



women thriving in ministry

AN INITIATIVE OF ASBURY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Program Curriculum

written by Rev. Ashlee Alley
Crawford and Rev. Dianne
Lawhorn

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Foundations of Curriculum:

The call of being a pastor is a gift, a blessing, and a joy for the one who says yes. It is also a challenge and a privilege. Clergy engage in seminary or courses of study for ministry leadership, but it is impossible to prepare a person for both the learning curve of pastoral ministry and the possible struggles that a leader of a spiritual community will face. At its inception, the Women Thriving in Ministry program sought “to help women move from threatened to thriving” with the following objectives:

- Offer community amid isolation
- Nurture identity formation as pastoral leaders
- Connect those who may have a lack of support from local congregations, families, or denominational leadership
- Develop pastors who can face ministry challenges with faithful decision-making

The Women Thriving in Ministry curriculum takes a small group of pastors who may or may not know one another and provides opportunities to build connections—with God and with one another. It also invites participants to reflect meaningfully and cultivate spiritual practices that root them in the Triune God to help them endure the difficulties they will surely face.

The program was launched in the summer of 2020 and included regular conversation by a small group of experienced clergy women who would serve as mentors. These pastors drew on their own experiences as well as the unveiling reality about what is needed to thrive as a woman in the current context. Leadership and pastoral formation would become foundational to the curriculum. As the mentors reflected on our experiences and heard back from participants, it was clear that what was most needed by the new pastors was support to navigate their isolation, lack of support, and challenges. What emerged was a two-fold focus: coaching through developing challenges and support in pastoral formation. Ultimately, we knew that the best support that we could offer our participants was soul care.

The final component of the monthly meeting times was something that actually started before the groups even met: prayerful preparation. In most of our learning modules, we invite all participants to spend some time in preparation—sometimes practical and sometimes reflective—so that they may be able to lean into what God is speaking to them. The preparation was enhanced with group spiritual direction and spiritual readings. Our hope was that this

curriculum would help clergy women to benefit from practical knowledge, as they grew in leadership formation, also that they would receive the spiritual care that is so vital in encouraging life-long, thriving ministry.

Who Was It Written For:

When the Women Thriving in Ministry program was launched, it was intended to be directed towards Clergy Women who are serving in their first five years of pastoral ministry. While the program wasn't intended only for young Clergy Women, many of our participants do happen to be young. The women—both mentors and participants—who were a part of the initial group were a diverse group of pastors serving congregations of all sizes and in a half dozen different denominations. Several served outside the local church as chaplains in various settings. While many of our participants also were engaged in programs for new pastors in their denominational structure, they sought this program to build community, mentorship, and support as they grew into their pastoral identity. Some intentionally sought connection outside of their “official” structures. It is also important to note that our intended guides or facilitators of these groups would be experienced women clergy who are thriving in ministry.

How To Use this Curriculum:

In developing this curriculum, we wanted it to provide enough guidance so that the mentors wouldn't feel like they had to come up with their own lesson plans every month. We also wanted there to be enough freedom that they felt they could be open to the Spirit as they led these sessions. We would encourage you to use this as a guide and also to find ways to make it your own. The curriculum is designed for a cycle of two years and includes 22 lessons in four modules, with a closing meeting.

Lessons 1-6	Introductions and Forming a Community
Lessons 7-11	Cultivating Pastoral Practices
Lessons 12-15	Flourishing in Ministry
Lessons 16-21	Discerning God's Voice: The Clearness Committee
Lesson 22	Closing Meeting: Celebration and Transition

If an 18-month cycle is more desirable for a group, simply skip lessons 16-21 and conclude with lesson 22.

Mentors should read through each lesson and make sure to share any preparation or “homework” assignments that should be completed prior to the group meeting. These assignments can be found within the lesson text, as well as several mentor-specific notations.

Additionally, each 24-month or 18-month group meeting cycle includes two built-in fellowship/Sabbath months that can be used at any time during the duration of the life of the group. For example, we gave the option to either take December “off” or invited one of the participants to plan a Christmas “party” for us. We held virtual Christmas parties, but groups meeting in person could include a meal or other shared fellowship opportunity.

The basic rhythm of each lesson includes a check-in or an ice breaker, a review and discussion of the practical element that we are teaching, a deeper conversation about the spiritual dimension of that element that may include a group spiritual direction conversation or a spiritual reading or reflection. Each session ends with prayer.

As each of us led the curriculum for our own groups, we found that we both used it similarly: we adhered very closely to the lesson plan and also found ways to personalize it. We responded to the invitations as a way to model sharing for the check-in question and reflection on the practical content that the participants were learning. If there was reflective work that they were asked to do, we also did this reflection and shared insights hoping to enhance our sharing time.

While those who lead through this curriculum are really serving as facilitators or guides to the process, it was also intended that we would be companions in the process. Our companionship was intended to be that of a mentor. We knew that our participants would benefit from hearing our insights and reflections on what it means to thrive in ministry. We believe that sharing these insights and reflections, in moderation, greatly enhances the overall experience in the groups.

Rev. Ashlee Alley Crawford is an ordained elder in the Great Plains United Methodist Conference. She is in her ninth-year working in the Great Plains Office of Clergy Excellence directing a young clergy leadership program, in addition to overseeing recruitment and other clergy development programming. Prior to this work, she worked for 12 years in Campus Ministry. She will graduate with a Doctorate of Ministry with an emphasis in Spiritual Direction from Asbury Theological Seminary in May 2023. Ashlee is particularly interested in two divergent—yet connected—aspects of ministry life: supporting people as they explore a call to ministry and walking alongside ministry leaders as they are navigating burnout.

Rev. Dianne Lawhorn is an Ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church, with over twenty years of ministry experience in pastoral positions. For the past 10 years, Dianne has also served the Western North Carolina Conference through Extension Ministries, whereby she consults with individuals and organizations who seek to create space for God to nurture growth and strengthen souls toward vibrant spiritual wholeness. Over the course of her ministry, Dianne has developed expertise in creating and sustaining cultures for spiritual growth. Those whom she has served comment on her unique way of making the word of God a living and relevant thing in their lives. They report valuing her spiritual insight and discipline and they credit her with creatively casting a vision for the future and mobilizing people to achieve their dreams and goals. It is Dianne's greatest joy to serve the Lord through living out her passion for pursuing renewal in and beyond the Church through spiritual transformation!

Meeting 1, Up to 90 minutes—Introductions & Purposes

The Gathering Time—5 minutes

- As people join the meeting, welcome them and create a place of hospitality. When all have arrived, open your time in prayer.

Conversation Starter—30-35 minutes

- Share your name, where you live and serve, how long you've been there.
- The Question Game:
 - The leader chooses a question to answer from The Question Game handout and then picks someone to go next. The second person answers the same question and then picks another question to answer. Then, they pick a third person to do the same. Repeat, making sure everyone gets to answer as long as time allows.

Program Overview—15 minutes

- Share the WTiM Program Goals and Expectations.

Asbury Theological Seminary received a grant from the Lilly Foundation to help women thrive in ministry. In an effort to encourage lifelong thriving, women who are in their first five years of pastoral ministry join together in small groups and are mentored by a female pastor who is thriving and is a few years farther along in her ministry.

To help women move from threatened to thriving, our goals are to help women in the early years of ministry deal with:

- Isolation
- Leadership Identity Formation
- Possible lack of support from local churches, families, or denominational leadership
- Facing ministry challenges and decisions (now with many additional challenges related to Covid-19).

The shape of the program:

- Groups of about 5 women meeting virtually, once a month, for two years
- Fantastic mentors who themselves are women thriving in ministry

The possibility of traveling to meet in person once or twice during the two years

Groups include: support, sharing, group problem solving, leadership goals set individually or as a group

Women may also connect across groups for networking with others in similar ministry settings, leadership challenges, or stages of life

Occasional optional online gatherings or other resources will be offered to address themes that arise as common learning goals (such as preaching, addressing conflict, managing staff, leading change, self-care, etc.)

- The mentor role is to be a guide, but not to have all the answers. Mentors are co-participants on the journey. Feel free to personalize this piece.
- What is a hope or a question that you have?

Group Guidelines—10 minutes

- Introduce the Group Ground Rules and invite discussion.
- Are there any other guidelines that you'd like to see added?
- How will we uphold these commitments?

Inviting Responses—5 minutes

- In a word or phrase, what's exciting to you right now?
- In a word or phrase, what's a concern for you right now?
- Is there anything that you've wanted to say that you've not said yet?

Closing Prayer—5 minutes

Remind them of the Group commitments, to pray for one another as you invite each of them to share a prayer request to be recorded individually. Each person can pray for another in the group and then commit to ongoing prayer. **Confirm the next meeting time and dismiss.**

The Question Game:

- Where do you feel most at peace?
- What was your favorite class in all of your studies? Why?
- What was the religious environment of your childhood like?
- What's the 2 minute version of your call story?
- If we meet up for a meeting at a restaurant/coffee shop/ice cream place/etc., for a meeting, where would you pick and what would you order?
- What's your favorite hymn/praise song/Christian song?
- How do you really feel about icebreakers?
- What advice do you have for me about ministry?
- Tell me something about your family.
- What are your vacation plans in the year ahead?
- If you had more space in your life, what is something you would spend more time doing?
- If you were to preach a sermon on your "life verse," what passage would you choose and why?
- If you were to get a tattoo of a word in a foreign language on your body, what would that word be and would you use spellcheck first?

Group Ground Rules:

- Maintain confidentiality. No one else should be present in the room during the meeting.
- What is shared in the group, stays in the group, unless there is a safety concern.
- Be present. Attend the groups and don't multitask during the meeting.
- Don't judge. Respect others' actions, choices, and theology.
- Don't pastor each other. Just create a safe space to share.
- Pray for each other.
- What would you add to this list of ground rules?

Meeting 2, Up to 90 minutes—Sharing Call Stories

The Gathering Time—5 minutes

- As people join the meeting, welcome them and create a place of hospitality. When all have arrived, open your time in prayer.

Conversation Starter—5 minutes

- When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up and why?

Sharing Call Stories—50-60 minutes

Instructions for participants (to be shared in advance for preparation): In no less than 5 minutes, but no more than 7, share your Call Story.

* While you won't be able to cover everything, spend some time considering how you might share your Call Story with this community, in this season. Feel free to share your story however you like. Here are some questions to consider as you think about your call (and you won't be able to share your response to all the questions— just choose one question or choose several!):

- Who championed you or served as a mentor, casting a vision for you in ministry?
- Have you experienced a wounding that prevented, confused, or delayed your full acceptance of your call?
- Is there a scripture or story from scripture that has framed your call?
- Share some of the highlights of encounters with God that revealed God's call for you.
- What is God teaching you about calling in this season?

*By "Call Story," we are specifically talking about our calling to vocational ministry. You can certainly include elements of your primary call—to follow Jesus—when discussing your secondary call—into vocational service.

To the leader: When your group members are sharing, set a timer for 6 minutes as a "One-Minute Warning" and then ask them to wrap up at 7 minutes. Thank each person for sharing their story—the good, the hard, and everything in between—and invite a few minutes after each person shares to offer feedback, a question, an insight, or a celebration!

After hearing all of the call stories, offer a prayer of gratitude for hearing God's voice and a heart that is obedient.

Inviting Responses—5 minutes

As you reflect on your own call story or the others that you've heard, consider the following:

- Is there anything that you've wanted to say that you've not said yet?
- Is there a way that we can build relationship outside of this group? Consider how social media ("following" one another, a "Group Me" for sharing prayer concerns, etc.) or

even creating prayer partners within the group could cultivate a sense of connection outside of this time.

Closing Invitation—5-10 minutes

Share your screen and ask each person to read several lines from John O’Donohue’s blessing, “For One Who Holds Power”

- Is there a phrase that speaks to your experience?
- How can you embrace the call that God is giving you in this season?

Closing Prayer—5 minutes

Remind everyone of the Group Commitments, one being prayer for one another. Share any updates or new prayer concerns within the group. Ask one person to pray for all concerns expressed or ask each person to pray for one other person in the group.

Confirm the next meeting time and dismiss

For One Who Holds Power

John O'Donahue

May the gift of leadership awaken in you as a vocation,
Keep you mindful of the providence that calls you to serve.

As high over the mountains the eagle spreads its wings,
May your perspective be larger than the view from the foothills.

When the way is flat and dull in times of gray endurance,
May your imagination continue to evoke horizons.

When thirst burns in times of drought,
May you be blessed to find the wells.

May you have the wisdom to read time clearly
And know when the seed of change will flourish.

In your heart may there be a sanctuary
For the stillness where clarity is born.

May your work be infused with passion and creativity
And have the wisdom to balance compassion and challenge.

