

Living Well: Christian Practices for Everyday Life

“Caring for the Body” Learning Activities

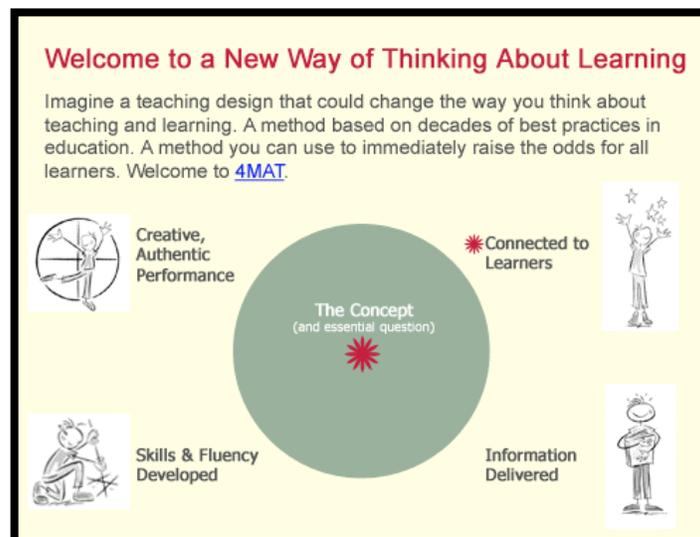
(LifelongFaith Associates)

Review the “Educating for Christian Practices Guide” for additional assistance in designing a learning plan for Christian practices.

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- 1) Educating for Christian Practices Using the 4MAT Learning Process
- 2) Sample Program Design for the Christian Practice of Caring for the Body
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Educating for Christian Practices using the 4MAT Learning Process



In **Quadrant One** (Connect to Learners) the union of elements creates personal meaning, the way we question the value of new learning by connecting it to ourselves. The question to be answered is “Why?” Why is this of value to me? Why do I sense the need to know this? *This is never telling, this is something that happens, something that intrigues them (a problem to solve), or connects to them (a situation that has real meaning in their lives), or touches them in a way that links to their humanity.*

In **Quadrant Two** (Information Delivery) the union of elements creates conceptualized content, structuring knowledge into significant chunks that form the essence, the coherence, and the wonder of new ideas. The question to be answered is “What?” What is out there to be known? What do the experts know about this? What is the nature of the knowledge I am pursuing?

In **Quadrant Three** (Skill and Fluency Development) the union of elements creates usefulness (and the more immediate the better), the transferability into one's life, problem solving with the learning. The question to be answered is "How?" How does this work? Will this streamline my tasks? How will this be of use in my life? *This is where learners take the learning and do something with it, something that has meaning for them. This is where relevance is demonstrated.*

In **Quadrant Four** (Creative and Authentic Performance), the union of elements creates creative integration, the way we adapt the learning into something new and unique. The question to be answered is "What If?" If I use this in my own way, what will happen? What can I create and how will that creation expand, enhance, and maybe even transform the world I know? *The world "per-form" means to form through and that is the essence of this step. It represents the merging of the learning and the learner.*

McCarthy emphasizes that knowledge must be used. It must operate in one's life. And because all human beings are unique, we use and then integrate learning in our own inimitable, incomparable ways. What we learn is transformed into a particular use, a distinct way of doing, a matchless refinement of a method, a unique understanding. It is transformed. It becomes for us. It is in the transformation that real understanding happens.

4 MAT References

- Website: www.aboutlearning.com
- *Teaching Around the 4MAT Cycle – Designing Instructive for Diverse Learners with Diverse Learning Styles*. Bernice McCarthy and Dennis McCarthy. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2006.
- *About Teaching: 4MAT in the Classroom*. Bernice McCarthy. Wauconda, IL: About Learning, 2000.
- *About Teaching Companion: The 4MAT Implementation Workbook*. Bernice McCarthy and Dennis McCarthy. Wauconda, IL: About Learning, 2003.

Examples of Methods for Each Stage of the Process

Quadrant 1. Connecting to the Learner

■ Why do learners need to know this?

