

Communitas: The Spirit of Community

A Guide for Pentecost 2020

We are clearly meeting in a bit different way, leading up to Pentecost - the time in the Church year when we celebrate the imparting of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples of Jesus. As we gather to discover and embody the love of Jesus, we seek to grow in attunement (a fancy word pointing to prayer) with the Spirit, who brings about community through joining God in mission. Conversationally, we'll consider key aspects of *communitas* as the foundation of the smallest units, the base of our church family. But what is *communitas*?

Communitas: "Latin noun for the spirit of community, typically those groups that form beyond regular institutions and organizations and create a profound sense of equality and togetherness. ...a movement of some sort of spirit in which people discover that solidarity is possible. Some sociologists have noted that *communitas* has spiritual or sacred dimensions through which people overcome division and achieve a new sense of identity and purpose." (Diana Butler Bass, *Grounded*)

"A worshipping community on mission is the church" (*Microchurches*, 34). The basics of any (micro)church are:

Mission - engagement with poor and lost in the world (John 9.4-5, Matt. 5.13-14, Matt 16.18-19)

Worship - submitting to the lordship of Jesus (Romans 12.1-2)

Community - relationship between people (Luke 5.20, John 13.35)

This guide is meant to facilitate ongoing connection and belonging to the Trinity community as we gather together as a worshipping community on mission, exploring the spirit of community through prayer - attunement to the Holy Spirit. You might like to use this guide individually (with the exception of the week of April 26th) or with a companion/ a smaller group of people. All prayer practice content has been adapted from *A Guidebook to Prayer* by MaryKate Morse.

April 19: Communal Joy 1 Peter 1:3-9

We rejoice in the resurrection, believing in (giving allegiance to) the lordship of Christ. At the most basic level, this means we are a worshipping community that remembers our salvation through coming together around the table/eucharist, in communion. This week, we read 1 Peter 1.3-9. No matter where or with whom (or how many) we gather (in worship), we are connected to the universal Church, an ever-growing and deepening reality of communion. Today, we embrace the work of the Holy Spirit among us in the smallest of groups (where two or more are gathered), giving attention to a prayer practice of rejoicing, recognizing the Holy Spirit as Joy.

Prayer Practice: Rejoicing Prayer and the Holy Spirit as Joy

Partner Experience:

- Spend time giving thanks - as short prayers - for each area: (1) God and the saints; (2) difficulties and trials; (3) family and friends; (4) community, nation and world. Allow enough time for reflection and verbal prayers in each area. We're not praying for answers or guidance or intercession, simply giving thanks.
- Converse about how the call to "rejoice always" might become part of daily life. How might the Spirit of Joy be inviting you to express gratitude?

Individual Experience:

Spend at least ten minutes actually giving thanks each day; make a list for each day below and name them out loud, giving thanks as specifically as possible; consider singing before or after your times of prayer:

- Day one: Give thanks for God and for people who have influenced you in your faith over the years
- Day two: Give thanks for difficult circumstances. This will not be easy. Make a list of the primary circumstances, reflecting on how you were shaped and how you grew in faith because of the situations. Then rejoice as authentically as you can.

- Day three: Give thanks for friends and family. Think about how these relationships have influenced you, how they have loved and cared for you.
- Day four: Give thanks for your neighbors, community and government. Bless them by speaking words of peace over them. This is not the time to pray about all the things that are not going right, but for rejoicing as God calls us to do.

Journal about your experience. At the end, consider sharing with a companion what you've learned.

At the end of the week, reflect on how rejoicing prayer is linked to praying without ceasing. How might you incorporate rejoicing into your daily life?

Kid Friendly Experience: Help your child fill out this [gratitude journal](#) each day. Have a conversation about the things to be grateful for each day and the great things that stick with us till the next day. Chat about happiness and how it is okay if we aren't really happy all the time. Ask them, "how can we rejoice, even when we aren't happy?"

April 26: Communal Conversation Luke 24:13-35

On the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), Jesus reveals himself to the disciples. Over and over again, Jesus makes himself known, not to those in high positions of power or among the priests, but among the body (the laity) - the "base" of the Church. The spirit of community is found in conversation, in the Holy Spirit as companion.