May your soul find the graciousness
To rise above the fest of small mediocrities.
May your power never become a shell
Wherein your heart would silently atrophy.
May you welcome your own vulnerability
As the ground where healing and truth join.

May integrity of soul be your first ideal,
The source that will guide and bless your work.

Meeting 3, Up to 90 minutes—Pastoral Identity

The Gathering Time—5 minutes

- As people join the meeting, welcome them and create a place of hospitality. When all have arrived, open your time in prayer.

Conversation Starter—5 minutes

- What would your elementary school classmates think of you being a pastor? What would your college classmates think?

Pastoral Ministry—45-50 minutes

Homework: Please read the following article, an interview published in *The Christian Century* in 2002 with Eugene Peterson. Some of it may feel dated, or specific to this author, but lean into how he describes the work of a pastor. Would you spend some time reflecting on these things after reading the article? Plan for about an hour for reading and reflection.

<https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2002-03/best-life>

- How does Peterson describe being a pastor? Does it resonate with what you're learning about being pastor in your congregation?
- What is compelling about the life of pastor as he describes it? Is there anything that feels really foreign about it?
- Peterson really knows himself...his inclinations, strengths, and struggles...and he lives in response to that knowledge. What do you know about yourself at this point in ministry?
 - What are your strengths?
 - What is a challenge for you in ministry?
 - Are you establishing rhythms within an average week, month, or year?
 - What are you longing for spiritually?
 - For what are you grateful?
- What questions arise from reading this article?

To the Mentor: This article can offer a great deal of conversation about the identity of pastor, as well the skills that are necessary in the life of the minister and could take you in many different directions. The purpose of this conversation is for the pastors to begin to first, imagine a life of ministry rooted in the Spirit, and second, to articulate their strengths and weaknesses, specific gifts and calling. Lead the conversation with the questions mentioned above for reflection and help your group members move to a place where they see that their ministry is partnering in Christ's ministry.

Prayer Practice: Consolation/Desolation—10-15 minutes

Share the Consolation/Desolation handout and for the purposes of our time today, read over all the questions and invite each person to settle in on one pair of questions. Ask them to

prayerfully hold our conversation up to these two questions (perhaps invite them to turn their cameras off) by engaging in a stream of consciousness journaling exercise. This is where they take the two questions and instead of just thinking about them, they write (completely unedited) for two to three minutes. They are writing about how they feel and don't need to worry about composing something to share with the group.

After the 3 minutes are up, invite them to share anything they want to share about this experience.

Inviting Responses—5 minutes

As you consider what it means for YOU to be a pastor to your particular congregation, consider the following:

- Is there anything that you've wanted to say that you've not said yet?
- In a word or phrase, what are you thinking or feeling about being called to be a pastor to your congregation?

Closing Prayer—10 minutes

How can we build relationships outside of group time? Prayer partners? Group texts? Marco Polo?

Remind them of the Group Commitments, one being prayer for one another. Are there any updates or new prayer concerns within this group? Share them now. Ask one person to pray for all concerns or for each person to pray for another person in the group.

Confirm the next meeting time and dismiss

Questions of Consolation and Desolation

Adapted by Dianne Lawhorn from The Daily Examen Resources

What was life-giving today, helping me to give and receive God's love?

What was life-draining today, hindering me from giving or receiving God's love?

Where did I feel the most alive today?

Where did I feel life draining out of me?

Where did I feel true joy today?

Where did I feel real sorrow?

What was my response to God today?

How do I wish to respond differently tomorrow?

Where did I love today?

Where did I fall short of loving today?

Where did I have the greatest sense of belonging?

Where did I feel estranged today?

What moment am I most grateful for today?

What moment am I least grateful for today?

Meeting 4, Up to 90 minutes—Soul Care

The Gathering Time—5 minutes

- As people join the meeting, welcome them and create a place of hospitality. When all have arrived, open your time in prayer.

Conversation Starter—5 minutes

- If you could have a day off (truly off—no “catch up” work), where would you go and what would you do?

Sharing—Soul Care—55-60 minutes

Homework: As much as you are able to, take a ½ day for a soul-care check-in. You’ll spend some time in an Examen, a longer version of how we ended our last meeting. Your Examen is focused around 3 questions and 1 action:

- How am I doing, Lord?
 - Where have I sensed God’s presence in this season?
 - Where have I sensed God’s absence in this season?
 - What themes, questions, gratitude, and confessions have emerged?
- How is it with my soul, Lord?
 - What deepens my life with God?
 - What destroys my life with God?
 - Does my spiritual practice or rule of life invite fruitfulness?
- What does faithfulness look like in the season ahead, Lord?
 - In my body, mind, and spirit?
 - In my relationships, home, and resources?
 - Is there anything specific that God is calling me to within these areas?
- Action: Identify 1-3 intentions that come out of this reflection.

To the Mentor: Please share these questions with your mentees and ask them to spend some time in prayerful reflection prior to your meeting. We hope that you can do the same. Mentees will share some of their reflections in 3 rounds of 3 minutes each in a Holy Listening Exercise. View the instructions on the document “Wholly, Holy Listening.” Keep this in mind: Feel free to use silence before and after sharing rounds. For the first round, you’ll ask mentees to share about their experience or one (or more) of their intentions following their reflection. Let them know in advance that there will be no cross talking while people are sharing and to lean into good listening. Use a timer. While deeper guidance is on the document, here is what the three rounds will include:

- The first round is for sharing what has come up for them in their reflection
- The second round is for going deeper in what has come up for them OR for sharing a question that they want to ask about someone else’s sharing

- The third round is for sharing another reflection OR a gratitude for the sharing time

The final two elements of the handout include closing in prayer. We encourage inviting that during the Closing Prayer section below.

Inviting Responses—5-10 minutes

We're coming up on the end of the year and this time may be busier than normal because of Advent. Invite your group to consider whether you will meet during December or not. If so, is someone (including the Mentor) willing to identify the agenda for that meeting? It could be a time of workshopping Christmas worship plans, fellowship/sharing time or could include a virtual Christmas "party." If schedules are tight, give yourselves a break with a month "off."

- Confirm your next meeting time.
- Is there anything that you've wanted to say that you've not said yet?
- In a word or phrase, what are you thinking or feeling about the state of your soul?

Closing Prayer—10 minutes

Remind mentees of the Group Commitments, one being prayer for one another. Are there any updates or new prayer concerns within this group? Share them now. Ask each person to pray for another person. (Agree upon those people prior to praying.)

Wholly, Holy LISTENING

The Art of Deep, Spiritual Listening

Adapted by Ann Starrette from a program on The Spiritual exercises of Saint Ignatius

A format for creating space and opening hearts to hear the wisdom of the Holy Spirit

SHARING: 3 minutes each (adjust time depending on number of people and time available)

FIRST ROUND: Leader begins sharing (based on the topic provided) — followed by others. Leader will keep time allowing each person 3 minutes per round as others listen without interruption.

SECOND ROUND: When all have shared, leader opens the floor again for 3 minutes to elaborate on what they have shared or comment/ask a question on another person's sharing as others listen without interruption.

THIRD ROUND: One last time, the floor is open for 3 minutes each sharing one grace received from the time together and any sense of God's invitation moving forward.

Leader invites circle members to pray a short prayer for the person on their right (either aloud or silently) — or the leader invites people to partner up and pray for each other (again, either aloud or silently).

Leader closes the Holy Listening circle, inviting all to recommit to confidentiality and accountability as we move back into the world.

Meeting 5, Up to 90 minutes—Practical Skills for Ministry

The Gathering Time—5 minutes

- As people join the meeting, welcome them and create a place of hospitality. When all have arrived, open your time in prayer.

Conversation Starter—5 minutes

- What would a mentor or one of your “favorite” church people say was your area to shine in ministry? Would your closest friends or family members agree?

Practical Ministry Skills—Sharing (50-60 minutes)

Ask your group to think about the homework assignment that you shared with them. Ask the following 5 questions and invite them to think in terms of the 5 bigger categories of ministry skills (Preaching, Leadership, Collegiality, Empowering the Laity, and Flourishing in Ministry). Let them know that you’ll be taking notes for an interview with all the mentors later this year that will touch on some of these topics.

- What do you feel like you do really well?
- What do you enjoy doing most or have passion around doing?
- What is something that you avoid doing or feel anxious about doing?
- What do you feel is a growing edge for you?

Inviting Responses—5-10 minutes

- Is there anything that you’ve wanted to say that you’ve not said yet?
- In a word or phrase, what is an area of ministry in which you sense God is calling you to grow?
- What kind of practical support would be most helpful at this point?
- Confirm your next meeting time.

Closing Prayer—5 minutes

Remind group members of the Group Commitments, one being prayer for one another. Are there any updates or new prayer concerns within this group? Share them now. Ask each person to pray for another person. (Agree upon those prior to praying.)

Homework Assignment:

As we start a new year, we want to take some time to talk about how you’re growing in some of the practical aspects of ministry. Preaching, leadership, collegiality, empowering the laity, and flourishing in ministry...these are all aspects of pastoral leadership that are fueled by spiritual practices, study of scripture, and discernment. Ministry can feel overwhelming as it involves a very complex skill set as well as spiritual strength. As part of our time together in the next few months, we’re going to be giving mentors an opportunity to share from their

experiences and we want it to connect with where you are right now—your struggles, your learnings, and your needs.

Part 1: Review

Would you take some time to reflect on the following five areas (Preaching, Leadership, Collegiality, Empowering the laity, and Flourishing in Ministry) and identify your strengths, growing edges, and an area of opportunity for each one?

Preaching—planning, preparation and delivery

Strength:

Growing Edge:

Area of Opportunity:

Leadership—vision, management, and oversight

Strength:

Growing Edge:

Area of Opportunity:

Collegiality—cultivating strong relationships with other clergy and in your annual conference/denominational structure

Strength:

Growing Edge:

Area of Opportunity:

Empowering the laity—cultivating discipleship and discernment among congregation members/leaders

Strength:

Growing Edge:

Area of Opportunity:

Flourishing in ministry—self-care, spiritual practices, and healthy boundaries

Strength:

Growing Edge:

Area of Opportunity:

Part Two: Reflect

In the section below, you'll see several sets of reflection questions. Would you spend a few minutes on a question that "sparks" you? There's no need to answer all of them, just gather your thoughts on a couple of questions that resonate and be willing to share some thoughts with your group when you meet.

- Spiritual Gifts
 - Consider your spiritual gifts for a moment (if you'd like, read 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, Romans 12:6-8 or Ephesians 4:11). What comes to mind about your own gifts? What questions come up for you?
 - What Spiritual Gifts have grown in you throughout your ministry? Are there some that you have not used recently?
 - What spiritual gifts do you most relish using? How might God be able to use those in your life right now?
- Passions
 - Give an honest assessment about your "passion" level for your ministry. What are the areas of ministry in which you are most passionate?
 - What can you do to make more space for an area of passion in your life? What could you stop doing so that you can start doing something life-giving?
 - Is there a social justice issue that "fires you up? What is one thing that will give you a stronger voice within this issue?
- Opportunities
 - Is there any "opening" of an opportunity in your life that holds promise?
 - What could you and 2 or 3 others realistically do about one of the things you named related to your gifts, passion, or spiritual growth?
 - Is there anything God is calling you to do to prepare for future opportunities?

Meeting 6, Up to 90 minutes- Mentor Spotlight

The Gathering Time—5 minutes

- As people join the meeting, welcome them and create a place of hospitality. When all have arrived, open your time in prayer.

Conversation Starter—5 minutes

- What has been a highlight for you in ministry in this last month?

Mentor Spotlight—55 minutes

To share with the mentees: When we become a Christian, we are invited into Christ's ministry. We are a group of pastors who have all acknowledged that Christ has asked us to serve in his ministry with our "daytime hours" and for a paycheck. This month we're going to spend some time chatting about ministry, with a spotlight on the mentor sharing from her experiences. These questions are simply designed to provide jumping off points for discussion. Feel free to make this exercise your own by offering your own questions. Reviewing these questions may bring up some other things that you want to ask your group mentor regarding their experience in ministry or regarding your own!

A Note to the Mentor: Share the document, *25 Questions to Ask a Mentor* via email or screen share and invite each group member to ask the mentor a question. Create a space of openness by modeling vulnerability and take care not to fall into three temptations of mentoring:

- **Creating a protégé who is your mini-me (clergy clone).** Help mentees identify their authentic pastoral style, instead of just trying to emulate you.
- **[Un]intentionally communicating your style is the right way.** Part of your job is to point them to other Exemplars. This will help them to see value in identifying personal/professional authenticity.
- **Telling war stories about your own experience.** Listen first, share second. Value transparency in sharing stories but remember that each context may be very different. Resist making your experience normative.

Do as many "rounds" of question-asking as time allows and enjoy the chance to share more fully about the ways that Christ has invited you into his ministry.