- Actual case studies
- Stories (audio, video, illustrated)
- Personal storytelling
- Direct experience / field trip
- Simulated experience or game
- TV-style game show
- Interactive dialogue
- Personal reflection/journal
- Feature film segment
- Media presentation (PowerPoint): images and music
- Dramatic presentations
- Personal reflection tool/worksheet
- Quiz
- Self-assessment or inventory
- Prayer or ritual experience
- Witness presentations

Quadrant 2. Delivering Information

■ What is it that we are teaching the learners?

- Video presentation
- Audio presentation
- PowerPoint presentation with content and images/music
- Guided reading and research
- Interviewing experts
- Demonstration
- Prayer or ritual experience
- Lecture
- Panel presentation
- Study groups: read and analyze/reflect on selecting readings, and present findings in a small group or to the large group
- Project-centered learning: develop a project that involves study, creative activity, and presentation of the project
- Debate
- Inquiry-oriented discussion
- Learning tournament

Quadrant 3. Developing Skills and Fluency

■ How will the learners use it in their lives?

- Case study demonstrating how to use the information
- In-session practice activities and exercises (specific to the content of the session)
- Mentoring
- Role play / skill practice
- Field work
- Simulations
- In-field observations
- Demonstrations
- Panel presentations
- Compare and contrast activities
- Creative writing activity, e.g., learners rewrite Scripture stories or hymns in contemporary language and situations
- Presentations by learners of a project
- Creative activity: learners create an art project, song/music video, video or PowerPoint presentation, dramatic presentation, advertisement/commercial

Quadrant 4. Creative and Authentic Performance

■ What will the learners become and do as a result of the learning experience?

- Conduct a demonstration
- Write a report, article, or story describing performance to share with others
- Create action plans
- Create a photo or video documentary of practice
- Field trip / mission trip
- Participate in a church ministry (within the church or in the wider community)
- Keep a journal or log of performance efforts
- Get involved in an action learning project (e.g., service project, teaching others, leading an activity).

4MAT and the Living Well Process

Each chapter in *Living Well* is developed around five movements:

1. **Yearning** taps into our hunger for living well by addressing a basic area of human need through the real-life stories of people who seek meaning and purpose for their lives through a particular practice.

2. **Reflecting** gives you, whether individually or with your household, an opportunity to become aware of how you experience the basic human need and hunger for the Christian practice in your own life, and how you may already be living this practice.
3. **Exploring** presents the biblical teaching on the practice, how the practice addresses our basic need and hungers, and why the practice is important for living a Christian life.
4. **Living** provides you with a variety of tools – activities, ideas, and strategies – that you can use to integrate each Christian practice into your daily life.
5. **Praying** concludes the chapter by offering God thanks and praise, and asking for God’s help.

Here is an application of the 4MAT learning cycle to teaching Christian practices to a large group (families, multiple generations, or adults) using the 5-part process of each *Living Well: Christian Practices for Everyday Life* chapter.

Quadrant 1

Part 1. *Yearning: The Hunger for the Practice*

- Illustrating the hunger for the Christian practice in story, music, film, and/or current events.

Part 2. *Reflecting: Reflection on the Hunger*

- Guiding the individual or family in identifying how they see the hunger in their own lives and world.
- Helping people become aware of how they already engage in this practice, and the things that distort or hinder the practice.

Quadrant 2

Part 3. *Exploring: The Christian Practice*

- Grounding the Christian practice in the Bible by describing how the biblical story(s) deepens our understanding of the Christian practice.
- Describing what people today, and throughout history, actually do when they are engaged well in a particular practice – people or communities that live the practice with exceptional grace and skill.
- Connecting the Christian practice to human needs and hungers. Identifying how and why it is important to living a meaningful life. Describing the benefits of living the Christian practice – for the person, family, and for the community and world.

Quadrant 3

Part 4. *Living: Application of the Christian Practice to Daily Life*

- Giving people tools – activities, ideas, resources – for living the Christian practice in their daily lives – at home, at work, at school, and in the world.
- Showing people how to make the Christian practice part of everyday life.
- Guiding people in performing the Christian practice and then reflecting on it.

