

Living Well: Christian Practices for Everyday Life
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Living Well

Christian Practices for Everyday Life

9

Participating in Community



Yearning



Looking for a community to belong to? We all are; no one really wants to be alone. But when it comes to belonging to and participating in a community, we're confused. Do we have time to become involved in a community? What type of community? How can we find ways to participate meaningfully in our church, our civic community, and our world?

“You’re Telling Us to WORK on Sunday?”

The sign out front boldly blazoned, “The church has left the building...but we’ll be back next week.” In the town of Dinuba, California, population 20,000, this was big news.

“For nearly two years, our church has been revising our vision, refocusing our mission. We were learning to think of our church not as a fortress, but as a bridge from God to our community, meeting needs,” explained Jim Aiken, pastor of Dinuba Mennonite Brethren Church, where the sign had been displayed. Pastor Jim continued, “When I first heard about Faith in Action, I knew this was for us.”

This church of 300 had 200 people show up to work on Faith in Action Day in October 2007, handling a grand total of no less than 20 work projects. One group offered a free carwash; another picked up trash in local parks. Senior citizens met at church to stuff 300 bags with school supplies to be sent to a Mennonite relief organization that will in turn send them around the world. Others worked in a nearby food bank.

“For us to tackle 20 different projects with a small church—God did that!” said Pastor Jim. “Our people learned that morning that the church is truly people reaching out to other people in a very concrete way. It’s not a building; we are the church, the hands and feet of Christ.”

“In almost every project, we had outsiders join in to help or donate supplies,” he continued. When one group went to purchase paint to repaint rooms in a homeless shelter, the hardware store donated the paint. More paint was donated to the group who went through town, painting over graffiti. When the “bathroom brigade” cleaned public restrooms at five local businesses, K-mart provided all the cleaning supplies.

“Some of our members said ‘We’ve been taught all our lives never to work on Sunday—and now you’re telling us to?’” said Pastor Jim. “It was definitely a bold move for us, and God blessed it.”

When one church member explained to his employees what he was doing on Sunday, many joined in and helped with various repair jobs at a senior citizens’ community center. They even went back on several days to finish additional work. Across town, neighbors joined in with groups doing yard work at the homes of other seniors or handicapped residents.

“Nearly three months later, I’m still hearing thanks from townspeople,” exclaimed Pastor Jim. “And just today, I was at a luncheon and a local newspaper reporter mentioned that they, too, are still getting feedback from various residents.”

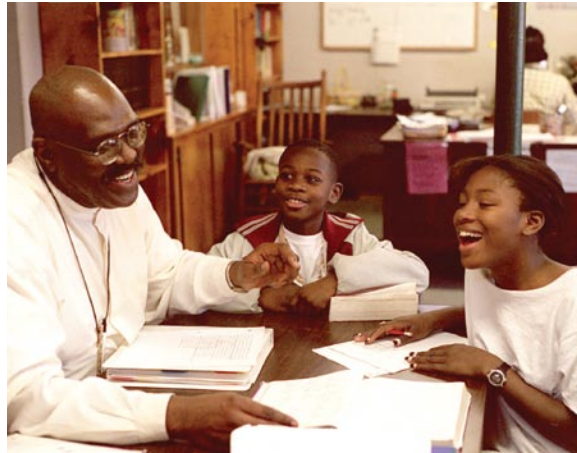
Pastor Jim is making big plans for 2008. He’s already working with the local high school principal, asking, “If we brought in 200 people to work one Sunday in May, can you find enough projects for us?” He’s also planning to approach the city council with the same question, with a fall date in mind, and plans to invite other churches to join in.

(*Faith in Action*, World Vision
www.putyourfaithinaction.org)

City on a Mission

It might be thought that the mayor of a mid-size American city would have enough on his plate dealing with local issues. But when Mayor Bill Baarsma, of Tacoma, Wash., was invited to visit World Vision’s work in an AIDS-devastated community in Lesotho, southern Africa, he was eager to go.