A Shared Reading—Prayer for a New Beginning, by John O'Donohue—10 minutes

We now want to share in the reading *Prayer for a New Beginning* written by John O'Donohue. This reading connects with our previous discussions, as we are reminded again of the "openings" or "opportunities" that God is always bringing along our path. We want to recognize the promise of these opportunities and the call that God offers us within each one. We know that this call prepares us and paves the way for our future ministry. *Share your screen or email the prayer in advance. Ask someone to read the prayer for the group.*

- Notice the word or phrase that shimmers for you
- Share what you noticed (or what came up for you) with your group

Inviting Responses—10 minutes

- Is there anything that you've wanted to say that you've not said yet?
- What are you looking forward to in the month ahead?
- What would you appreciate support/prayer for in the month ahead?
- Confirm your next meeting time.

Closing Prayer—5 minutes

Remind mentees of the Group Commitments, one being prayer for one another. Share any updates or prayer concerns within this group. Ask each person to pray for another person. Agree upon this prior to praying.

25 Questions to Ask a Mentor

Adapted from 25 Questions to Ask a Mentor by Jo Miller

Stories

Ask your mentor to tell a story from her career. Some questions to consider:

1. What was your church like when you first got there?
2. Think back to five years ago. Did you envision this is where you would be?
3. Can you tell me about a time when you had a difficult relationship with a group in the church? How did you handle it?
4. How did you learn to embrace failure?
5. What's the most important leadership lesson you've learned and how is it valuable?
6. Tell me about a recent setback and how you recovered.
7. Tell me about a member of your first church who taught you how to be a pastor.
8. How did you build the skill of always speaking so engagingly in front of others?

Situations

Identify a challenging situation and share it with the mentor. Ask your mentor to act as a sounding board. Some questions to consider:

9. The year ahead holds challenges (because...). What advice do you have for me?
10. Who are the people I need to align with in the church to achieve success?
11. What advice can you offer on nurturing my spiritual life?
12. How do you successfully stay connected to other clergy colleagues?
13. When trying to gain buy-in to implement a new program, what tactics have worked for you?

Self-awareness

Ask a question that invites your mentor to contribute to your self-awareness. Some questions to consider:

14. Where do you see my strengths and what should I focus on to improve?
15. What do you see as some of my blind spots?
16. How do you think others perceive me?
17. How I am viewed by leadership?
18. Do I come across as poised and calm?
19. Did everyone understand what I presented at the last meeting?
20. How could I have communicated my idea more clearly?

Skill-building

Identify a skill you currently want to develop and ask your mentor for advice or resources. Some questions to consider:

21. How do you approach risk-taking?
22. What new skills do I need to grow my leadership skills?
23. How can I become a more connected preacher?
24. How can I become better at cultivating leaders?

OR, 25. Come up with your own question!

Prayer for a New Beginning

by John O'Donohue

In out-of-the-way places of the heart,
Where your thoughts never think to wander,
This beginning has been quietly forming,
Waiting until you were ready to emerge.
For a long time it has watched your desire,
Feeling the emptiness growing inside you,
Noticing how you willed yourself on,
Still unable to leave what you had outgrown.
It watched you play with the seduction of safety
and the gray promises that sameness whispered,
Heard the waves of turmoil rise and relent,
Wondered would you always live like this.
Then the delight, when your courage kindled,
And out you stepped onto new ground,
Your eyes young again with energy and dream,
A path of plenitude opening before you.
Though your destination is not yet clear
You can trust the promise of this opening;
Unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning
That is at one with your life's desire.
Awaken your spirit to adventure;
Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk;
Soon you will home in a new rhythm,
For your soul senses the world that awaits you.

Meeting 7, Up to 90 minutes—Preaching

The Gathering Time—10 minutes

- As people join the meeting, welcome them and create a place of hospitality. When all have arrived, open your time in prayer, including the prayer below. The mentor could read it, or you could share your screen and invite a group member to read it. Let this prayer create the space for your group to really be present—first to God, then to themselves and finally to one another.

A Gift by Denise Levertov

Just when you seem to yourself
nothing but a flimsy web
of questions, you are given
the questions of others to hold
in the emptiness of your hands,
songbird eggs that can still hatch
if you keep them warm,
butterflies opening and closing themselves
in your cupped palms, trusting you not to injure
their scintillant fur, their dust.
You are given the questions of others
as if they were answers
to all you ask. Yes, perhaps
this gift is your answer.

Conversation Starter—5 minutes

- What was the first sermon that you ever preached?

Sharing—Preaching—50-55 minutes

Starting this month and continuing on through the next few months, we'll be sharing in a series of videos of the mentors sharing about topics that came out of our groups in January. We'll be asking everyone to watch a video (usually about 15 minutes, give or take a few minutes) and spend some time in prayerful reflection and journaling.

Two sets of videos have been filmed. You may choose to watch either set, or you may want to watch both! All videos can also be found under the “Navigating through Ministry Videos” page on the Women Thriving in Ministry website.

Set 1 - Filmed by Cohort 1 mentors, 2021

- [Navigating Through Ministry - Introduction on Vimeo](#) (7 min)
- [Navigating Through Ministry - Preaching on Vimeo](#) (21 min)

Set 2 - Filmed by Cohort 2 mentors, 2022

- [Navigating Through Ministry - Introduction & Preaching on Vimeo](#) (28 min)

After watching, please spend some time journaling or considering the following questions:

- What did you appreciate about hearing the mentors share from their experience of preaching?
- Was there anything shared that particularly resounded with your experience of preaching?
- What questions came up for you as you considered the mentors experience along with your own?
- Is there anything that came up in your reflections that you want to give further consideration to?
- Are there any action steps that you feel compelled to take in response to this reflection?

To the Mentor: Please share these questions with your mentees and ask them to watch the video and spend some time in prayerful reflection prior to your meeting. We hope that you can do the same. Mentees will share some of their reflections in 3 rounds of 3 minutes each in a Holy Listening Exercise. View the instructions on the document “Wholly, Holy Listening.” Keep this in mind: Feel free to use silence before and after sharing rounds. For the first round, you’ll ask mentees to share about their experience or one (or more) of their intentions following their reflection. Let them know in advance that there will be no cross talking while people are sharing and to lean into good listening. Use a timer. While deeper guidance is on the document, here is what the three rounds will include:

- The first round is for sharing what has come up for them in their reflection
- The second round is for going deeper in what has come up for them OR for sharing a question that they want to ask about someone else’s sharing
- The third round is for sharing another reflection OR a gratitude for the sharing time

The final two elements of the handout include closing in prayer. We encourage inviting that during the Closing Prayer section below.

- Since we’ll be repeating this practice several times, let’s spend 5 minutes or so getting some feedback about it. For just a few minutes ask your group the following questions and capture their reflections to share in the next Leader’s Meeting:
 - What was the experience of Holy Listening like for you?
 - Was there anything that you especially appreciated about it?
 - Was there anything that felt awkward about it?
 - Was there anything that could have enhanced the experience for you?
- Confirm your next meeting time.

- Is there anything that you've wanted to say that you've not said yet?
- In a word or phrase, what are you thinking or feeling about becoming a preacher?

Closing Prayer—5 minutes

Remind group member of the Group Commitments, one being prayer for one another. Share any updates or new prayer concerns within the group. Ask each person to pray for another person. Agree upon those people prior to praying.

Meeting 8, Up to 90 minutes—Leadership & Visioning

The Gathering Time—5 minutes

- As people join the meeting, welcome them and create a place of hospitality. When all have arrived, open your time in prayer.

Conversation Starter—5 minutes

- Is there a pastor with whom you've worked whose leadership style you have especially admired?
- What about their leadership style have you appreciated or would like to emulate?

Sharing—Leadership—50-55 minutes

Homework before: Please watch the video below and spend some time in prayerful reflection and journaling:

As in the previous session, you may choose to watch just one set, or both!

Set 1 - Filmed by Cohort 1 mentors, 2021

Leadership and Vision - [Navigating Through Ministry - Leadership \(vimeo.com\)](#) (13 min)

Set 2 - Filmed by Cohort 2 mentors, 2022

Leadership and Vision - [Navigating Through Ministry - Leadership & Visioning](#) (19 min)

After watching, please spend some time journaling or considering the following questions:

- What did you appreciate about hearing the mentors share from their experience of leadership and casting vision?
- Was there anything shared that particularly resounded with your experience of spiritual leadership?
- What questions came up for you as you considered the mentor's experience along with your own?
- Is there anything that came up in your reflections that you want to give further consideration to?
- Are there any action steps that you feel compelled to take in response to this reflection?

To the Mentor: Please share these questions with your mentees and ask them to watch the video and spend some time in prayerful reflection prior to your meeting. We hope that you can do the same. Mentees will share some of their reflections in 3 rounds of 3 minutes each in a Holy Listening Exercise. View the instructions on the document "Wholly, Holy Listening." Keep this in mind: Feel free to use silence before and after sharing rounds. For the first round, you'll

ask mentees to share about their experience or one (or more) of their intentions following their reflection. Let them know in advance that there will be no cross talking while people are sharing and to lean into good listening. Use a timer. While deeper guidance is on the document, here is what the three rounds will include:

- The first round is for sharing what has come up for them in their reflection
- The second round is for going deeper in what has come up for them OR for sharing a question that they want to ask about someone else's sharing
- The third round is for sharing another reflection OR a gratitude for the sharing time

The final two elements of the handout include closing in prayer. We encourage inviting that during the Closing Prayer section below.

Inviting Responses—10 minutes

- Confirm your next meeting time.
- Is there anything that you've wanted to say that you've not said yet?
- In a word or phrase, what are you thinking or feeling about Leadership & Visioning?

Closing Reflection—5-10 minutes

Invite someone to read John O'Donahue's blessing, "For A Leader." Ask everyone to listen for a phrase, a word, or an idea that speaks to them. After it is read, ask them the following:

- What stands out to you from this blessing?
- Is there a word that you feel particularly challenged by in this current season of ministry?
- Is there a word that you think God might be encouraging or challenging you with for the season ahead?

Closing Prayer—10 minutes

Remind group members of the Group Commitments, one being prayer for one another. Are there any updates or new prayer concerns within this group? Share them now. Ask each person to pray for another person. Agree upon those people prior to praying.

For a Leader by John O Donohue

May you have the grace and wisdom to act kindly, learning to distinguish between what is personal and what is not.

May you be hospitable to criticism.

May you never put yourself at the center of things.

May you act not from arrogance but out of service.

May you work on yourself, building up and refining the ways of your mind.

May those who work for you know you see and respect them.

May you learn to cultivate the art of presence in order to engage with those who meet you.

When someone fails or disappoints you, may the graciousness with which you engage be their stairway to renewal and refinement.

May you treasure the gifts of the mind through reading and creative thinking so that you continue as a servant of the frontier where the new will draw its enrichment from the old, and you never become a functionary.

May you know the wisdom of deep listening, the healing of wholesome words, the encouragement of the appreciative gaze, the decorum of held dignity, the springtime edge of the bleak question.

May you have a mind that loves frontiers so that you can evoke the bright fields that lie beyond the view of the regular eye.

May you have good friends to mirror your blind spots.

May leadership be for you a true adventure of growth.

Meeting 9, Up to 90 minutes—Collegiality

The Gathering Time—10 minutes

- As people join the meeting, welcome them and create a place of hospitality. When all have arrived, open your time in prayer.
 - As part of the homework, would you find a picture, image or symbol to share with your group that exemplifies connection between people? You'll be invited to share it with your group, without explanation at this time, as a way of introducing your shared understanding, hope, or need about collegiality.
 - To the Mentor: Please share the instructions above and make sure that your Zoom link allows everyone to share their screens. Let this time be a prayerful/offering time, but don't let it become story-hour. They'll be able to speak to their image at the end if they really want to do so.

Conversation Starter—5 minutes

- Describe your approach to a new situation: A.) Find (or make) a friend and spend the duration hanging with that person, B.) Get to know as many people as you can, or C.) Step away for some alone time as often if you can.

Sharing—Collegiality—50-55 minutes

Homework before: Please watch the video below and spend some time in prayerful reflection and journaling.

As in the previous session, you may choose to watch just one set, or both!

Set 1 - Filmed by Cohort 1 mentors, 2021

Collegiality - [Navigating Through Ministry - Collegiality](#) (12 min)

Set 2 - Filmed by Cohort 2 mentors, 2022

Collegiality - [Navigating Through Ministry - Collegiality](#) (18 min)

After watching, please spend some time journaling or considering the following questions:

- What did you appreciate about hearing the mentors share from their experience of collegiality?
- Was there anything shared that particularly resounded with your experience of building (or not building) relationships with colleagues?
- What questions came up for you as you considered the mentors experience along with your own?
- Is there anything that came up in your reflections that you want to give further consideration to?