Quadrant 4

Part 4. *Living: Application of the Christian Practice to Daily Life*

Part 5. *Praying: Prayer for the Practice*

- Entering more deeply into the practice through prayer and reflection.
- Offering God thanks and praise, and asking for God’s help in living the practice.

Sample Program Design for the Christian Practice of Caring for the Body

To illustrate how these five elements are incorporated in a learning resource, here is an outline of a large group program using the “Caring for the Body” chapter from *Living Well: Christian Practices for Everyday Life*. During the session, children can use the Caring for the Body activities in the *Living Well Children’s Workbook*.

Preparation

Materials

- The following handouts are included with this session:
 1. *Society’s View of the Body* (2 copies per person/household)
 2. *Your View of the Body*
- People will need Bibles, paper, and pens.
- Collect a variety of magazines with advertising that targets the body, especially fashion magazines, and “lifestyle” magazines focused on men, women, teens, and even children. These types of magazines typically have lots of “body product” ads. Place a variety of magazines on each table prior to the session.
- Record TV commercials that are targeting the body and/or selling “body” products. Try to record up to 10 commercials so that you get a good selection, targeted to different audiences. Since most commercials are 30 seconds or less, this will only be 5 minutes of viewing. Remember that some commercials send positive messages about the body, such as Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty. Create a PowerPoint presentation with the name of each commercial so that people will be able to recall what they have seen.

Suggested Setting

- Organize the participants into table groups. Decorate the table with symbols such as water and oil. Have a Bible on each table. Have all of the learning materials on the table for the session (e.g., magazines for the media activity).

Session Plan

Quadrant 1. Connecting to the Learner: The Experience of Caring for the Body

1. Yearning to Care for the Body—Stories of Caring for the Body

Share with the group the opening stories about caring for the body on pages 1.2 – 1.4 in *Living Well*: “Anne’s ‘Heart Attack,’” “A Married Couple’s Touch,” and “Mom’s Last Bath.” Use a different reader for each story.

2. Society's View of the Body

Participants will use the worksheet, *Society's View of the Body*, to analyze the messages from the advertisements. The worksheet has a number of questions. Tell the group to use as many of the questions that are helpful for the ad they are evaluating. Participants should be sure to answer the final question: *How would summarize this advertisement's message about the body?*

- What do you see and/or hear? Which images, sounds or characters really caught your eye or ear?
 - How does this ad make you feel?
 - What did you like or dislike about this advertisement?
 - What do you think this advertisement is telling you? What's its message?
 - What isn't this advertisement telling you? What's being left out?
 - What did this commercial try to convince you that you personally need? Did it say anything about what our family might need? Do you or do we really need this?
 - What does this advertisement want you to do? How does it want you to behave?
 - Who created this advertisement? What is the producer's purpose? Who is the target audience?
 - How would summarize this advertisement's message about the body?
1. Present the TV commercials. After the commercials review each one using a PowerPoint presentation with the name of each commercial so that people will be able to recall what they have seen.
 2. Ask each table group to analyze the media messages about the body using the worksheet, *Society's View of the Body*. They should use one worksheet per commercial and write their answers on the worksheet. (Table groups can work together or organize into small work groups, by household or ages, with each one taking 1-2 commercials.)
 3. Ask individuals or households to select a magazine to review and to find up to 5 ads focused on the body: "beauty products," "body care products," etc. Using the worksheet, *Society's View of the Body*, they should summarize their impressions of the ads they have selected and write their answers on the worksheet.
 4. As a table group, have people share their reflections on their analysis of the magazine ads and the messages about the body that were being communicated.
 5. Ask the groups to summarize their analysis by identifying 10 messages society communicates through advertisement about the body. These can be written on newsprint and posted around the room. Conclude by asking each group to share one or two messages they discovered in the advertisements.

3. Your View of the Body

Invite each household (individual, couple, or family with children/teens) to review the handout, *Your View of the Body* and complete the questions. The questions are also found on page 1.6 in *Living Well*.

- How do you honor and care for your body?
- How do dishonor or abuse your body?
- What do you see when you look in the mirror? Do you focus on what is beautiful, or do you obsess over perceived flaws?