Bill says having had several close friends die of AIDS and having been an active member of the Pierce County AIDS Foundation, he was acutely conscious of the anguish the disease caused. His concerns only deepened when he visited Sekameng, western Lesotho, along with representatives from Tacoma’s businesses and churches.



The party met with orphans caring for younger siblings, and soon-to-be orphans caring for dying parents. Bill says one poignant moment was meeting fourteen-year-old Motlasi Sesinyi, who was valiantly struggling to feed and clothe his eight-year-old sister after their parents perished. When Bill turned to Motlasi’s schoolteacher, she said about a third of her pupils were in similar dire straits.

Bill says although Sekameng is thousands of miles from Tacoma, he felt his city could not ignore such pain. “We are all God’s children; we are all part of the community of the world. This was an easy call for me to make,” he says.

After discussions with Tacoma pastor Dean Curry and business leader Ken Grassi, it was decided to establish the Global Neighbor Project, a community-to-community effort whereby the citizens of Tacoma could meet some of the desperate needs in Sekameng.

Support poured in from churches, schools, a synagogue, private individuals, and the Tacoma Symphony Orchestra, which performed benefit concerts.

So far more than 1,000 Lesotho children have been sponsored through World Vision, and more than \$130,000 raised to support the organization’s orphan care, education, health, and water projects in Sekameng.

(*World Vision Magazine*, Autumn 2008)





A Typical Wednesday Night

It's a typical Wednesday for Mike. After his morning run, he gets ready for work, and then he and his wife, Janet, take their children to school.

During his lunch hour, Mike meets with his men's small group, which gathers weekly to discuss, "a Christian approach to men's issues," as Mike puts it. "We started this men's ministry at our church, and I've been involved for about a year now. I can really see a difference in my life."

After work, Mike comes home, and the whole family heads out the door for Discovery Night at their church. "There's a meal, activities for the whole family, activities for the kids, and classes for the adults," says Mike. "Janet and I are in a couple's class, made up mostly of people we've invited to our church over the years. Right now we're discovering how our unique God-given talents affect our relationships. It's been great for our marriage."

After their night at church, the family heads home. Mike and Janet check homework, get the children off to bed, watch some TV and then, before turning in, the couple spends time in prayer together. "It's an important part of our day," says Mike, "to end it together in prayer."

Mike is also involved in leading his church's Habitat for Humanity team. "In my 'day job,' I'm a software engineer," says Mike, "but I've always love to build things and even worked construction during the summers I was in college. That's something most people don't know about me. But my church asked, 'What are you good at, and what do you love to do?' when we became members. I thought about it a while. I'm good at organizing people, and I love to build things, and I've been a believer in the mission of Habitat ever since I saw Jimmy Carter on the news talking about it several years ago. So I talked to the pastor about starting a team from our church. It's been one of the greatest experiences of my life."

For Mike, his faith is the organizing principle of his life. "I wouldn't consider myself a fanatic or anything like that, and I certainly don't press my beliefs on others," he says. "It's just that without my faith, my life wouldn't be as meaningful—I'd be kind of directionless. I don't know how, but it seems that the more I've gotten involved at church, the more spiritually aware I've become. I've become more compassionate, more aware of the suffering of others and what I can do about it. I'm a better husband and father. I'm just a better person."

(Albert Winseman, *Growing an Engaged Church*)

Reflecting

There is a disturbing scene in the movie *The Shawshank Redemption* when Brooks, an older man who has been in prison for decades, is released on parole. He rents a small, empty apartment in the city. In a horrifying moment of desperate loneliness, he hangs himself surrounded by the sounds of a vibrant urban community, to which he feels absolutely no connection. When he was in prison, he knew his place in the community. He felt a sense of connection with his fellow inmates. He had familiarity. He belonged. He was released into a world that was unlike the one he had just left, and also unlike the one that he was snatched from decades ago when he was first incarcerated. Everything had changed. He had no one to greet him at the prison gate. He had no family with whom he could reunite. He had no skills to help him participate in community. He couldn't begin to imagine how he could belong, and so he simply checked out of life. In this story we see our fundamental need to participate meaningfully in community. In fact, we cannot survive without some sense of connection to others. We need to belong and participate!