- Are there any action steps that you feel compelled to take in response to this reflection?

To the Mentor: Please share these questions with your mentees and ask them to watch the video(s) and spend some time in prayerful reflection prior to your meeting. We hope that you can do the same. Mentees will share some of their reflections in 3 rounds of 3 minutes each in a Holy Listening Exercise. View the instructions on the document “Wholly, Holy Listening.” Keep this in mind: Feel free to use silence before and after sharing rounds. For the first round, you’ll ask mentees to share about their experience or one (or more) of their intentions following their reflection. Let them know in advance that there will be no cross talking while people are sharing and to lean into good listening. Use a timer. While deeper guidance is on the document, here is what the three rounds will include:

- The first round is for sharing what has come up for them in their reflection
- The second round is for going deeper in what has come up for them OR for sharing a question that they want to ask about someone else’s sharing
- The third round is for sharing another reflection OR a gratitude for the sharing time

The final two elements of the handout include closing in prayer. We encourage inviting that during the Closing Prayer section below.

Inviting Responses—10 minutes

- Confirm your next meeting time.
- Is there anything that you’ve wanted to say that you’ve not said yet?
- Think back to the exercise we did at the beginning with the pictures. Is there anything you want to say about the picture/symbol that you shared? Is there anything you want to share about your group member’s pictures? What do you think is important for us to carry with us from these images about our connection with clergy colleagues?
- In a word or phrase, what are you thinking or feeling about collegiality?

Closing Prayer—10 minutes

Remind group members of the Group Commitments, one being prayer for one another. Are there any updates or new prayer concerns within this group? Share them now. Ask each person to pray for one other person. Agree upon those prior to praying.

Close with Ted Loder’s prayer, “I Want So to Belong.” Share it on the screen and ask someone to read it as a closing.

I Want So to Belong

Ted Loder

O God, I want so to belong;
 teach me to accept.
I want to be close;
 teach me to reach out.
I want a place where I am welcome;
 teach me to open my arms.
I want mercy;
 teach me to forgive.
I want beauty;
 teach me honesty.
I want peace;
 show me the eye of the storm.
I want truth; show me the way to question
 my unquestionable convictions.
I want joy;
 show me the way of deeper commitment.
I want life;
 show me how to die.

Meeting 10, Up to 90 minutes—Flourishing in Ministry

The Gathering Time—5 minutes

- As people join the meeting, welcome them and create a place of hospitality. When all have arrived, open your time in prayer.

Conversation Starter—5 minutes

- Briefly tell us about a time in the last year when you knew that God was at work in the life of your ministry.

Sharing—Flourishing in Ministry—50-55 minutes

Homework before: Please watch the video below and spend some time in prayerful reflection and journaling.

As in the previous session, you may choose to watch just one set, or both!

Set 1 - Filmed by Cohort 1 mentors, 2021

Flourishing in Ministry- [Navigating Through Ministry: Flourishing](#) (15 min)

Set 2 - Filmed by Cohort 2 mentors, 2022

Flourishing in Ministry - [Navigating Through Ministry: Flourishing](#) (21 min)

After watching, please spend some time journaling or considering the following questions:

- What did you appreciate about hearing the mentors share from their experience of flourishing in ministry?
- Was there anything shared that particularly resounded with your hope for or experience of a ministry that is fruitful?
- What questions came up for you as you considered the practices that sustain a flourishing ministry?
- Is there anything that came up in your reflections that you want to give further consideration to?
- Are there any action steps that you feel compelled to take in response to this reflection?

To the Mentor: Please share these questions with your mentees and ask them to watch the video and spend some time in prayerful reflection prior to your meeting. We hope that you can do the same. Mentees will share some of their reflections in 3 rounds of 3 minutes each in a Holy Listening Exercise. View the instructions on the document “Wholly, Holy Listening.” Keep this in mind: Feel free to use silence before and after sharing rounds. For the first round, you’ll ask mentees to share about their experience or one (or more) of their intentions following their reflection. Let them know in advance that there will be no cross talking while people are

sharing and to lean into good listening. Use a timer. While deeper guidance is on the document, here is what the three rounds will include:

- The first round is for sharing what has come up for them in their reflection
- The second round is for going deeper in what has come up for them OR for sharing a question that they want to ask about someone else's sharing
- The third round is for sharing another reflection OR a gratitude for the sharing time

The final two elements of the handout include closing in prayer. We encourage inviting that during the Closing Prayer section below.

Rule of Life—10 minutes

Several mentors mentioned a Rule of Life. A Rule of Life is a way of living that puts some boundaries in your life to create space for flourishing. It could include commitments that you keep with yourself about spiritual practices, relationships, habits, or other areas about which you have a conviction.

- Have you ever intentionally crafted a rule of life?
- Are there commitments that you already keep with yourself (even though they aren't written down) that help you to flourish?
- Are there areas of your life and ministry that God may be inviting you to make a renewed commitment to?
- Does the idea of crafting a rule of life seem life-giving or life-draining? In other words, does it seem energizing or does it seem restrictive?

[Mentor: if you have a Rule of Life, would you be willing to share all or part of it with your group?]

Some resources about crafting a Rule of Life can be found below to help you consider whether you want to spend time creating one during this season.

Inviting Responses—10 minutes

- Share the reading, "Fire" by Judy Brown
 - What stands out to you from this poem?
 - How does it point to a life of flourishing?
- Confirm next meeting time.
- Is there anything that you've wanted to say that you've not said yet?
- In a word or phrase, what are you thinking or feeling about living a life of flourishing?

Closing Prayer—5 minutes

Remind them of the Group Commitments, one being prayer for one another. Are there any updates or new prayer concerns within this group? Share them now. Ask each person to pray for another person. Agree upon those prior to praying.

Rule of Life

*Compiled by Ashlee Alley Crawford
from Ruth Haley Barton's Rule of Life Resources*

Though the temptation is to find the next best-selling ministry book to tell us what we should be doing or preaching in our contexts, often what we need most is a heart and mind attuned to what the Spirit is speaking to us now. "When we are rested, we bring steady, alert attention that is characterized by true discernment about what is truly needed in our situation, and the energy and creativity to carry it out" (Ruth Haley Barton in *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, p. 121). Creating a Rule of Life provides some boundaries to help us shepherd our own schedules and actions so that we might share in the abundance of Christ.

Developing a Rule of Life

A Rule of Life was first identified in the 5th century by St. Benedict so that the community of monks could, as Ruth Haley Barton says, in *Shaping the Soul of Your Leadership*,

Seek God and live responsibility in the world...St. Benedict's Rule...is simply a pattern of attitudes, behaviors and practices that are regular and routine and are intended to produce a certain quality of life and character in us.

Two samples are provided for you to consider how you might begin to identify a rule to draw forth faithfulness and fruitfulness from your life. You're not expected to work through both models. Rather, linger over each and identify a path of listening to your own life as you see what Rule of Life emerges.

Sacred Ordinary Days

The Sacred Ordinary Days planner includes space for one to develop a Rule of Life, or, as they describe,

Several simple statements that guide the posture of your life and the living of your days. It is not lived perfectly but can be lived faithfully while fostering within you an integrated and embodied life of faith (Sacred Ordinary Days Liturgical Planner).

The Planner includes space to draft out one's values in seven areas: Spirit, Body, Mind, Relationship, Home, Work, Resources. They encourage creating a statement that can become a "rule" for life that can be shared with others in one's community and is meant to inspire and guide, rather than dictate.

Spirit	
Body	
Mind	
Relationship	
Home	
Work	
Resources	

Spiritual Rhythms, Ruth Haley Barton

Author Ruth Haley Barton writes in several books about spiritual rhythms that nourish one's soul which could become the foundation for a Rule of Life. Consider the categories that she shares in Chapter 8 of her book, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership* (134-135). For each of these areas, consider if you're practicing them in a healthy way. What is the vision of "abundance" for each area? What practical boundaries could you draw related to each of these areas?

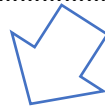
Solitude.....Community

Work.....Rest

Stillness.....Action

Silence.....Word

Engagement...Retreat



Circle areas that might be missing for you. Draw an arrow at something God is inviting you to grow in today. Write out a short list of statements that could become a Rule for your Life.

Spiritual Discipline Reflection

Take a look at this list of spiritual practices. Underline those that have been meaningful to you in the past. Star* those that you are currently practicing. Circle those that you want to include as part of a healthy rhythm for living within a Rule of Life.

- Reading Scripture
- Memorizing Scripture
- Meditation
- Prayer Beads
- Intercessory Prayer
- Prayer Journal
- Praying in groups
- Memorized Prayers
- Breath Prayer
- Daily Office
- Fasting
- Covenant Group
- Meeting with a Spiritual Director
- Keeping Sabbath
- Silence
- Solitude
- Labyrinth
- Examen
- Simplicity
- Generosity
- Forgiveness
- Worship
- Art
- Gratitude practice
- Journal
- Spending time in nature
-
-
-
-

- Eucharist

Fire Reading

Judy Brown

What makes a fire burn
is space between the logs,
a breathing space.
Too much of a good thing,
too many logs
packed in too tight
can douse the flames
almost as surely
as a pail of water would.
So building fires
requires attention
to the spaces in between,
as much as to the wood.

When we are able to build
open spaces
in the same way
we have learned
to pile on the logs,
then we can come to see how
it is fuel, and absence of the fuel
together, that make fire possible.

We only need to lay a log
lightly from time to time.
A fire grows simply because the space is there,
with openings in which the flame
that knows just how it wants to burn can find its way.

Meeting 11, Up to 90 minutes—Women in Ministry

The Gathering Time—5 minutes

- As people join the meeting, welcome them and create a place of hospitality. When all have arrived, open your time in prayer.

Conversation Starter—5 minutes

- Who is the first female pastor you knew? What impression of women serving in pastoral ministry did you have growing up?

Sharing—Flourishing in Ministry—50-55 minutes

Homework before: Please watch the video below and spend some time in prayerful reflection and journaling:

As in the previous session, you may choose to watch just one set, or both!

Set 1 - Filmed by Cohort 1 mentors, 2021

Women in the Workplace: [Navigating Through Ministry -Women in the Workplace](#) (29 min)

Set 2 - Filmed by Cohort 2 mentors, 2022

Women in the Workplace: [Navigating Through Ministry: Women in the Workplace](#) (39 min)

After watching, please spend some time journaling or considering the following questions:

- What did you appreciate about hearing the mentors share from their experience as women serving in pastoral ministry?
- Was there anything shared that particularly resounded with your experience as a woman serving in pastoral ministry?
- What questions came up for you as you considered the experiences shared by the mentors that are aspects of being women serving in pastoral ministry?
- Is there anything that came up in your reflections to which you want to give further consideration?
- Are there any action steps that you feel compelled to take in response to this reflection?

To the Mentor: Please share these questions with your mentees and ask them to watch the video and spend some time in prayerful reflection prior to your meeting. We hope that you can do the same. Mentees will share some of their reflections in 3 rounds of 3 minutes each in a Holy Listening Exercise. View the instructions on the document “Wholly, Holy Listening.” Keep this in mind: Feel free to use silence before and after sharing rounds. For the first round, you’ll ask mentees to share about their experience or one (or more) of their intentions following their reflection. Let them know in advance that there will be no cross talking while people are sharing and to lean into good listening. Use a timer. While deeper guidance is on the document, here is what the three rounds will include:

- The first round is for sharing what has come up for them in their reflection
- The second round is for going deeper in what has come up for them OR for sharing a question that they want to ask about someone else's sharing
- The third round is for sharing another reflection OR a gratitude for the sharing time

The final two elements of the handout include closing in prayer. We encourage inviting that during the Closing Prayer section below.

Inviting Responses—15 minutes

- There are many different tensions in being a woman in our contemporary American church context. Work/life tensions, family responsibilities, theological conflicts, inherent biases for women in leadership, growing in pastoral identity and authenticity, among others. Some things we need to hold on to, and some things we need to let go of.
 - Can you think of something you need to let go of?
 - What would you like to hold on to?
- Share the reading, "Blessing the Ordinary" from Jan Richardson's book *Circle of Grace*
 - Giving and receiving blessing is an aspect of ministry. Ministry is the place where we interact with the work of Christ and isn't just for a special group of credentialed people (or for just men). Ask one person to read the blessing.
 - What stands out to you from this blessing?
- If you were to create a blessing for other women who are discerning or walking a path of ministry, what would you include? (Have someone write this down...perhaps it could shared at a later date or with the whole group.)
- Confirm next meeting time.
- Is there anything that you've wanted to say that you've not said yet?
- In a word or phrase, what are you thinking or feeling about being a woman serving in ministry?