- How has media advertising influenced your view of your body? How does it effect what you wear, what you eat, which products you use to care for your body or make your look good?
- The best thing about my body is _____ because _____.

Give participants time to think about their responses. (Families can work together on the worksheet.) Then invite them to share their responses to the questions with their table group. Remind people that this is a storytelling experience so be sure to give each person/family time to share their story without interruptions or discussion.

Quadrant 2. Delivering Information: The Christian Practice of Caring for the Body

The Exploring section of the “Caring the Body” chapter on pages 1.7 – 1.11 in *Living Well* presents examples of the Biblical teaching on honoring or caring for the body.

1. Introduction

Introduce the Christian practice of Caring for the Body by using the following quotes from Barbara Brown Taylor and Stephanie Paulsell.

“In Christian teaching, followers of Jesus are called to honor the bodies of our neighbors as we honor our own. In his expanded teaching by example, this includes leper bodies, possessed bodies, widow and orphan bodies, as well as foreign bodies and hostile bodies – none of which he shied away from. Read from the perspective of the body, his ministry was about encountering those whose flesh was discounted by the world in which they lived. (p. 42)

“The daily practice of incarnation – of being in the body with full confidence that God speaks the language of flesh – is to discover a pedagogy that is as old as the gospels. Why else did Jesus spend his last night on earth teaching his disciples to wash feet and share supper? With all the conceptual truths in the universe at his disposal, he did not give them something to think about together when he was gone. Instead, he gave them concrete things to do – specific ways of being together in their bodies – that would go on teaching them what they need to know when he was no longer around to teach them himself.” (p. 43)
(Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World*)

“The Christian practice of honoring the body is born of the confidence that our bodies are made in the image of God’s own goodness. “Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you,” Paul wrote to the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 6:19). As the place where the divine presence dwells, our bodies are worthy of care and blessing and ought never to be degraded or exploited. It is through our bodies that we participate in God’s activity in the world....And it is through daily bodily acts – bathing, dressing, touching – that we might live more fully into the sacredness of our bodies and the bodies of others.”
(Stephanie Paulsell, *Practicing Our Faith*)

2. Presentation: Jesus Cares for the Body

The Exploring section presents Gospel stories and commentary on Jesus cares for the body, organized in the following themes:

- 1) Jesus affirms the body.
- 2) Jesus affirms the body by healing people.
- 3) Jesus affirms the body by consoling people.
- 4) Jesus affirms the body by feeding people.
- 5) Jesus affirms the body by suffering and rising from the dead.

Using the information on pages 1.9–1.11 in *Living Well*, prepare a presentation organized around the five themes to introduce people to how Jesus cares for the body in the Gospels. Use a PowerPoint presentation to share your key points. Use the Gospel stories to illustrate each of the four themes.

Conclude your presentation with this quote from Stephanie Paulsell (on page 1.11).

“These are the touchstones for a contemporary Christian practice of honoring the body. That God created our bodies good. That God dwelled fully in a vulnerable human body. That in death God gathers us up, body and all. That through our bodies we participate in God’s activity in the world.” (Stephanie Paulsell, *Practicing Our Faith*)

3. Experience: Dramatizing the Gospel Stories of Caring for the Body

Explore the stories of Jesus caring for the body by engaging people in enacting the Gospel stories of Jesus’ healing and care for the body. You want the participants to use their body in enacting and giving life to the story.

Organize the participants into drama groups (by table, households, or age groups). Assign each group one of the Gospel stories below. Select the stories in advance. Try to get a good mix in the stories you select.

Provide the group with the following guidelines. (Feel free to adapt these guidelines as needed).

1. Have someone in the group read the story aloud.
2. Work together as a group to develop a drama that will act-out the story. Assign each character in the story to one person in the group. Assign a narrator to read the Gospel story while the actors dramatize the reading. Give everyone a specific role (even if it is part of the crowd). Everyone needs to be involved in giving form to the story through movement, touch, facial expressions, etc. For example, a drama may include more than one person to be healed by Jesus
3. Create or find any props that would be helpful to the drama.
4. Rehearse the actions as a group.
5. Present the drama. Remind the narrator to read the story slowly and with emotion.