Prayer Practice: Conversational Prayer and the Holy Spirit as Companion

Partner or Small Group Experience:

Get comfortable. As one person shares, another person(s) responds. Take turns in conversation style where everyone has a turn.

Step One: Open by reading together Romans 8:26-27 and then praying Ephesians 6:18: "Lord, we 'pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.' Guide us as we pray."

Step Two: Begin with one or two minutes of silence, reflecting on the Spirit's presence. Then Give thanks to God as you are lead: *Thank you, God, for...* (expressing gratitude toward God for ____ and then giving thanks for those in your life).

Step Three: *Help God...*

- *God, help me....* (Give space between requests to listen for how the Spirit leads you to respond.)
- *God, help others...* (Listen for responses to each request)
- *God, help the world...*

Step Four: Close with gratitude

Leader: Holy Spirit, thank you for hearing our prayers and interceding on our behalf.

ALL: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you. (2 Cor. 13.13)

Kid Friendly Experience: Use a talking stick (or other fun object) to follow the above conversation structure. Remind children of the importance of *hearing* their conversation partner, to not speak unless they have the talking stick.

May 3 : Communal Discernment Acts 2:42-47

Acts 2:42-47 is often given as a picture of the most basic church. As disciples spend time together, in their context, elements of life and faith merge together through love and sharing (= mission). The spirit of community is experienced through devotion to the teachings of Jesus and to one another. The outworking of this experience is mission, guided by the Spirit. Today, we engage in what might be called group spiritual direction as we learn to pray for discernment and experience the Spirit as Guide.

Prayer Practice: Discernment Prayer and the Holy Spirit as Guide

Partner Experience:

- Bring a question for discernment - something you are seeking clarity on. Consider the prompting question, “Holy Spirit, how can we become more Christlike?” to bring clarity to your discernment question.
- Follow this process:
 - Introductions and opening prayer.
 - Explanation of the process (outlined as follows...).
 - Introduction to the question: One person shares their question for discernment and takes ten to fifteen minutes to explain the situation. If it is a group question, then the leader reviews the history leading up to the question.
 - Clarifying questions: Clarifying questions may be asked to understand the situation better or know the person and context better.
 - Prayer of Listening: Sit in silence, listening for the Spirit and holding the person or question before God.
 - Sharing: After the silence, each person in the group shares what came to their awareness while in prayer (thoughts, impressions, Scripture, or word/image). Have someone take notes to give to the person at the end.
 - Summary: The leader summarizes the discernment of the group.
 - Clarification: The group clarifies the discernment. If there are still questions, concerns or ambiguity, the discernment prayer is repeated at another time. There is no rush or timetable. Sometimes there is a lot of emotional investment so it takes more time to let go and listen.
 - Close in prayer, giving thanks to the Spirit for the experience and for the words shared and heard.
 - Have a time for people to ask questions or share perspectives on their experience of discernment prayer. How might you distinguish between the voice of the Holy Spirit and your own self-talk? How do you distinguish between the Holy Spirit’s guidance and the guidance of others that might come from bias or brokenness? What if you hear from the Holy Spirit, but you don’t want to do it?

Individual Experience:

If you have an individual discernment question, ask someone to join you in the partner experience above.

Otherwise, for several days, use Galatians 5.16, 22-23, and 25 in this manner:

- Opening prayer: Ephesians 1.17-18
- Question: “Holy spirit, how might I live more fully by your Spirit?”
- Prayer of Listening: Reflect on Galatians and listen to the Holy Spirit for the insight regarding the fruit of the Spirit in your life. Take at least ten minutes to listen. At the end of the prayer of listening, pray, “Holy Spirit, thank you for the gift of your guidance.”
- Sharing: Journal on your experience. If you have a spiritual friend or a guide, you might share any insights you received from the Spirit.
- Summary: Repeat the same prayer experience over several days, preferably a week. Then summarize what you discovered about living more fully by the Spirit.

Kid Friendly Experience: Get a compass and a map. Discuss how a person’s conscience can work like a compass when the person chooses to listen to God’s directions.