Closing Prayer—5 minutes

Remind them of the Group Commitments, one being prayer for one another. Are there any updates or new prayer concerns within this group? Share them now. Ask each person to pray for another person. Agree upon those prior to praying.

Blessing the Ordinary

Jan Richardson

Let these words lay themselves
like a blessing upon your head,
your shoulders,
as if, like hands,
they could pass on to you
what you most need for this day,
as if they could anoint you
not merely for the path ahead
but for this ordinary moment
that opens itself to you---
Opens itself like another hand
that unfurls itself,
that reaches out
to gather these words
in the bowl of its palm.
You may think this blessing lives
within these words.
But I tell you
it lives within the opening
and in the reaching; i
it lives in the ache
where this blessing begins;
it lives in the hollow
made by the places
where the hands
of this blessing meet.

Meeting 12, 90 minutes—Daily Wellbeing

The Gathering Time—5 minutes

- As people join the meeting, welcome them and create a place of hospitality. When all have arrived, open your time in prayer.

Conversation Starter—5 minutes

- If you were to share an emoji (or two) for your day today, what would it be? Why?

Sharing Together—45 minutes

Homework, to be shared in advance:

We're going to be spending the next four months connecting around four aspects of what makes for healthy and flourishing clergy. It's rooted in some research that takes into account the feedback of thousands of pastors and presents a model for wellbeing. You're invited to dig into some resources that they've created to help pastors lean into spiritual and wellbeing practices that contribute to lives of deeper spiritual joy. Would you...

- Take the assessment
 - <https://workwellresearch.org/research-projects/improve-your-wellbeing/>
 - It will require you to download a free app for your phone/tablet. If you need to input a referral code, use: LILLY
 - Feel free to explore the app and any practices that look interesting. No need to do too much with this, but you're invited to if you'd like!
- Watch [this 6 minute video](#) as an overview of the 4 categories that we're going to be exploring in the next 4 months: happiness, resilience, authenticity, and thriving.
 - While you watch, take notes and capture any questions that come to mind. Be prepared to bring one question to the group discussion.

To the Mentor: Please share the instructions and questions above with your mentees. Ask them to watch the short video and reflect a bit prior to your meeting.

As you prepare for this time, we want you to know that for the next 4 months, we're going to be digging into the research of a group from Notre Dame who has been investigating how well clergy are flourishing and how they can live more deeply in the abundant life of Christ. They've identified 4 things that all make up a flourishing life and help us consider areas that we might pay attention to in order to intentionally grow in being abundant in the ways that bring us more Jesus-life! You're welcome to dig into the research a bit yourself, if you'd like, but it's not necessary. If it is of interest, you can find a compiled report here: https://workwellresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/FIM_Report_Flourishing_in_Ministry_2.pdf

Or, poke around the website here: <https://workwellresearch.org/>

Below are some guideposts for your discussion:

- Hopefully you were able to watch the brief video about the four areas that contribute to increased flourishing in ministry. Did you have any takeaways that you'd like to share with us?
- We asked you to identify a question that you had from watching the video. What question comes to mind for you as a result?
- This month, we want to focus on the idea of daily wellbeing or happiness. In the video, Dr. Bloom mentioned that healthy wellbeing is three good days for every one difficult day. How are you doing? Do you have more good, positive days than difficult, challenging days? (Perhaps this is another way of getting at John Wesley's question: "How is it with your soul?")
- What are 3-5 things that are a part of a "good day" for you?

Prayer Practice—Centering Prayer—15 minutes

Preparation: You will need to set a timer/use a chime for the centering prayer exercise. You could potentially use a chime tone from your phone, or download the free app, **Insight Timer**. **Insight Timer** will allow you to set a time that starts and ends with a bell.

Instruction: As a way of connecting with God, we want to encourage sharing a prayer practice of Centering Prayer together. One of the things that is important to remember as you are focusing on your well-being is that this isn't only about work that you do for yourself; it's also about work that God does within you. We want to invite God to be a resource to us in our well-being. Centering prayer is one of the practices that connects us with God's work on our behalf. Through this practice, we open our minds, hearts, bodies, and spirits to God. As we make ourselves totally available to God and give God access to our whole selves, we turn everything over to God and trust God with it. In this, we trust God to do the work in us that we can't do within ourselves. Our role is simply to show up and be present to what God has for us- which is always pure gift!

- **Say:** We are going to guide you through an abbreviated form of centering prayer now. There will be a chime that leads you into and out of this prayer time. Once we are settled, we will enjoy 10 minutes of silent prayer, after which, we will close with reciting The Lord's Prayer together.
- **Preparation:** Use a chime tone from your phone, or perhaps download the app, **Insight Timer**. You can set a time that starts and ends with a bell. *Plan for this to be 10 minutes.*
- **Say:** We invite you to get comfortable in your seats, as you place your feet flat on the floor, and hold your hands gently in your lap, turn your palms up, representing openness to God.
 - As you settle, take a moment to notice your breath and take a couple of deep breaths, as we begin to enter in together.
 - Often people will choose a word or an image as the symbol of their intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
 - If you choose to do this, silently introduce your sacred word as the symbol of your consent and surrender, as you enter into this prayer.
 - When engaged with your thoughts, let them pass by and return ever-so-gently to this sacred word or image.

- At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with your eyes closed for a moment before we close with the Lord's prayer.

Inviting Response—15 minutes

- We've been discussing what it means for pastors to flourish in ministry. Part of what Jesus came to do is for us to know the "Abundant Life" as he spoke about in John 10:10.
 - Which do you have more of:
 - Tasks or time
 - Possibility or capacity
 - Burdens or celebration
 - Fill in the blank: if I could have more of anything, I'd like more _____.
- What is one thing you can do in the week ahead to incorporate a practice that contributes to more "good days"?
- Is there anything that you've not said yet that you'd like to say?
- Homework for next time: Would you consider committing to the "Map Your Day" exercise in the WorkWell app? It is an opportunity to pick an emoji (of the five offered there) to do a self-check in at various times in your day. Perhaps check in as your day starts and an hour before you wrap up for the day.
 - While you're in WorkWell, consider adding one of the other Daily Wellbeing practices (poke around until you find something that resonates with you! There are some audio-guided practices and some reflection practices, such as "End your day on a high note."
- Confirm next meeting time.
- What emoji would you use to describe how you're doing now?

Closing Prayer—5 minutes

Remind them of the Group Commitments, one being prayer for one another. Are there any updates or new prayer concerns within this group? Share them now. Ask each person to pray for another person. (Agree upon those prior to praying.)

Handout—Centering Prayer for Home Practice, below

Centering Prayer for Home Practice

- Find a place in your home or office where you can be comfortable and quiet. Make it clear to others that you need to be undisturbed during your prayer time. Think about what you need to create a sacred space welcoming to your prayer. Create a place that you associate with prayer and where you would like to pray.
- Have a timer available. Using a timer enables you to focus entirely on your prayer during the period allotted. You can use a simple egg timer or buy a dedicated timer. If you want to splurge, buy a timer that makes a gentle chiming sound or use an app on your phone like Insight Timer.
- Think carefully about what time of day will work best for your practice. It's easier to create a regular practice if you are able to pray at the same time each day. Many people find that if they get up a little early this provides them with a time when they are peaceful and undisturbed. The earlier in the day you pray, the less likely that your prayer time will be swept away by the events of the day.
- Set realistic goals. If you know from experience that you are completely unable to meditate for more than five minutes at a time, keep that in mind. It's good to challenge yourself and work on creating new habits, but don't set yourself up for failure. If you're unsure how much you will be able to do, you could set up a required practice that seems doable, plus an extra credit assignment that you could do if you have enough time. Or, start with a doable goal, like 5 minutes of centering prayer a day, and then work up.
- Five minutes is better than no minutes! The only bad prayer session is a skipped prayer session. If you find that you are unable to stick to your goals, don't give up entirely. Centering prayer can help us to acknowledge how much we need God. When we see how unable we are to let go of our thoughts, we recognize our limitations and our dependency on God. A few minutes in prayer can help us to stay connected to God, and God can use our limitations to draw us closer.
- Meditation is hard work! The truth is that most people find centering prayer difficult. Like anything else, it gets easier with practice. Everything you put into it you will get back. When it's hardest, that might be when you get the most out of it.
- Many people find it much easier to maintain a home practice if they are practicing in a group once a week or at least every once in a while. The prayer of the other members of the group seems to provide important support. Another option is to find a prayer partner. This might be someone who has a similar centering prayer schedule or someone who is interested in talking about the practice. Check in with each other on a regular basis and share concerns. Practice together when possible.

Meeting 13, 90 minutes—Resilience

The Gathering Time—5 minutes

- As people join the meeting, welcome them and create a place of hospitality. When all have arrived, open your time in prayer.

Conversation Starter—15 minutes

- How (physically) flexible are you:
 - Like a (stick) pretzel--you bend it, you break it
 - Like cardboard--give me a minute, but I can get there eventually
 - Like Gumby--I can touch my toes with my nose!
- Were you able to identify and accomplish one thing that will help you “have more good days than bad” in the last month?
- Tell us about your experience with the “Map Your Day” exercise? Or did you try something else? How did it go?

Sharing Together—40 minutes

Homework, to be shared in advance:

One of the things that help us navigate challenging things that come our way is to grow in our self-awareness. Would you spend 15 minutes considering the following:

- What do you notice about what’s going on in your life in this season?
 - How does your body feel?
 - How is your spirit?
 - How are your relationships?
 - Are you finding a sense of purpose in your work (in your personal and ministry life)?
- What questions are emerging for you about the observations above?
- What possibilities could you explore as you consider your observations about your body/soul, relationships, or sense of purpose?

To the Mentor: *Please share the instructions and questions above with your mentees. Ask them to bring their reflections to this conversation. Behind the conversation is a focus toward considering self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-control. We will do some reflective experiences, but keep in mind that the topic of Resilience is something that grows as a grace by the Holy Spirit. As you’re able, be open and sensitive to conversation that points toward growth in this area as an act of spiritual maturity.*

- The focus for this month is on the topic of Resilience. How do you think of Resilience?
- Dr. Bloom and his research group define Resilience as the “capacity to deal well with life’s ups and downs, and our capacity to adapt and grow” with 3 subdimensions of Resilience:
 1. Hardiness
 - a. "Grit"--the ability to persevere despite challenges
 - b. Bouncing back after a set-back
 2. Optimism
 - a. Expecting--and helping to create--good things in one’s life
 - b. Using positive coping skills

3. Self-Regulation

- a. Self-control—ability to exhibit restraint over behaviors and regulate emotions
 - b. Cognitive flexibility--adapting how you think about something so you can respond well to it
- Can you think of a time in your life when you've seen a consistent or powerful example of hardiness, optimism, self-regulation, or cognitive flexibility?"
 - Resilience according to the definition above seems like something that grows as we grow in the Fruit of the Spirit, especially self-control. How have you seen the Spirit grow self-control in your life? What about other Fruit that points to better handling disappointments, challenges, or suffering?

Prayer Practice—The Examen—15 minutes

The Examen practice is an invitation to invite the Holy Spirit to enable us to review our day/week/longer season in the Light of Christ. The purpose of practicing the Examen is that by bravely taking an honest reflective look at one's day, it can be an invitation to encounter Christ, express gratitude, face shortcomings, and identify how to move forward with the Holy Spirit. We have included a resource below to guide you in this practice. Consider a brief explanation, guide your group through the practice and invite them to share a word, a phrase, or a brief response afterward about their experience.

Inviting Response—10 minutes

- Think back to the homework assignment we have you. We want to provide an opportunity for setting an intention in one of the three specific areas that we mentioned in the Homework assignment: of body/soul, connection, and purpose. What's one thing that you could do to nurture your body and soul, your connection, or your purpose in the month ahead?
- Is there anything that you've not said yet that you'd like to say?
- WorkWell App: consider adding one of the other Daily Wellbeing practices (poke around until you find something that resonates with you! There are some audio-guided practices. Try at least one of the guided Meditations—perhaps one from the “Mindfulness” series or from the “Living Your Values” series.
- Confirm next meeting time.

Closing Prayer—5 minutes

Remind them of the Group Commitments, one being prayer for one another. Are there any updates or new prayer concerns within this group? Share them now. Ask each person to pray for another person. (Agree upon those prior to praying.)

The Daily Examen Prayer Practice:

In the Examen, we review our recent past to find God and God's blessings in life. We also look back to find moments in the day when things didn't go so well—when we were hurt by something that happened to us, or when we sinned or made a mistake. We give praise and thanksgiving for the blessed moments. We ask forgiveness and healing for the difficult and painful moments.

Having reflected on this past day, we then turn to the day yet to come and ask God to show us the potential challenges and opportunities of tomorrow. We try to anticipate which moments might go one way or the other for us: toward God's plan or away from it.