There are forces that make it hard for us to participate in community. We find ourselves busy at home and work. There doesn't seem to be enough time to get involved in church or our community, let alone the world.

It comes as no surprise that parents are busier today than in the past. In spite of that, research shows that the amount of time parents spend caring for their children has actually increased over the past 40 years. This time has been taken from housework, sleeping and eating, married couples time together, time with friends, and civic and social activities. It seems that we are less involved in our churches and communities at a time when we hunger for belonging and participation.



Did You Know?

Participating in community—church, civic, and world—has positive benefits for us and for our household. Many studies have shown that people who go to church regularly are healthier physically, emotionally and mentally than people who do not go to church. For example, studies have shown that active church members live seven years longer, on average, than people who do not go to church (and it is fourteen years longer for African Americans); have a lower risk level for depression and suicide; and report that they live a “very happy” life. The Search Institute has found that young people who participate an hour a week or more in church activities are less likely to engage in high-risk behaviors and more likely to demonstrate positive characteristics (getting good grades, resisting danger, maintaining physical health, and leadership).

Research also shows that youth who have a variety of meaningful relationships with peers, older people and younger children are more likely to find joy and satisfaction in life than those who restrict themselves to just a few friends their own age. These intergenerational relationships seem to help youth do better in school. They also keep young people connected to church. More than interesting activities, the sense of belonging to a church community attracted and held teens in the church.

9 Participating in Community



The participation of the whole family in church life is essential to the faith life of children and teens. In a national study on youth and religion, researchers concluded that the best way to get most youth involved in and serious about their faith communities is to get their parents more involved in and serious about their faith communities. Parents can influence children and teens in what they believe and how they practice their faith by maintaining a church attendance rule even into the teen years. Young people with the most consistent exposure to a church environment—especially in the areas of church attendance, praying, Bible reading, and knowledge of church tradition—were the most likely to remain in the tradition.

It seems that participation *does* matter!



How Are You Participating?

- In what ways are you and your household involved in your church community throughout the year? How could you be more involved?
- In what ways are you and your household involved in activities and projects in your civic community? How do you and your household make a positive contribution to your civic community?
- In what ways are you and your household involved in the world community—making a positive contribution to people around the world?
- How do you balance “family time” with “community time”?

Exploring

For an Hour or a Lifetime

You are invited to join us in this community of Christ;
to attend to God's unfolding and reconciling word;
to walk in our ways according to the rule of the gospel;
to be living stones in God's building, responding together to God's call.
(First Church, Cambridge, MA)

Participating in the Church Community

When she [my pastor] was about seven, her best friend got lost one day. The little girl ran up and down the streets of the big town where they lived, but she couldn't find a single landmark. She was very frightened. Finally a policeman stopped to help her. He put her in the passenger seat of his car, and they drove around until she finally saw her church. She pointed it out to the policeman, and then she told him firmly, "You could let me out now. This is my church, and I can always find my way home from here."

And that is why I have stayed so close to [my church]—because no matter how bad I am feeling, how lost or lonely or frightened, when I see the faces of the people at my church, and hear their tawny voices, I can always find my way home.

(Anne Lamott, *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith*)

Christians join together in church communities to support each other in carrying on the mission of Jesus. Jesus, who is the center of the Christian community, told us, "Where two or three come together in my name, I am there with them" (Matthew 18:20). While there is no doubt that our first and most influential encounter with God happens in our homes, it is also necessary to nurture our faith by joining with other Christians in a church community.