- Begin by showing your child a map of your city or town. Point out how the map is marked with the directions north, south, east and west. Show your child some neighborhood landmarks and ask them to determine whether those landmarks are north, south, east or west of your house.
- Next, show your child how to use the compass by lining up the floating arrow on the compass with the “N” for north. Based on the reading from the compass, have your child tell you which direction is which, from inside your home. Help your child identify the direction of the back yard, the front street and your neighbors’ houses.
- When your child has had sufficient opportunity to explore using the compass, use the questions for discussion to relate their compass experience to discerning right from wrong and finding direction from God.
 - What is a compass used for?
 - How is God like a compass?

- How can we decide what is right and what is wrong?
- How can we decide what path to take?
- Pray with your children and ask God to put on them the same Spirit that rested on Jesus so they have wisdom and understanding.

May 10: Communal Intercession [John 14:1-14](#)

What does healing look like? Can we ask God for anything? Engaging in the activity of God requires boldly praying on behalf of others and asking the Spirit to intervene, to bring healing. Sometimes we don't understand what is happening and we don't know where life is taking us. What is clear is that if we are attuned to the Spirit, God will lead us to the "base of society" and to the margins - the poor. In this space we find that we have nothing else left to do, but pray. Today, we bring forth prayers of intercession and seek the Holy Spirit as healer.

Prayer Practice: Intercessory Prayer and the Holy Spirit as Healer

Partner Experience:

Spend time praying for one another or consider going to someone who needs prayer.

- Identify the need (ask specifics)
- Sit in silence to center on the Holy Spirit and listen
- Place hands on the person and pray for them as you feel led
- Anoint them with oil (on the hand or head)

Talk about your experience. How did you experience the Holy Spirit's presence? How did you feel?

Individual Experience:

Set up a small altar to remind you that you're coming before the Lord. Pray prayers of intercession for people. Listen first to the Holy Spirit for whom or what to pray. When you are clear (like one or two things), then pray. Continue praying until your heart feels at peace. Write in your journal about the experience. How does it shape your understanding of joining God in mission in the world? How does praying for others shape you and your faith?

Kid Friendly Experience: Follow Sybil MacBeth's [plan for Praying in Color](#).

May 17: Communal Healing [Acts 17:22-31](#)

In God we live and move and have our being; and in God we are connected to one another. *Communitas* is the spirit of community - we are connected. It is so easy for us to idolize the ways of the world, to worship 'unknown' gods. Derailed and distracted by our human ignorance, we repent. We seek inner healing. At the most basic level, each breath reminds us of who we really are and we seek the Holy Spirit as Inner Healer.

Prayer Practice: Breath Prayer and the Holy Spirit as Inner Healer

Partner Experience:

- Get comfortable
- Close your eyes and be still. Focus on your breathing. Meditate on, or together read, Rom 14.17: "For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."
- Brief silence.
- Imagine God is calling you by name...perhaps Jesus is standing before you and asks, "what do you want?"
- Answer with honesty - a single word or simple phrase.
- Choose a name for God that is meaningful to you at this time.
- Combine the name for God with your answer to Jesus' question and create a simple prayer. (Ex. I need rest. Name is "Shepherd". Prayer is "Shepherd, I rest in you.")

Share your prayers with one another. Often breath prayers matter to the individual for several months. Sometimes the initial breath prayer is not the deeper desire. Check in with one another to make sure that the prayer is still current. Talk to one another about how the prayer helps you be more Christlike.

Individual Experience:

Follow the suggestions for the partner experience. Journal about it. How has it helped you be more Christlike? What does the prayer tell you about your inner world? How might you use the prayer to manage emotions, memories or behaviors that interfere with your desires for righteousness, joy and peace?

Kid Friendly Experience: Kids Imaginative Prayer

- Before beginning, pick a scene from the Bible.
- Explain to your child what you'd like to try: "We're going to read this story about Jesus, and then we're going to imagine what it would be like to be *in* the story."
- Begin by praying to the Holy Spirit to help you "enter" the scene. Then, observe sixty seconds (if you can) of silence.
- Prayerfully read the text once or twice with your child.
- Begin to pretend you're in the story with your child. Explain that this is a way of praying! (Your "pretending" might take the form of shared storytelling. Ask your child to supply the details of the story using some of the question prompts above. It may help to use a children's picture Bible or storybook as a text.)