We ask for insight into what graces we might need to live this next day well; patience, wisdom, fortitude, self-knowledge, peace, optimism. We ask God for that grace, and we trust that He wants us to succeed in our day even more than we do.

Mark Thibodeaux

Guided Practice:

Ask God For Light- We ask God for light, as we look at our day through God's eyes, not our own. We relax into this time, allowing God to still us, to open us, and to help us to be attentive to the activity of the Holy Spirit guiding us into freedom for love.

Review the Day- We carefully look back on the day just completed. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we move through the parts of our day: morning, afternoon, early evening, and night. We notice where God spoke, revealed, nudged, or guided. We pay particular attention to the places that God showed us something new about ourselves. We examine how we responded to God's work and God's grace in us.

Give Thanks- We recognize that this day was a gift from God and we give thanks for both the gifts we received and the gifts we gave. We give particular thanks for the times where we reflected the character of Christ through an increased freedom from sin or capacity for love. We especially give thanks for the awareness of this fruit in the dark places of our lives.

Face our Shortcomings- We face up to what is wrong in our lives and in ourselves. We notice where we weren't at our best, where we fell short of love, or of reflecting the character of Christ. We make amends, confessing our sins and claiming God's forgiveness. We also ask God to show us concrete steps we might take with others to make things right.

Look Forward Day to Come- In gratitude for God's transforming work in our hearts, we close the chapter on this day, and we look forward to what God has in store for us in the day to come. We ask for help in the day tomorrow, that God's guidance would lead us throughout our day, guiding us into greater freedom for love, and continuing to transform us into the image of Christ.

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---Compiled by Rev. Dianne Lawhorn- Pastor of Faith Formation/www.davidsonumc.org

Meeting 14, 90 minutes—Authenticity

The Gathering Time—5 minutes

- As people join the meeting, welcome them and create a place of hospitality. When all have arrived, open your time in prayer.

Conversation Starter—15 minutes

These questions are to get people thinking about what comes naturally (or has been acquired) and what is still unfamiliar and requires committed work.

- What is something you've done this week that you feel 100% comfortable doing?
- What's something that you have to do this week that feels like a really big stretch?
- Which do you prefer doing?
- Tell us about your experiences the last month with adding in a practice to nurture your body/soul, relationships, or purpose. Anything to report?

Sharing Together—40 minutes

Homework, to be shared in advance:

This month we're going to be doing something that may push you out of your comfort zone a bit, but we think it will give you an opportunity to get some helpful feedback that you may not always be able to get! We're asking you to interview 2-4 people who know you well (hopefully one who is in your work environment) with the following three questions:

- What do you think I'm best at?
- In what area do you see me growing?
- Describe me in 5 words. (A sentence OR using 5 different words to describe you)

Anticipate that each conversation may take 5-15 minutes. You can spend some time chatting with your interviewee, but it's not necessary. The goal in conducting these interviews is to gather some feedback about who you are (becoming) to see if it resonates with your self-perception. You're welcome to reflect on this feedback if you're interested. We will have an opportunity to do so in our meeting this month.

To the Mentor: *Please share the instructions and questions above with your mentees.*

The discussion will not immediately engage the feedback they received, but they'll have time to share their reflections on it at the end. The goal for today's conversation is to engage their self-understanding and help them to consider their self-worth and self-confidence. We don't want to focus on our ego...in fact, a sign of authenticity is quiet ego, not spending too much time thinking of oneself. Open this conversation by framing the work that you're doing as an invitation for the Holy Spirit to bring to your awareness a sober understanding of yourself. Perhaps read Romans 12:3 with your group.

As you're able, be open and sensitive to conversation that points toward growth in this area as an act of spiritual maturity.

- The focus for this month is on the topic of Authenticity. How do you understand Authenticity?
- Teaching:
 - Dr. Bloom and his research group explain that Authenticity comprises “our sense of self-worth and self-confidence. Authentic people understand both their strengths and weaknesses and they feel good about themselves. They do not spend very much time thinking about themselves.
 - It includes 3 dimensions:
 - Self-integrity--includes self-worth, self-efficacy (achieving important goals), and sense of mastery in one's life
 - Authenticity at work--being able to be true to yourself in work environment
 - Personal Growth--ability to grow and develop as a person, gaining new skills and knowledge, progressing toward full potential
- Can you share an example when your gifts have been authentically received in ministry?
- Have you ever felt like you weren't the person that "THEY" wanted for the "job"? (because of gender, race/ethnicity, age, hair color, vibe, etc.)
 - We all will likely face *something* that puts us into a questionable box (or more than one something). How have you experienced that pain?
 - Have you been able to find healing from some of the rejection/pain?
- The Holy Spirit is at work in each of us, sowing seeds that will grow in us the Fruit of the Spirit. What is a fruit that you can see growing in your own life? (Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control) How can you be open to the Spirit growing this in you in fuller measure?
- How do you think the world defines Authenticity? (Several things come to mind for me: the t-shirt that said IDGAF on it—it meant, “I don’t give a [flip].” Also, the mentality that “I am who I am” or “Love me or hate me, this is me.”)
- How does it contrast to how we might understand Authenticity from a Christian point of view?

Prayer Practice—Journaling--10 minutes

In the WorkWell app, Alex Elle provides a writing for self-understanding exercise. In this exercise, Alex provides some excellent questions for us to consider that can contribute to our self-understanding. As we lean in and dig deep, these questions can be a tool that supports our well-being and growth. We have provided these questions for you to sit with today. We will read them aloud twice. You are invited to select one or two of them that you feel drawn to consider. Instead of selecting specific questions, you might consider what comes up for you after reading all of them together. Then, you will be invited to turn off your cameras and do a stream of consciousness exercise where you write (completely unedited) for five minutes. Your mentor will keep time for you and you will hear a chime when it’s time to come back to the group. After the five minutes of writing, you will have a chance to share whatever you would like to about what came up for you. You are invited to take these questions and return to them again for reflection, prayer, and journaling. You also may wish to write a letter to yourself (or a letter to God) utilizing one or more of the questions offered. We are reminded that any practice can become a spiritual practice when we invite God into the process, so we approach this exercise in a spirit of prayer!

Here are the questions:

- Who are you today?
- Who do you want to be in life?
- What is your purpose?
- What feels hard and heavy right now?
- What feels easy and light?
- How do you want to get to know yourself better?
- Where do you feel lost?
- What feels certain and true?
- What does change feel like?

Inviting Response—15 minutes

- Think back to the homework assignment we gave you. How did you feel about the feedback you got from the interview?
- After our conversation today about authenticity, how do YOU answer those three questions:
 - What do you think I'm good at?
 - In what area do you see me growing?
 - Describe me in 5 words. (A sentence OR using 5 different words to describe you)
- Is there anything that you've not said yet that you'd like to say?
- WorkWell App: consider adding one of the Self-Discovery practices and keep doing one that works well for you.
- Confirm next meeting time.

Closing Prayer—5 minutes

Remind them of the Group Commitments, one being prayer for one another. Are there any updates or new prayer concerns within this group? Share them now. Ask each person to pray for another person. (Agree upon those prior to praying.)

Meeting 15, 90 minutes—Thriving

The Gathering Time—5 minutes

- As people join the meeting, welcome them and create a place of hospitality. When all have arrived, open your time in prayer.

Conversation Starter—15 minutes

- Which inspires you more: a favorite place in your home state/country, the mountains, the ocean? Why?
- Did you take some time to journal on any of the questions we suggested last month? Anything to report?

Sharing Together—40 minutes

Homework, to be shared in advance:

An Exercise in Paying Attention

We will be talking about what it means to live a life of *Thriving* this month. As an exercise to prepare for this discussion, would you put your phone aside, silence any alerts you expect on your watch, and take a walk outside—or at least an intentional look around wherever you are—for at least 15 minutes? Would you be open to whatever catches your eye and settle in to see what you can experience? Look at the squirrel digging around and playing tag. Study your favorite plant and its soil. Watch the kids playing outside. Even study your own hands. Jot down what comes to mind or what you experience and be prepared to share it. (Bonus points: Do this practice every day for a week!)

To the Mentor: *Please share the paragraph above with your mentees at least 2 weeks prior to this meeting.*

- The focus for this month is on the topic of Thriving. How would you describe what it means to Thrive?
 - Perhaps read or talk about John 10:10. What do you think Jesus meant by “abundance” or “life to the full”?
- Teaching:
 - Dr. Bloom and his research group explain that thriving relates to our sense of meaning, purpose, and our sense of connection with others.
 - Here’s how Dr. Bloom defines *thriving*: striving to live a good and worthy life that honors other people and contributes toward the common good.
 - It includes 3 dimensions:
 - Spiritual Vitality—the clarity and strength of one’s faith and includes the wholistic impact that a spiritual or religious belief provides. It is related to the amount of awe, wonder, inspiration, and worship of the Triune God that one experiences.
 - Relational Connectedness—the quality of relationships and social support in and outside of work.

- Meaning in Life—the extent to which a person experiences meaning in life. (Thank you Captain Obvious!)
- Think back to the exercise in paying attention that we assigned. Tell us about your experience. What did you learn? How was that for you?
 - *Mentor: we expect that this homework was delightful for some and maybe challenging for others. We hope that they will point to experiences of awe, wonder, or delight.*
- Listen to Henri Nouwen’s famous statement about joy: “Joy does not simply happen to you. You have to choose it and keep choosing it every day”? What do you think this means? How do you do it?
- We can’t always control the spiritual vitality we experience, the health of our relationships, or the meaning that we feel in our life at any given moment. But we can do things to nurture each of those. Is there an area that you particularly want to nurture right now?
- Consider the Fruit of the Spirit: Galatians 5 specifically identifies the following as fruit that is produced by the Holy Spirit: *Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*. Where do you see this fruit growing in or around you? How does this fruit help you “thrive” according to this definition?

Prayer Practice—Lectio Divina—15 minutes

To the Mentor: *This is written for you to read directly, if you’d like.*

Our prayer practice today is a guided prayer experience called Lectio Divina. Lectio Divina, which means divine reading, is one of the great treasures of the Christian tradition of prayer. While originating with the early desert Fathers and Mothers, it became the devotional practice of the Jews in the days of Jesus and the main form of contemplative prayer in the Christian tradition for the first sixteen centuries. This method of prayer leads us into a deeper encounter with scripture, as we listen with the ear of our hearts. It is a way of listening to scripture as if we were in conversation with Christ. As we encounter Christ’s friendship, trust, and love, our conversation becomes communion. As we read, reflect, respond, and rest in the Word, we experience union with Christ. This union ultimately leads us to transformation, as Christ works in us, helping us to become more merciful, compassionate, and loving.

I will guide you through this experience, beginning with a time of preparation and concluding with a time of rest. You will remain silent throughout the entirety of the experience. I will read the passage a total of four times and will share the written prompts and questions verbally. You are invited to read along, to put your papers away and simply receive, or to journal through these steps—whatever you prefer. The instructions for leading the passage are below, as is a section of scripture, John 15:5-11.

- Prepare your heart to receive the Word by spending a few minutes in quiet, sitting comfortably, with eyes closed, as you eliminate distractions and focus inward. Let your body relax and become consciously aware of God’s presence with you.
- ***First Reading of the Passage – Read***
 - Listen to the word offered, reading it several times slowly, with an open ear for the word or phrase that strikes you or catches your attention. Be content to listen

simply and openly, without judging or analyzing as you savor the word meant for you. How is my life touched by this passage?

- **Second Reading of the Passage – Reflect**
 - Listen for the way in which the passage connects with your life. Allow several moments for thoughts, perceptions, and impressions. If the passage is a story perhaps ask yourself, “Where am I in this scene? What do I hear as I imagine myself in this story? How does this story connect with my own life experience?” Is there an invitation for me here?
- **Third Reading of the Passage- Respond**
 - Listen for your own response. Allow a prayer to flow spontaneously from your heart. As you enter into personal dialogue with God, prayerfully consider if there is an invitation for you in this text, if God is calling you to act or respond to the word you have heard. You might find it helpful to write your prayer or to journal at this point. How should I respond to this invitation?
- **Last Reading of the Passage- Rest**
 - Return to a place of rest in God, as you wait and rest in God’s presence. Assume a posture of being yielded and open to God as you accept this word as a gift.