The Christians who lived in the years following Jesus' life, death, and resurrection expressed their faith in a loving God by building communities of love and mission. The New Testament records their efforts in all kinds of

ways, but one of the clearest examples is found in the Acts of the Apostles. (There is a similar description of the early Christian community in Acts 4:32–35.)

Many miracles and wonders were being done through the apostles, and everyone was filled with awe. All believers continued together in close fellowship and shared their belongings with one another. They would sell their property and possessions, and distribute the money among all, according to what each one needed. Day after day they met as a group in the Temple, and they had their meals together in their homes, eating with glad and humble hearts, praising God, and enjoying the good will of all the people. And every day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.

—Acts 2:43–47

Churches are communities of faith, of action, and of hope. Here the gospel is proclaimed and celebrated; here believers are formed and sent to transform the world. Within the church community, God's people meet Jesus in word and sacrament, and come in touch with the source of Christian life.



Participating in Community

The same Spirit and mission that gave birth to the early Christian communities gives life to Christian churches today. Here are two examples.

First Church, Cambridge, MA

Imagine a church that is glad you're here no matter where you come from, what you look like, how old or young you are, how much money you have, where you are on the journey of life, or where you are on the journey of faith.

Imagine a church that loves its heritage, yet flexibly entertains new people, new ideas, and new ways too. Imagine a church that is amazed by the wonderful gifts God gave you for service, wants to receive them, and is eager to help you use them for the good of the world.

Imagine a church that helps all who enter its life take one more step, or many more, on the way of life.

Imagine a church with a wide open door, a church of life-changing welcome, a church of unity in our differences, a church shaped in the pattern of God's boundless embrace.

Imagine First Church in Cambridge.

(www.firstchurchcambridge.org)

Church of St. Gregory the Great, Hamilton Square, NJ

- Is a vibrant Eucharistic community that provides total spiritual, emotional, relational, and educational development from the very beginning and throughout one's faith journey in a healthy and beautiful atmosphere. We worship, learn, pray, and work together as we become disciples of Jesus Christ.
- Is a home where parishioners, empowered by the Holy Spirit, generously give of their time, talents, and treasure through regular participation in all aspects of parish

life. Their special talents, creativity, and treasure make this parish a special place of continuous growth and spiritual renewal.

- Is a welcoming parish where everyone cheerfully greets, embraces, knows, and reaches out to one another within and outside our community.
- Is a community sensitive to the realities of our world, such as hunger, war, homelessness, poverty, joblessness, and injustice. We address these issues through prayer, education, and visible actions of justice, peace, mercy, and love.

(www.stgregorygreatchurch.org)

The Christian community shows the presence of Christ to the world. We are joined together as members in the one body of Christ with a diversity of gifts that we use in service to God's kingdom.

We have many parts in the one body, and all these parts have different functions. In the same way, though we are many, we are one body in union with Christ, and we are all joined to each other as different parts of one body. So we are to use our different gifts in accordance with the grace God has given us. If our gift is to speak God's message, we should do it according to the faith we have; if it is to serve, we should serve; if it is to teach, we should teach; if it is to encourage others, we should do so. Whoever shares with others should do it generously; whoever has authority should work hard; whoever shows kindness to others should do it cheerfully.

—Romans 12:4–8

The Christian practice of participating in the church community engages us with other Christians in a common effort to live the mission of Jesus Christ today. We join a community that supports each other in good times and bad, celebrates their faith in worship, is continually learning about the Christian faith and what it means to follow Jesus Christ today, and utilizes their gifts and talents in service to the church and world.

Participating in the World

Christians have a mission and gifts that are meant to be shared beyond the walls of their homes and churches, so it's important to get out and get involved in our local civic communities.

The Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those people whom he allowed Nebuchadnezzar to take away as prisoners from Jerusalem to Babylon: "Build houses and settle down. Plant gardens and eat what you grow in them. Marry and have children. Then let your children get married, so that they also may have children. You must increase in numbers and not decrease. Work for the good of the cities where I have made you go as prisoners. Pray to me on their behalf, because if they are prosperous, you will be prosperous too."