[May 24th: Memorial Day weekend Brunch] Around the table (or over a Zoom meal) discuss what you've been experiencing in prayer. How are you experiencing the Holy Spirit in this season?

May 31 (Pentecost): Communal Truth 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

"No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." (1 Cor. 12.3b.) This is the very foundation of what it means to worship. Today, in celebration of Pentecost, we celebrate who we are as a body of believers who overcome division and achieve a new sense of identity and purpose as we meditate - listen to the Holy Spirit whisper truth.

Prayer Practice: Meditative prayer and Holy Spirit as Truth Whisperer

Partner Experience:

- Choose a passage of Scripture relevant to the group (preferably one in which Jesus is speaking).
- Everyone sit comfortably
- Open with prayer: "Holy Spirit, guide us into God's truth and transform us into Christlikeness."
- Brief silence - everyone relax their bodies and focus on breathing. Be reminded of Christ's love and the Spirit with you.
- As one person reads the passage 3 times:
 - First time. Listening as an observer: "As I read the passage slowly, imagine you are there. See the place in your mind and see Jesus speaking."
 - Second time. Listening as a participant: "As I read the passage again, see yourself as the person to whom Jesus is speaking. You are there."
 - Third time. Listening from Jesus' perspective: "As I read the passage for a third time, see the experience from Jesus' perspective. Ask for the eyes of Christ to see Jesus' point of view."

Talk about your experience. Did you have any insights or questions? How might the Spirit of Truth help you live a more Christlike life on a daily basis? How might you carry the passage or story with you throughout the day or week?

Individual Experience:

- Find a story or a verse that might speak to whatever you're currently struggling with.
- Give yourself thirty to sixty minutes for meditative prayer. It may not take that long, but don't feel rushed.
- Over a period of several days, use the same passage to read over and over again. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you. Imagine yourself in the passage as an observer until there is some movement. Then see yourself as the participant,

again leaning into any movement of the Spirit, and then lastly see it from God's (or Jesus' or the Holy Spirit's) perspective.

- After each experience, journal thoughts, insights and openings.

Kid Friendly Experience: Lectio Divina for kids

1. Have your child get in a **comfortable** position. Consider doing this at night when = getting ready for bed so that they are cozy in their beds.
2. **Say** something like, "God can speak to us through the Bible. Close your eyes and listen to what I read. Pay attention to what makes you feel good, what you remember most, or what stands out to you. God may be speaking to you through that!"
3. **Read** (preferably one where Jesus speaks) the verse out loud.
4. **Ask** what part stood out to them and explain that you are going to read that part of the verse again. Or you can read the entire verse again if you chose a shorter verse.
5. When you are done reading the section of the verse again **ask**, "What does that tell you about God?" "What does that tell you about yourself?" "Is there anything else you think God was saying through that scripture?"
6. **Pray** and thank God for speaking to you.

General Discussion Prompts:

-When do you most sense God's presence? Have you considered that as prayer? Lean in and embrace the unique ways that you experience being in attunement with the Holy Spirit.

-What type of prayer might you need to grow in? Experiment. Confide in someone else who might join you.

-With whom do you experience a profound sense of equality and togetherness? Notice how the Spirit of community overcomes division and what new sense of identity and purpose is being formed.

-Spend some time with a couple of people, engaging in discernment together. Where do you notice the Spirit at work? How might you join in? Notice how this small gathering of people is the church as you come together around the lordship of Christ and participate in God's activity in the world.

-What truth is the Spirit revealing to you? How might that truth bring healing? Create a breath prayer to continue the conversation with God in the day to day.

-Read the passage for this week again. What sticks out to you that you've not noticed before? Talk about it with others.

Resources:

Books:

Grounded by Diana Butler Bass

In the Company of the Poor by Gutierrez and Farmer

Incarnate by Michael Frost

Base Communities by Margaret Hebblethwaite

Divergent Church by Shapiro/Faris

A Guidebook to Prayer by Morse

Pedagogy of the Oppressed by Paulo Friere

Microchurches by Brian Sanders

Music:

Brother, album by The Brilliance

Visual Arts:

Explore the image of wild geese. It's the Celtic spiritual image for the Holy Spirit.