The Gospels are filled with stories of Jesus’ care for the body. Select stories for the dramas from the following list. Make sure there is at least one story in each of the four categories.

1. Jesus affirms the body by healing people.

Actions of Jesus	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Healed a leper	8:2-4	1:40-45	5:12-16	
Healed a centurion’s servant	8:5-13		7:1-10	
Healed a paralytic	9:1-8	2:1-12	5:18-26	
Healed a woman hemorrhaging	9:20-22	5:25-34	8:43-48	
Healed two blind men	9:27-31			

Healed a man with a withered hand	12:9-14	3:1-6	6:6-11	
Healed the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter	15:21-28	7:24-30		
Healed an epileptic boy	17:14-18	9:17-27	9:38-42	
Healed two blind men near Jericho	20:29-34			
Healed the Gerasene demoniac			8:26-33	
Healed a deaf mute		7:31-37		
Healed the blind man at Bethsaida		8:22-26		
Healed blind Bartimaeus		10:46-52	18:35-43	
Healed an infirm, bent woman			13:11-13	
Cured the crippled woman			13:10-17	
Healed a man with dropsy			14:1-6	
Healed ten lepers			17:11-19	
Healed a nobleman's son				4:46-54
Healed an infirm man at Bethsaida				5:1-15
Healed a man born blind				9:1-41

2. Jesus affirms the body by consoling people.

Actions of Jesus	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Raised Jairus' daughter	9:18-19, 23-26	5:22-24, 35-43	8:40-42, 49-56	
Raised a widow's son at Nain			7:11-17	

3. Jesus affirms the body by feeding people.

Actions of Jesus	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Feeding more than 5,000 people	14:13-21	6:30-44	9:10-17	6:1-14
The Feeding of the Four Thousand	15:32-39	8:1-9		

4. Jesus affirms the body by suffering and rising from the dead.

Actions of Jesus	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Jesus appears to his disciples			24:36-49	
Jesus and Thomas				20:24-29

During the dramatic presentations encourage people to take notes on what they are experiencing. This will prepare them for the concluding discussion.

4. Discussion

After the dramatic presentations, have people in table groups discuss the following questions. Give each person/household an opportunity to think about the questions and then invite people to share their responses. Display the questions on a PowerPoint presentation or on newsprint for all to see.

- What were you feeling as you experienced the dramas? Which drama was the most meaningful for you?
- How would have felt if you were the person experiencing Jesus' care for the body (e.g., being healing, being fed, being freed of demons)?
- Why do you think Jesus cared for people's bodies?
- What do you think Jesus is teaching us about the body through these stories?
- How do you see God at work through these stories of caring for the body? How do people experience God by caring for the body?

Quadrant 3. Developing Skills and Fluency: Ways to Live the Christian Practice of Caring for the Body

1. People Who Care for the Body

This would be a good time to utilize a panel of people who care for the bodies of others on a daily basis: doctors, nurses, health care providers, hospice workers, mother of infants/young children, fitness trainers, physical therapists, etc. Invite several members of your church community who are involved professionally in caring for the bodies of others to serve on panel to share how they care for the bodies of others, what it means to them, and how these see God at work through their care for the bodies of others. Identify these people in advance and prepare them for their role. Give each person 5 minutes to share his or her story and experiences.

2. Caring for Your Body

Pages 1.12–1.13 in *Living Well* contain 5 activities to help people care for their own bodies. The goal of this part of the learning design is to have people experience one or more activities to help them imagine ways of caring for their own body. Families with children can do these activities together.

Review all 5 activities with people, using a PowerPoint presentation. Select one or more of the following activities from *Living Well* to do with the group. Create a handout for people to guide people through the activity or create a PowerPoint presentation with the activity and instructions.

1. Change your mindset.
2. Take a body inventory.
3. Listen to your body.
4. Examine “body habits” and develop a plan to care for your body.
5. Take delight in your sense of taste.

3. Caring for the Body of Others

Pages 1.13–1.15 in *Living Well* contain 7 activities to help people care for the bodies of others. The goal of this part of the learning design is to present and/or have people experience one or more activities to help them imagine ways of caring for body of others. Families with children can do these activities together.