—Jeremiah 29:4–7

Christians by nature are participators. Christian love never stops at the doors of the church; it overflows into the civic community that surrounds the congregation. We don't fulfill our destiny by burying ourselves in our churches to protect ourselves from the evils in the world. We need to get involved to make our communities better places to live. It is an expression of our faith in God to get involved economically, socially, and politically in our community.

Christian participation in the civic community inspires others when it shows a loving concern for the poor and marginalized members of the community.

When you harvest your fields, do not cut the grain at the edges of the fields, and do not go back to cut the heads of grain that were left. Do not go back through your vineyard to gather the grapes that were missed or to pick up the grapes that have fallen; leave them for poor people and foreigners. I am the Lord your God.

—Leviticus 19:9–10



Whenever you possibly can, do good to those who need it. Never tell your neighbors to wait until tomorrow if you can help them now.

—Proverbs 3:27–28

Christians don't use all of their economic and material resources for themselves; they set aside a portion for those who don't have enough. People can see the presence of God when Christians reach out in love to the poor. One Christian church in Ohio "adopted" a young man who was struggling to survive. He suffered brain damage from prior drug abuse and he was homeless. The church gave him a maintenance job and rented a room for him in a local motel. Families from the church worked with him to make sure he got to work every day and stayed out of trouble. They also got him connected to the social service agencies that could help him get his life together. The woman who managed the motel where he lived was so inspired by the church's generous concern that she joined the church. We are called to be involved, and our involvement makes a difference in many ways.



Participating in Community

Christians express their faith in loving action for the benefit of the whole world. When a child dies from hunger in a remote village in a poor nation far away, Christians are concerned because God embraces that dying child. When workers are oppressed with low wages and unsafe working conditions, Christians are concerned because God's law of justice is being violated. When species of animals and plants are disappearing from the face of the earth due to the consumption of forest land, Christians are concerned because unique expressions of God's creation are gone.

The first Christian communities were inspired to care for people beyond their borders with these words:

Remember that the person who plants few seeds will have a small crop; the one who plants many seeds will have a large crop. You should each give, then, as you have decided, not with regret or out of a sense of duty; for God loves the one who gives gladly. And God is able to give you more than you need, so that you will always have all you need for yourselves and more than enough for every good cause.

—2 Corinthians 9:6–8



Participating in a church community means participating in service to the world. Churches all across the country are serving beyond their borders. Here is one moving story.

Ginghamsburg Church is a 4500+ member United Methodist congregation in Tipp City, Ohio. In December 2007, Senior Pastor Mike Slaughter challenged Ginghamsburg's attendees for the fourth year to spend only one-half on Christmas gifts of what they would normally spend, and to bring the rest in for the Sudan project, "Miracle Offering." The 2007 result was \$1.2 million to continue Ginghamsburg's child protection and development program, serving 15,000 children in Darfur, Sudan, while also expanding a four-year project enabling 15 water yards that will provide safe water and sanitation for 219,000 people, the most critical health need in Darfur today.

This is the fourth year that Ginghamsburg and partner churches/schools have participated in this Christmas "Miracle Offering" initiative, which has enabled the church in just 36 months to provide nearly \$3 million in Darfur relief. The first year resulted in \$317,000, which Ginghamsburg Church immediately used in partnership with the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) to establish a self-sustaining agricultural project. This project put 5,208 Sudanese families back into the farming business in 2005, and resulted in a successful harvest that has now expanded to feed 65,000 people in five internally displaced persons (IDP) camps and host communities in Darfur until the next harvest season. The program also strengthened the region's economy as local blacksmiths created the tools, area threshers assisted with the harvest, and resultant seed was packaged for selling at local markets.

