name of the person she was thinking of in the centre. She went from person to person, writing down their name and surrounding each name with colours and shapes. When she was done, she discovered that she had been praying and giving over her family and friends into the care of God. She shares her thoughts and ideas to guide others in embracing this active and visual way of praying in her book, **Praying in Colour by Sybil MacBeth - Book:** <https://www.commonword.ca/ResourceView/82/19913>, in a **Workshop Guide DVD:** <https://www.commonword.ca/ResourceView/82/14698> or in the **Praying in Colour: Kid's Edition:** <https://www.commonword.ca/ResourceView/82/11945>

- Fuller Youth Institute shares some ideas on how to encourage spiritual practices that we do with youth at camp or at retreats, into the rhythm of their everyday lives. They share suggestions on how we move youth from the energy of the camp or retreat “high” into lasting changes in their connection with God and their community of faith.

[https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/articles/sustainable-practices?utm\\_source=FYI+E-Journal&utm\\_campaign=8fbaff8a51-FYI+E+Journal+March+6+2013&utm\\_medium=email](https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/articles/sustainable-practices?utm_source=FYI+E-Journal&utm_campaign=8fbaff8a51-FYI+E+Journal+March+6+2013&utm_medium=email)