Review all 7 activities with people, using a PowerPoint presentation. Select one or more of the following activities from *Living Well* to do with the group. Create a handout for people to guide people through the activity or create a PowerPoint presentation with the activity and instructions.

1. Be awestruck by eye contact.
2. Reach out to an ailing body.
3. Care for the Body of Christ
4. Enjoy the bodies with whom you share your meals.
5. Clothe your body with an awareness of others.
6. Connect family and church.
7. Work to free people who are enslaved.

Quadrant 4. Demonstrating Creative and Authentic Performance: Living the Practice of Caring for the Body

1. Integrating the Christian Practice of Caring for the Body into Daily Life

Conclude the session by helping people identify ways that they can integrate the Christian practice of Caring for the Body into their daily life. Have individuals, couples, and families develop a plan for caring for their own bodies and caring for the bodies of others.

Review the ideas presented in the *Living Well* book and in the session. Ask people to consider others ways they can live the Christian practice. Then explain this simple process of moving from idea to action. Give people a worksheet or piece of paper to create their action plan.

1. List 2-3 actions you would like to take to live the Christian practice of Caring for the Body by focusing on caring for your own body.
2. Describe what you will do to put each action into practice, and the steps you will take to ensure that it will happen.
3. List 2-3 actions you would like to take to care for the bodies of others.
4. Describe what you will do to put each action into practice, and the steps you will take to ensure that it will happen.

Conclude by inviting people to share one action idea with their table group.

2. Closing Prayer: Honoring the Body

Here is a closing prayer service using the prayer on page 1.16 in *Living Well*. Consider adding a ritual action from the ideas suggested after the prayer service.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

Prayer:

God, who knit us together in a mother's womb, help us honor what you have made.
Let us touch this masterpiece gently,
with reverence,
with delight,
blessing what you have blessed.
(*Worshippers may touch named body parts as they are blessed.*)

The face

For the housing of our thoughts,
For the muscles of our emotion.

The arms,

For embracing what is sacred,
For grasping, then releasing, your gifts.

The belly

For taking in nourishment,
And, in some, for the nurture of new life.

The thighs

For carrying another's burden,
For pushing off from the ground.

The feet

For walking your paths of peace,
For standing on holy ground.
God, who formed these inward and outward parts,
Fill us with wonder at such knowledge,
knowledge that we are wonderfully made. Amen.

Closing Prayer:

Blessed God, you created us in your image; making each of us an unrepeatable miracle. Help us see how valuable and vulnerable every body is. Teach us to care for, honor, and cherish our bodies even as you cherish and care for us, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Additional Ritual Actions

Water

Place a pitcher of water, basin, and towel on a small table in the center of the room. Invite participants to come forward as pairs and wash each other's hands, using a blessing such as:

"In the name of God: Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit. Amen."

"In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

"Bless these hands to your service, O God."

Oil

Pour oil into a small bowl. Then move from person to person and "anoint" the palm of their hands with oil. Explain that oil is one of the symbols used in Baptism. Ask participants to close their eyes and slowly and silently massage their hands with the oil. Ask them to think about what the oil does to their skin, and how it feels as they continue to gently massage their hands.

Signing of the Senses (Adapted from the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*)

Each person will make the sign of the cross several times – on their foreheads, ears, eyes, lips, heart, shoulders, hands, and feet. As you read each signing ask people to make the sign of the cross on that particular part of their body and respond: Lord Jesus, we will be a sign of your love.

Receive the sign of the cross on your forehead. It is Christ himself who now strengthens you with this sign of his love.

Response: Lord Jesus, we will be a sign of your love.

Receive the sign of the cross on your ears, that you may hear the voice of the Lord.

Response: Lord Jesus, we will be a sign of your love.

Receive the sign of the cross on your eyes, that you may see the glory of God.

Response: Lord Jesus, we will be a sign of your love.

Receive the sign of the cross on your lips, that you may respond to the word of God.

Response: Lord Jesus, we will be a sign of your love.