The second year's offering resulted in \$530,000, which Ginghamsburg deployed in partnership with UMCOR to initiate the five-year child protection and development program. The first year's results included 190 teachers trained, 90 classrooms constructed or rehabilitated and 15,000 children receiving educational materials. The 2006 and 2007 miracle offerings each resulted in more than \$1 million to continue expansion of the child development and safe water projects.

Living

I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community, and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can.
—George Bernard Shaw

There are tremendous benefits that come with participating deeply and meaningfully in a community—whether it’s a Christian community, your local community, or the world. Whether you are a single young adult, a newly married couple, a family with children or teens, a single adult, an “empty nest” household, or an older adult, there are lots of ways you can become more deeply involved in your church, neighborhood, and world. Let’s explore the gifts that you bring to community, and some of the ways you can utilize those gifts more fully.

Identifying Gifts & Talents

Each one, as a good manager of God’s different gifts, must use for the good of others the special gift he has received from God.
—1 Peter 4:10

Each of us is like a gift package from God. Our combination of gifts is unique. Not one of us has ever been replicated on this earth! Our giftedness includes our talents and abilities, styles, interests, experiences, preferences, and passions for serving in the world. Our gifts are part of an abundant web of giftedness in our faith community. These gifts were given to us so that we might minister together as partners in God’s work in the world. And our gifts are meant for us too! When we live out our gifts, we discover the joys of an abundant life.

(Jean Morris Trumbauer, *Created and Called*)

Begin the process of strengthening your involvement in church and community by identifying your God-given gifts and talents. Involve everyone in your household in the “gifts inventory.”



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Participating in Community

My gifts are...

Check up to a dozen things you do well. Have each member of your household do this. Feel free to add other gifts not specifically listed. (Adapted from *Created and Called*, by Jean Morris Trumbauer.)

- accounting/finances/budget
- acting/drama
- artwork/crafts
- caring and compassion
- carpentry/building
- child care
- clerical work
- communication
- computer skills
- cooking and serving food
- coordinating and organizing projects
- dancing
- decorating
- facilitating and working with groups
- faith-sharing
- fundraising
- gardening
- graphic design
- hospitality
- housekeeping
- legal services
- listening
- maintaining buildings/grounds
- mechanical work
- mediating and problem-solving
- medical/nursing care
- mentoring/tutoring
- music: instrumental or voice
- photography
- planning/visioning
- praying
- promotion/advertising
- public speaking
- researching
- sewing
- social justice work
- sound recording/audio production
- teaching/training
- video and video production
- visiting others
- Web design
- writing
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



Participating in Community

Identifying Ways to Be Involved in Church, Community, and World

Equipped with a list of your gifts and talents and those of your household, you can now start to consider the type of activities you and members of your household might want to be involved in. Take a look at the two lists below, one for the church community and one for the civic community and world. Think about which interests best match with your gifts and talents. Some activities may be more traditional, such as teaching or singing, while others may be new, such as Web ministry.

I have experience or interest in these areas of involvement in the church...

Mark the three greatest areas of experience (E) with a 1, 2, and 3. Mark the three greatest areas of interest (I) with A, B, C. (Adapted from *Created and Called*, by Jean Morris Trumbauer)

E	I	Potential Involvement
_____	_____	aging
_____	_____	arts
_____	_____	children's ministry
_____	_____	consolation/grief ministry
_____	_____	communications/media
_____	_____	community outreach/service
_____	_____	data administration
_____	_____	education: children
_____	_____	education: youth
_____	_____	education: adults
_____	_____	family ministry
_____	_____	finance
_____	_____	global mission
_____	_____	health ministry
_____	_____	media ministry
_____	_____	music
_____	_____	new member welcome
_____	_____	pastoral care
_____	_____	prayer ministry
_____	_____	property management
_____	_____	recovery ministry
_____	_____	sacramental preparation
_____	_____	singles ministry
_____	_____	small faith communities

_____	_____	social justice
_____	_____	social/community life
_____	_____	spiritual growth
_____	_____	stewardship
_____	_____	visual communication
_____	_____	Web ministry/cyberministry
_____	_____	worship/liturgy
_____	_____	young adult ministry
_____	_____	youth ministry
_____	_____	other: _____
_____	_____	other: _____
_____	_____	other: _____
_____	_____	other: _____

I have experience or interest in these areas of involvement in the community and world...