John 15:5-11 (NIV)

⁵ “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. ⁹ “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

Inviting Response—10 minutes

- Do you remember the homework we gave you on the Resilience lesson? (It was a self-check-in about your body/soul, your relationships, your sense of purpose.) Two of those three things are identified as aspects of *Thriving*. Being able to pay attention to our own selves—our body and soul, our relationships, and our sense of purpose—and nurture that part of ourselves is an important practice. What’s one thing that you could do to nurture your body and soul, your connection, or your purpose in the month ahead?
- Is there anything that you’ve not said yet that you’d like to say?
- WorkWell App: consider adding one of the Self-Discovery practices and keep doing one that works well for you.
- IMPORTANT FOR NEXT MONTH: Presuming that you lead this lesson in November, would you discuss plans for meeting in December. Invite your group to consider whether you will meet in Advent or not. If so, is someone (including the Mentor) willing to identify the agenda for that meeting? It could be a time of workshopping Christmas worship plans,

fellowship/sharing time or include a virtual Christmas “party.” If schedules are tight, give yourselves a break with a month “off.”

- Confirm next meeting time.

Closing Prayer—5 minutes

Remind them of the Group Commitments, one being prayer for one another. Are there any updates or new prayer concerns within this group? Share them now. Ask each person to pray for another person. (Agree upon those prior to praying.)

If you are choosing to meet for 18 months instead of 24 months, skip lessons 16-21 and go to Lesson 22 (Page 84) for your final group meeting

Meeting 16, 90 minutes—Introduction of Clearness Committees

The Gathering Time—30 minutes

- As people join the meeting, welcome them and create a place of hospitality. When all have arrived, open your time in prayer.
- Revisit the covenant—how have you lived into your covenant this last year and a half? What commitments do you want to make together?
- As a means of reconnecting in the new year, being with some extra time for “fellowship.” Chat freely, or consider the following questions:
 - What’s new and good since we were together last?
 - What is a high, a low, or an “a-ha” (something you’ve learned) in the last month (or share all three)?
 - What’s the best gift you gave or received for Christmas?

Conversation Starter—5 minutes

- Would you rather: ask someone for advice and HAVE to do what they say **or** make a decision on your own and do whatever you think is best?

Sharing Together—25 minutes

NO HOMEWORK this time! Woohoo!

Our shared time together today will be focused on introducing what we’re going to do for the next 5 months (February-June). We will be turning our attention to a way of discerning that honors both one’s internal voice and the voice of the community, the Quaker’s tradition of the Clearness Committee. It’s an opportunity for each group member to bring a “problem” to discern together (though it could be used to celebrate joyful occasions or transitions). During this session, the mentor will share the instructions on the screen and ask the group to read them together. Following the introduction of the Clearness Committee, facilitate a discussion afterward starting with questions listed below:

The Clearness Committee

This is written for Asbury Theological Seminary's Women Thriving in Ministry Program by Ashlee Alley Crawford

There is a Quaker tradition that dates to the 1660's for sharing a concern—or even a joy—with a group of trusted friends as a practice of discernment to hear the voice of Truth within one's context. Parker Palmer frequently teaches about the practice of a “Clearness Committee” and identifies this central conviction: *each of us has an inner teacher, a voice of truth, that offers the guidance and power we need to deal with our problems*¹. To be clear, the “inner teacher” and “voice of truth” is the Holy Spirit. All guidance below will be given with a humble prayer that the Holy Spirit gives wisdom and direction to all questions, responses, and actions. It is a vulnerable thing for someone to bring his or her joy or concern to others, even trusted friends. But, the Clearness Committee recognizes that their job is not to “fix” a person or even offer suggestions; rather, it is to listen—first to the Holy Spirit—and second to what the focus person is actually saying, so that she might be able to more clearly hear both her own voice and the voice of the Holy Spirit.

The Clearness Conversation

There are some “rules” that provide structure for the conversation. First and foremost, it needs to be a confidential conversation, even one that isn't brought up by group members to one another or to the focus person. If the focus person wants to bring it up, she may. Below are expectations for the group to consider:

- 1.) Someone will act as the facilitator and guide the conversation, keep track of time, and interject if someone begins to “fix” within the conversation. A simple reminder that our job is to listen and ask questions without offering solutions is all that is usually needed. This will be the mentor's role in our groups.
- 2.) Someone agrees in advance to be the “focus person” who is willing to share a problem that she wishes to bring before the group. As preparation, she should prepare a statement that articulates the following three things:
 - A concise statement of her problem, even if it is not clear—this process can work as well with murky issues as with clear ones
 - A recounting of relevant background factors that may bear on the problem
 - An exploration of any hunches the focus person may have about what's on the horizon regarding the problem

This should be no more than 1 page, single spaced and will be read when the conversation begins.

- 3.) Here's the “agenda” for the Clearness Committee conversation:
 - The facilitator opens the conversation with a prayer asking the Holy Spirit to lead and guide the conversation.
 - The following expectations should guide the conversation:

¹ Palmer has a 5 page description in detail about the origin and practice of a Clearness Committee: https://couragerenewal.org/PDFs/Parker-Palmer_Clearness-Committee.pdf. Much of this guideline is based on instruction found in this document.

- The focus person will begin by reading the one-page summary of the “problem” that she is bringing before the group. Everyone’s job here is to listen—to the focus person and to the Holy Spirit. The listeners may decide to take notes to track the conversation better. Do your best to write exactly the words you hear the focus person saying, or jot down questions that come to mind. Resist interpreting what they’re saying and instead, offer questions or honest observations that may help the focus person remove a “block” from how she is viewing their situation.
- Don’t offer advice, your experiences, or your knowledge. The intent is open and honest dialogue. Be aware of your own tendency to phrase your advice as a question. “Did you blame such and such?” Is NOT an open and honest question. “What did you mean when you said you were frustrated?” IS an open and honest question.
- To the focus person: resist the need to tell the whole backstory about something and do your very best to keep your responses focused. In order to go deeper within the problem, you’ll need to hear questions from diverse perspectives.
- The Clearness Committee is not a deposition or cross-examination. Rather, it is a kind and gentle invitation for revealing a hidden truth about a circumstance, giving space for the Holy Spirit to do the revealing. Don’t be afraid of silence and don’t fill the silence with a question that doesn’t contribute to this purpose.
- The entire agenda is to provide space for the focus person to bring a concern in front of God and the group entrusted with this conversation; thus, every effort must be made to give full attention to the focus person. Plan for your Zoom meeting to give you private space, resist the urge for chit-chat, don’t make that hilarious joke, and don’t use the Chat for commentary. The Committee’s job is to “hold space” as counselors say, and be present in a loving and kind, but not even overly reassuring space. Be present with your care and attention, don’t try to coerce or manipulate someone to share unless they feel compelled to share.
- Prior to the time of closing—which will be done by offering a word of encouragement and celebration of the focus person’s gifts—you will spend about 10 minutes with an experience of “mirroring.” This is when group members offer observations including specific words that the focus person said. If group members are taking notes with exact words shared, members can read back over and see which of the focus person’s own words seems to have resonance. The intention behind this is to give the focus person an opportunity to reflect *without commentary from the listeners* about what she may have said that sheds light on her problem.
- The **meeting agenda** is as follows:
 - Opening and Intros (no more than 10 minutes)
 - Opening Prayer

- Facilitator refreshes the rules (above)
- Focus Person reads (or speaks from) her prepared statement
- The conversation (25 minutes)
 - The Facilitator starts a conversation with the first question (perhaps something like: what aspect of what you've shared is most pressing on your mind or heart right now?)
 - The group will discuss with open and honest, non-leading questions.
- The Reflection (10 minutes)
 - The Facilitator asks the Focus Person if she is ready to suspend the questions and begin the "mirroring." If not, continue questions. If so, move on to the process of reflecting her own language and body language to identify if what you observed resonates with her experience. She can respond, "Yes, that's me," "no, that's not me," or even just be silent.
- The Closing (5 minutes)
 - The facilitator asks the group members to affirm and celebrate the gifts of the focus person.

Do not expect complete clarity about the circumstance or deep insight in the moment, and the Focus Person should not feel compelled to share any particular insights. This conversation is one that opens a door and provides deep listening, and the actual insight may come later.

Follow Up/Discussion Questions for group about how the Clearness Committee works?

- What stands out about this way of sharing a concern in the midst of a community?
- What do you find compelling about a Clearness Committee?
- What concerns you about a Clearness Committee?
- What kinds of things would you consider sharing with a Clearness Committee?
- How easy or hard is it for you to share openly with others?
- At the end of our meeting today we will be asking who would be willing to be the first "focus person" and prepare a one-page statement. Consider if you might want to go first.

Shared Reading: "The Winter of Listening" —20 minutes

Share the reading of "The Winter of Listening," by David Whyte and invite members of your group to each read a section (OR ask someone to read the whole thing). Following the reading, ask the questions listed below:

The Winter of Listening, by David Whyte

No one but me by the fire,
my hands burning
red in the palms while
the night wind carries
everything away outside.

All this petty worry
while the great cloak
of the sky grows dark
and intense
round every living thing.

What is precious
inside us does not
care to be known
by the mind
in ways that diminish
its presence.

What we strive for
in perfection
is not what turn us
into the lit angel we desire,

what disturbs
and then nourishes
has everything
we need.

What we hate
in ourselves
is what we cannot know
in ourselves but
what is true to the pattern
does not need
to be explained.

Inside everyone
is a great shout of joy
waiting to be born.

Even with the summer
so far off
I feel it grown in me
now and ready
to arrive in the world.

All those years
listening to those
who had
nothing to say.
All those years
forgetting
how everything
has its own voice

to make
itself heard.

All those years
Forgetting
how easily
you can belong
to everything
simply by listening.

And the slow
Difficulty
of remembering
how everything
is born from
an opposite

and miraculous
otherness.

Silence and winter
has led me to that
otherness.

So let this winter
of listening
be enough
for the new life
I must call my own.

Questions for Group Reflection:

- What stands out to you from the reading?
- How does this reading articulate where you are right now?
- What is the shout of joy waiting to be born in you?
- How does listening prepare you for new life?
- Read it a second time, just to linger a bit longer with some of the possibilities that could emerge from these words: Is there a word, a phrase, or an idea that you may want to “hold on to” in the season ahead?

Inviting Response—5 minutes

- Is there anything that you've not said yet that you'd like to say?
- Who would be willing to go first by presenting something to us as a Clearness Committee next month?
- Confirm next meeting time.

Closing Prayer—5 minutes

Remind them of the Group Commitments, one being prayer for one another. Are there any updates or new prayer concerns within this group? Share them now. Ask each person to pray for another person. (Agree upon those prior to praying.)

Meeting 17, 90 minutes—Clearness Committees, Session #1

Note to Mentor: Despite everyone’s best efforts, it’s possible that no one is willing to be the “Focus Person” for a Clearness Committee conversation. Or, it’s possible that the person who was planning on sharing has an unavoidable conflict at the last minute. We are providing two options—Plan A, and Plan B. Plan A anticipates that someone has prepared in advance. Plan B will provide an opportunity to have a focused conversation around one person’s life or ministry circumstances but without preparation.

PLAN A

The Gathering Time—15 minutes

- As people join the meeting, welcome them and create a place of hospitality. When all have arrived, open your time in prayer.
- Provide an opportunity for a brief “check-in” by choosing one of these questions (or another of your choice). Model brevity by going first, but do intentionally give everyone an opportunity to share what is most pressing for them, as the focus this month will be on one member of the group:
 - What’s new and good since we were together last?
 - What is a high, a low, or an “a-ha” (something you’ve learned) in the last month (or share all three)?

Clearness Committee, Session #1—50 minutes

- Opening and Intros (no more than 10 minutes)
 - Opening Prayer for the Holy Spirit’s guidance
 - Facilitator refreshes the rules
 - *Focus Person:* keep the “backstory” or side comments to a minimum. Don’t get distracted by things not central to what’s at the heart of the discussion.
 - *Group members:* Focus on listening through the power of the Holy Spirit. Keep notes of the actual words that the Focus Person shared. Ask questions that emerge from the listening posture and stick to questions that bring up clarity. Don’t try to “fix” the thinking or the actions of the focus person.
 - Focus Person reads (or speaks from) her prepared statement
- The conversation (25 minutes)
 - The Facilitator starts a conversation with the first question (perhaps something like: what aspect of what you’ve shared is most pressing on your mind or heart right now?)
 - The group will discuss with open and honest, non-leading questions.
- The Reflection (10 minutes)

- The Facilitator asks the Focus Person if she is ready to suspend the questions and begin the “mirroring.” If not, continue questions. If so, move on to the process of reflecting her own language and body language to identify if what you observed resonates with her experience. She can respond, “Yes, that’s me,” “no, that’s not me,” or even just be silent.
- The Closing (5 minutes)
 - The facilitator asks the group members to affirm and celebrate the gifts of the focus person.

PLAN B

This plan is to be used when no one has prepared to be the “Focus Person” for the Clearness Committee.