Receive the sign of the cross over your heart, that Christ may dwell there by faith.

Response: Lord Jesus, we will be a sign of your love.

Receive the sign of the cross on your shoulders, that you may bear the gentle yoke of Christ.

Response: Lord Jesus, we will be a sign of your love.

Receive the sign of the cross on your hands, that Christ may be known in the work which you do.

Response: Lord Jesus, we will be a sign of your love.

Receive the sign of the cross on your feet, that you may walk in the way of Christ.

Response: Lord Jesus, we will be a sign of your love.

I sign you with the sign of eternal life in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Response: Amen.

Being Real: The Practices of the Body of Christ

Melanie L. Dobson Hughes

Divinity Online Edition, Winter 2004, Duke University Divinity School

At a stone picnic table on the campus of a large, suburban Phoenix high school, I break bread with a dozen of my church's youth. In the midst of their frenetic schedules, we pause to offer thanks to God for the food, which I brought for them from a nearby restaurant. In the blessing of the meal and the sharing of our lives at the table, we stand out as an odd oasis of thanksgiving and peace in the chaos of 3,000 adolescents' lunch period.

A recent, discouraging report on the status of women at Duke University serves as the "meat" of our table talk on this pleasant sunny day in Arizona. I ask these college-bound teenagers if they have experienced the intense pressure Duke undergraduate women describe as "effortless perfection: the expectation that one would be smart, accomplished, fit, beautiful, and popular ... without visible effort."

I ask the girls in particular if they feel a need "to hide their intelligence in order to succeed with male peers," if "being cute trumps being smart?"

One student admits, "I felt the pressure intensely in middle school to look a certain way; now I've realized I don't want to be a skinny little girl who labors for hours on my makeup and hair. I'm too busy with school and activities for that stuff; at some point you just give up."

Others remark that the degree of pressure depends upon one's group of friends—the more popular groups feel more intense pressure to be "perfect," while the smarter youth feel pressure to pretend they don't study all of the time.

These youth feel that girls and boys receive equal attention in the classroom (contrary to the experience of Duke female undergraduates), but all acknowledge that, in one way or another, appearances matter.

In a consumption-based society, bodies—particularly women's bodies—become recalcitrant projects that require ceaseless work and the purchase of innumerable products. Physical deficiencies, such as excess weight or flawed skin, are increasingly viewed as evidence of moral weakness or lack of character. Thus, bright, talented young women at Duke University in 2003, though cognizant of media-derived pressure, nonetheless feel valued more for appearance rather than intelligence.

Does the church, I ask the youth, serve as a place that relieves, or intensifies, pressures to look and be "perfect?"

My survey certainly wasn't scientific or comprehensive, yet my heart leapt with hope as the youth described those at church as kind and accepting. One student said she isn't as conscious of body image at church; another said, "We go there to worship God, not to compare appearances."

"At church, we're not scared to be ourselves," added a girl. "We can be real."

Becoming Real

Being real in the church involves a rich set of Christian practices, which are given their foundation in Scripture and theology, and are lived out in a community known as the Body of Christ.

In Scripture, we encounter a God who made creation in God's image and called it good. We meet a savior who became flesh, washed in the waters of baptism, celebrated food and drink in his table life with the world's outcasts, suffered crucifixion, and bodily rose again.

One youth in my congregation who struggles with body image (and who doesn't?) learned that God made her good. Now, whenever a teen magazine or a cruel comment makes her feel less than beautiful, she repeats to herself her one Hebrew word, "I'm tov, I'm tov. . .", and the doctrine of imago dei nurtures her body and soul.

Stephanie Pausell, in her book *Honoring the Body*, writes "Our fragile bodies require communal attention, and so honoring the body is a shared practice, one for which we need each other in profound ways ... bodily vulnerability is something we all share."

As a community, we share in the practices that honor the body when we wash one another's feet, hold hands while praying over a suffering loved one in the hospital, or break bread together at a fellowship potluck. Worship offers innumerable practices to honor the body in its vulnerability – baptism, Eucharist, a liturgical year of feasting and fasting, singing, and Sabbath rest to name a few.