Mark the three greatest areas of experience (E) with a 1, 2, and 3. Mark the three greatest areas of interest (I) with A, B, C. (Adapted from *Created and Called*, by Jean Morris Trumbauer)

E	I	Potential Involvement
_____	_____	abuse
_____	_____	addiction and recovery
_____	_____	the arts
_____	_____	care for and dignity of the elderly
_____	_____	disabilities
_____	_____	disaster relief
_____	_____	discrimination
_____	_____	economic and community development
_____	_____	education: children, youth
_____	_____	employment
_____	_____	environment
_____	_____	governmental and political reform
_____	_____	grief and loss
_____	_____	health care
_____	_____	homelessness
_____	_____	human rights
_____	_____	hunger
_____	_____	literacy
_____	_____	mental health
_____	_____	poverty and economic disparity
_____	_____	prisons and rehabilitation
_____	_____	violence
_____	_____	war and peace
_____	_____	other: _____
_____	_____	other: _____
_____	_____	other: _____
_____	_____	other: _____

Participating in Community

Now that you have identified your interests, take some time to research your church and community for specific ways you can be involved. Many churches conduct an annual stewardship Sunday, ministries fair, or time and talent campaign. This can provide an opportunity to match your gifts and interests with existing opportunities in the church. Don't be afraid to ask for help. If you want to get involved and still do not know what to do, go to your pastor or another church leader and ask how you can get involved. They will find you an activity that would be enjoyable, rewarding, and helpful!

To be more involved in your civic community, research local organizations and projects through the newspapers, local government and social service agencies, schools and parent-teacher organizations, church social service agencies such as Catholic Charities, and so on. Newspapers will often have articles about needs in the community, such as the need for food at the food bank or soup kitchen. Be sure to ask members of your church community which projects or organizations they are involved in.

To get involved in global projects, you can participate in a project sponsored by your church or other local churches. Most Christian denominations have national organizations dedicated to service throughout the world, such as Catholic Relief Services and Church World Service. You can find organizations dedicated to global service covering a wide range of areas, from the environment to poverty to war and violence. Be sure to research the Web sites of internationally recognized organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, World Vision, and Heifer International to discover the variety of ways you can be involved in global efforts.

Ways to Enhance Your Participation

- *Keep abreast of local, national and international events.* Subscribe to reputable news sources (in print or online) that will give you accurate information about events in your community, in our nation, and around the world. If you live with others, invite each person to select a

news story for discussion at one of your meals each day. Include a Christian interpretation of the news in your discussion. Your pastor or another leader in your church can help you find resources that offer a Christian perspective on the daily news. Keep a globe or atlas handy to locate places around the world that are in the news. Close your discussion with some brainstorming about how you and your household might actively respond to the news in a spirit of Christian generosity.

- *Pray the news.* Christians don't just discuss the news; we place the needs of those who are suffering at the foot of the cross. We pray that God's transforming power, the power that turned the death of Jesus into resurrection, will also transform the suffering in our communities and around the world. We are a hopeful people who believe that our prayer, accompanied by our good works, will make a positive difference in the world. Here is a great Web site to help you pray the news: www.praythenews.com.
- *Respond to tragedy generously.* Keep your eyes and ears open for people and places in need. Discuss with the members of your household how you can respond financially and personally.
- *Prioritize your participation.* We have to make good choices about how we will be involved and how to balance our involvements. There is no simple formula that will solve the priority problem for you and your household, but there are some principles that might be helpful:
 - Keep talking and listening. Communicate regularly with those in your household about what is important to you. Listen closely and respectfully to what is important to them. In two-parent households, the parents should work hard to share priorities as much as possible and communicate them consistently to their children. Communicate regularly with the leaders of the organizations to which you and your family belong. Let them know as soon as possible when you have a concern or anticipate a schedule conflict.