At our breaking of bread on the high school picnic table, one student remarked about our church's practice of table. "You know," she said softly, "I love coming forward for our Lord's Supper. The bread of Jesus tastes so good." The body's sense of taste becomes an avenue for celebrating God's grace within us. Alleluia.

Other practices of the Body of Christ that celebrate the body include retreats and mission trips.

After a trip to the border town of Agua Prieta, Mexico, an astute freshman at the University of Arizona (who very much identified with the findings in the Duke report) said, "People in this town (Agua Prieta) struggle just to feed their bodies and house their children – they don't have the luxury of trying to be perfect."

By touching and experiencing the lives of the poor as a practice of the church, we learn that the practice of honoring the body necessarily involves nourishing the hungry.

Being Real

By honoring the body through Christian practices based in our scriptural tradition, the church mentors its young into a way of life that understands embodiment as a gift. In living together as the Body of Christ, we are a people who allow youth and young adults to be and to celebrate their bodies. We follow the advice of Toni Morrison's character Baby Suggs.

"Here," she said, "in this place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard."

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Society's View of the Body

The following questions help us to evaluate the messages we receive from commercial advertising about our bodies. Use as many of the questions that are helpful for the ad you are evaluating.

Advertisement/Commercial: _____

- ✓ **What do you see and/or hear? Which images, sounds or characters really caught your eye or ear?**

- ✓ **How does this ad make you feel?**

- ✓ **What did you like or dislike about this advertisement?**

- ✓ **What do you think this advertisement is telling you? What's its message?**

- ✓ **What isn't this advertisement telling you? What's being left out?**

- ✓ **What did this commercial try to convince you that you personally need? Did it say anything about what our family might need? Do you or do we really need this?**

- ✓ **What does this advertisement want you to do? How does it want you to behave?**

- ✓ **Who created this advertisement? What is the producer's purpose? Who is the target audience?**

- ✓ **How would summarize this advertisement's message about the body?**

Your View of the Body

Complete this reflection as an individual or as a whole family.

1. How do you honor and care for your body?
2. How do you dishonor or abuse your body?
3. What do you see when you look in the mirror? Do you focus on what is beautiful, or do you obsess over perceived flaws?
4. How has media advertising influenced your view of your body? How does it effect what you wear, what you eat, which products you use to care for your body or make you look good, and so on?
5. The best thing about my body is:

because:

Resources for Developing the Christian Practice of Caring for the Body

An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith. Barbara Brown Taylor. San Francisco: Harper One, 2009.
(See especially Chapter 3: The Practice of Wearing Skin)

From simple practices such as walking, working, and getting lost to deep meditations on topics like prayer and pronouncing blessings, Taylor reveals concrete ways to discover the sacred in the small things we do and see. Something as ordinary as hanging clothes on a clothesline becomes an act of devotion if we pay attention to what we are doing and take time to attend to the sights, smells, and sounds around us. Making eye contact with the cashier at the grocery store becomes a moment of true human connection. Allowing yourself to get lost leads to new discoveries. Under Taylor's expert guidance, we come to question conventional distinctions between the sacred and the secular, learning that no physical act is too earthbound or too humble to become a path to the divine. As we incorporate these practices into our daily lives, we begin to discover altars everywhere we go, in nearly everything we do.

“Honoring the Body.” Stephanie Paulsell. *Practicing Our Faith.* Dorothy C. Bass, editor. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997.

Honoring the Body: Meditations on a Christian Practice. Stephanie Paulsell. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003.

Stephanie Paulsell offers readers a much-needed guide for cherishing the human body and countering the corrosive cultural messages that prevent us from knowing that we are children of God in our bodies as in our spirits. Honoring the Body does more than help us cope with issues such as weight gain and loss, body image, illness, birth and death, it helps us enrich our practice of faith. Paulsell draws on resources from the Christian tradition to show how we can learn to celebrate the body's pleasures, protect the body's vulnerabilities, and develop the practices that will ultimately transform our troubled relationship with our bodies to one of honor and joy. From Paulsell, we can learn how to regain a sense of awe and wonder about our bodies and to cultivate the healing practices that lead to joyful and embodied living.