- Acknowledge that God is present everywhere all of the time. While some activities must take priority over others, it does not mean that lower priority activities are unimportant. When you set a church or family event as a priority over a recreational event, be careful not to give the impression that the recreational event has no value. Don't suggest that you are choosing God over sports or a party; rather, you are choosing one way of experiencing God over another way at this particular time for a specific reason. Be clear about your reason.
- Once you've established your priorities, stick to them. If you have children, don't let their complaining break you down. State your priority, state why it is your priority, and suggest that a discussion about it can happen later when the complaining stops.

■ *Never stop participating with your children.* Many parents make the mistake of disconnecting with their children when they become teenagers. Yet recent studies show that teens desire meaningful family time more than anything else. They also love having positive and active relationships with their parents. While teens often appear to be quite grown up, they still lack many necessary skills for responsible community participation. They simply will not acquire these skills by hanging out with friends who also lack the skills necessary for mature adulthood. Stay involved with your teens.

■ *Participate intergenerationally.* We often fall into the temptation of participating in community only with people who are our own age. There is certainly nothing wrong with developing friendships with our peers, but we don't experience the fullness of community life unless we connect with people of all ages. We have much to give and receive from people who are older and younger than we are. Our schooling, which is heavily age-segregated, inhibits us from developing strong intergenerational skills. Parents need to intentionally find ways to regularly connect their children with trusted adults of all ages in their community. Parents and

children can connect with older adults in their community through church programs, nursing home visits, neighborhood block parties, neighborhood services to older adults, so on.

■ *Be politically active.* Write to your elected representatives about issues that matter to you. Learn the positions of political candidates and vote. Explain to your family that it is important for Christians to share their values with the community through political participation. Keep your perspective in balance. Christians may use politics as a tool to help a community achieve its goals, but politics will not be the ultimate solution to community problems. Government is only one part of society. The daily choices of citizens in their homes and in their interactions with each other are far more powerful in determining the health of a community. Many denominations prepare guides to political elections that articulate Christian teaching and its application to social issues. Check with your church or denomination for information.

■ *Discuss the issues and pray for the candidates.* Discuss the candidates' positions on issues during mealtime, and pray for all candidates. Answer questions your children or grandchildren have about political issues. If you don't know the answers, research the issue together online or at the library.

Resources for Living the Christian Practice of Participating in Community

Go to our project web site
www.lifelongfaith.com
 for exciting ideas, practical resources,
 and recommended books and web
 sites to help you live the Christian
 practice of participating in community.

Praying

Praying for Our Community and World

God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit:
you call us to live in unity
with all the members of our community.
We pray for all of the people and organizations
that help to create a sense of belonging among us all.
We pray for our families,
that they will be schools of love.
We pray for our schools,
that they will inspire great thoughts.
We pray for our businesses,
that they will create beneficial goods and services.
We pray for our clubs and organizations,
that they will be open to all and fair with their members.
We pray for our politicians,
that they will lead with humility and wisdom.
We pray for those who are different from us,
that they may become our friends.
We pray for our churches,
that they will uncover the hidden face of God in everything we do
and in everyone we meet in our community.

We pray for the communities, the nations, the world,
and the universe of which we are a part,
that we may be one.

We pray for ourselves,
that we will participate in our communities
so that God can bring our prayers to fulfillment.
Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ,
you invite the stranger and the sinner,
the outcast and the orphan
into your wide embrace.
Like a nesting bird,
you shelter and protect the weak
beneath your compassionate wings.
Hold us close and fill us with your love,
that we might welcome others
as you first welcomed us.

—Susan Briehl, adapted by Don Richter