The Gathering Time—20 minutes

- As people join the meeting, welcome them and create a place of hospitality. When all have arrived, open your time in prayer.
- This time will allow everyone to have a quick “check-in” but the hope is for one person to be opened up to sharing more deeply later on in the meeting. These questions are intended to probe a little deeper than our usual “opening” questions. Ask group members to answer one of the following questions:
 - What is really challenging you in your ministry right now?
 - What are you really enjoying or do you feel most hopeful about in your ministry setting right now?
 - Are there any “issues” that keep reappearing in your ministry? Can you name them?
- Ask the group if anyone would be willing to be the Focus Person for today and open up a bit more deeply for the group discernment experience.

Clearness Committee, Session #3—45 minutes

- Opening and Intros (no more than 5 minutes)
 - Brief check in about previous experiences.
 - To the previous Focus Person: as you’ve had time to process your experience from last month, could you share about how the experience was valuable for you?
 - To all: Did anyone have any questions about the process? Does anyone want to say anything about the Clearness Committee before we start?
 - Opening Prayer for the Holy Spirit’s guidance
 - Facilitator refreshes the rules
 - *Focus Person*: keep the “backstory” or side comments to a minimum. Don’t get distracted by things not central to what’s at the heart of the discussion.

- *Group members:* Focus on listening through the power of the Holy Spirit. Keep notes of the actual words that the Focus Person shared. Ask questions that emerge from the listening posture and stick to questions that bring up clarity. Don't try to "fix" the thinking or the actions of the focus person.
- Identifying the Focus (10 minutes)
 - Facilitator asks the Focus Person the following questions:
 - Would you share with us a challenge or an opportunity that you're facing in ministry right now?
 - Who are the main "players" in the situation? What is each person's role?
 - Are there other non-people dynamics that are important in considering the tension around the challenge or opportunity?
- The conversation (15 minutes)
 - The Facilitator starts a conversation with the first question (perhaps something like: what aspect of what you've shared is most pressing on your mind or heart right now?)
 - The group will discuss with open and honest, non-leading questions.
- The Reflection (10 minutes)
 - The Facilitator asks the Focus Person if she is ready to suspend the questions and begin the "mirroring." If not, continue questions. If so, move on to the process of reflecting her own language and body language to identify if what you observed resonates with her experience. She can respond, "Yes, that's me," "no, that's not me," or even just be silent.
- The Closing (5 minutes)
 - The facilitator asks the group members to affirm and celebrate the gifts of the focus person.

Shared Reading—Woodcarver—15 minutes

Share the following reading and invite members of your group to each read a section (OR ask someone to read the whole thing). The reading is not written by a Christian, but, there are insights that can be identified from our Christian perspective. Following the reading, ask the following questions:

Woodcarver- Chuang Tzu

Khing, the master carver, made a bell stand of precious wood. When it was finished, all who saw it were astounded. They said it must be the work of spirits.

The Prince of Lu said to the master carver: "What is your secret?"

Khing replied: "I am only a workman: I have no secret. There is only this: When I began to think about the work you commanded I guarded my spirit, did not expend it on trifles, that were not to the point. I fasted in order to set my heart at rest. After three days fasting, I had forgotten gain and success. After five days I had forgotten praise or criticism.

After seven days I had forgotten my body with all its limbs.

By this time all thought of your Highness and of the court had faded away. All that might distract me from the work had vanished. I was collected in the single thought of the bell stand.

Then I went to the forest to see the trees in their own natural state. When the right tree appeared before my eyes, the bell stand also appeared in it, clearly, beyond doubt. All I had to do was to put forth my hand and begin.

If I had not met this particular tree there would have been no bell stand at all.

What happened? My own collected thought encountered the hidden potential in the wood; From this live encounter came the work which you ascribe to the spirits."

Questions for Group Discussion:

- What stands out to you from the reading?
- How does this reading articulate where you are right now?
- Where are you encountering the Holy Spirit's activity in your life, bringing clarity or direction?
- Read it a second time, just to linger a bit longer with some of the possibilities that could emerge from these words: Is there a word, a phrase, or an idea that you may want to "hold on to" in the season ahead?

Inviting Response—5 minutes

- Is there anything that you've not said yet that you'd like to say?
- Who would be willing to go next by presenting something to us as a Clearness Committee next month?
- Confirm next meeting time.

Closing Prayer—5 minutes

Remind them of the Group Commitments, one being prayer for one another. Are there any updates or new prayer concerns within this group? Share them now. Ask each person to pray for another person. (Agree upon those prior to praying.)

Meeting 18, 90 minutes—Clearness Committees, Session #2

Note to Mentor: As with last month, two lesson plans are provided, Plan A for use when someone has prepared to be a “Focus Person” for the Clearness Committee and Plan B for use when no one prepared in advance.

PLAN A

The Gathering Time—15 minutes

- As people join the meeting, welcome them and create a place of hospitality. When all have arrived, open your time in prayer.
- Provide an opportunity for a brief “check-in” by choosing one of these questions (or another of your choice). Model brevity by going first, but do intentionally give everyone an opportunity to share what is most pressing for them, as the focus this month will be on one member of the group:
 - What’s new and good since we were together last?
 - What is a high, a low, or an “a-ha” (something you’ve learned) in the last month (or share all three)?

Clearness Committee, Session #2—50 minutes

- Opening and Intros (no more than 10 minutes)
 - Brief check in from first experience last month.
 - To the first Focus Person: as you’ve had time to process your experience from last month, could you share about how the experience was valuable for you?
 - To all: Did anyone have any questions about the process? Does anyone want to say anything about the Clearness Committee before we start
 - Opening Prayer for the Holy Spirit’s guidance
 - Facilitator refreshes the rules
 - *Focus Person:* keep the “backstory” or side comments to a minimum. Don’t get distracted by things not central to what’s at the heart of the discussion.
 - *Group members:* Focus on listening through the power of the Holy Spirit. Keep notes of the actual words that the Focus Person shared. Ask questions that emerge from the listening posture and stick to questions that bring up clarity. Don’t try to “fix” the thinking or the actions of the focus person.
 - Focus Person reads (or speaks from) her prepared statement
- The conversation (25 minutes)

- The Facilitator starts a conversation with the first question (perhaps something like: what aspect of what you've shared is most pressing on your mind or heart right now?)
- The group will discuss with open and honest, non-leading questions.
- The Reflection (10 minutes)
 - The Facilitator asks the Focus Person if she is ready to suspend the questions and begin the "mirroring." If not, continue questions. If so, move on to the process of reflecting her own language and body language to identify if what you observed resonates with her experience. She can respond, "Yes, that's me," "no, that's not me," or even just be silent.
- The Closing (5 minutes)
 - The facilitator asks the group members to affirm and celebrate the gifts of the focus person.

PLAN B

This plan is to be used when no one has prepared to be the "Focus Person" for the Clearness Committee.

The Gathering Time—20 minutes

- As people join the meeting, welcome them and create a place of hospitality. When all have arrived, open your time in prayer.
- This time will allow everyone to have a quick "check-in" but the hope is for one person to be opened up to sharing more deeply later on in the meeting. These questions are intended to probe a little deeper than our usual "opening" questions. Ask group members to answer one of the following questions:
 - What is really challenging you in your ministry right now?
 - What are you really enjoying or do you feel most hopeful about in your ministry setting right now?
 - Are there any "issues" that keep reappearing in your ministry? Can you name them?
- Ask the group if anyone would be willing to be the Focus Person for today and open up a bit more deeply for the group discernment experience.

Clearness Committee, Session #3—45 minutes

- Opening and Intros (no more than 5 minutes)
 - Brief check in about previous experiences.
 - To the previous Focus Person: as you've had time to process your experience from last month, could you share about how the experience was valuable for you?
 - To all: Did anyone have any questions about the process? Does anyone want to say anything about the Clearness Committee before we start?
 - Opening Prayer for the Holy Spirit's guidance

- Facilitator refreshes the rules
 - *Focus Person*: keep the “backstory” or side comments to a minimum. Don’t get distracted by things not central to what’s at the heart of the discussion.
 - *Group members*: Focus on listening through the power of the Holy Spirit. Keep notes of the actual words that the Focus Person shared. Ask questions that emerge from the listening posture and stick to questions that bring up clarity. Don’t try to “fix” the thinking or the actions of the focus person.
- Identifying the Focus (10 minutes)
 - Facilitator asks the Focus Person the following questions:
 - Would you share with us a challenge or an opportunity that you’re facing in ministry right now?
 - Who are the main “players” in the situation? What is each person’s role?
 - Are there other non-people dynamics that are important in considering the tension around the challenge or opportunity?
- The conversation (15 minutes)
 - The Facilitator starts a conversation with the first question (perhaps something like: what aspect of what you’ve shared is most pressing on your mind or heart right now?)
 - The group will discuss with open and honest, non-leading questions.
- The Reflection (10 minutes)
 - The Facilitator asks the Focus Person if she is ready to suspend the questions and begin the “mirroring.” If not, continue questions. If so, move on to the process of reflecting her own language and body language to identify if what you observed resonates with her experience. She can respond, “Yes, that’s me,” “no, that’s not me,” or even just be silent.
- The Closing (5 minutes)
 - The facilitator asks the group members to affirm and celebrate the gifts of the focus person.

Shared Reading, Merton’s Prayer —15 minutes

Share the following reading and invite members of your group to each read a section (OR ask someone to read the whole thing). Following the reading, reflect using the questions listed below the reading.

Merton Prayer- Thomas Merton

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.

I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end.

Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you and I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.

I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire and I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore, will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.

I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

Group Discussion from reading:

- What stands out to you from the reading?
- How does this reading articulate where you are right now?
- How do you experience tension between God's will and your own place in the world today or in this season?
- Where are you encountering the Holy Spirit's activity in your life, bringing clarity or direction?
- Read it a second time, just to linger a bit longer with some of the possibilities that could emerge from these words: Is there a word, a phrase, or an idea that you may want to "hold on to" in the season ahead?

Inviting Response—5 minutes

- Is there anything that you've not said yet that you'd like to say?
- Who would be willing to go next by presenting something to us as a Clearness Committee next month?
- Confirm next meeting time.

Closing Prayer—5 minutes Remind them of the Group Commitments, one being prayer for one another. Are there any updates or new prayer concerns within this group? Share them now. Ask each person to pray for another person. (Agree upon those prior to praying.)

Meeting 19, 90 minutes—Clearness Committees, Session #3

Note to Mentor: Two lesson plans are provided, Plan A for use when someone has prepared to be a “Focus Person” for the Clearness Committee and Plan B for use when no one has prepared in advance.

PLAN A

The Gathering Time—15 minutes

- As people join the meeting, welcome them and create a place of hospitality. When all have arrived, open your time in prayer.
- Provide an opportunity for a brief “check-in” by choosing one of these questions (or another of your choice). Model brevity by going first, but do intentionally give everyone an opportunity to share what is most pressing for them, as the focus this month will be on one member of the group:
 - What’s new and good since we were together last?
 - What is a high, a low, or an “a-ha” (something you’ve learned) in the last month (or share all three)?

Clearness Committee, Session #3—50 minutes

- Opening and Intros (no more than 10 minutes)
 - Brief check in about previous experiences.
 - To the previous Focus Person: as you’ve had time to process your experience from last month, could you share about how the experience was valuable for you?
 - To all: Did anyone have any questions about the process? Does anyone want to say anything about the Clearness Committee before we start?
 - Opening Prayer for the Holy Spirit’s guidance
 - Facilitator refreshes the rules
 - *Focus Person:* keep the “backstory” or side comments to a minimum. Don’t get distracted by things not central to what’s at the heart of the discussion.
 - *Group members:* Focus on listening through the power of the Holy Spirit. Keep notes of the actual words that the Focus Person shared. Ask questions that emerge from the listening posture and stick to questions that bring up clarity. Don’t try to “fix” the thinking or the actions of the focus person.
 - Focus Person reads (or speaks from) her prepared statement
- The conversation (25 minutes)
 - The Facilitator starts a conversation with the first question (perhaps something like: what aspect of what you’ve shared is most pressing on your mind or heart right now?)

- The group will discuss with open and honest, non-leading questions.
- The Reflection (10 minutes)
 - The Facilitator asks the Focus Person if she is ready to suspend the questions and begin the “mirroring.” If not, continue questions. If so, move on to the process of reflecting her own language and body language to identify if what you observed resonates with her experience. She can respond, “Yes, that’s me,” “no, that’s not me,” or even just be silent.
- The Closing (5 minutes)
 - The facilitator asks the group members to affirm and celebrate the gifts of the focus person.

PLAN B

This plan is to be used when no one has prepared to be the “Focus Person” for the Clearness Committee.

The Gathering Time—20 minutes

- As people join the meeting, welcome them and create a place of hospitality. When all have arrived, open your time in prayer.
- This time will allow everyone to have a quick “check-in” but the hope is for one person to be opened up to sharing more deeply later on in the meeting. These questions are intended to probe a little deeper than our usual “opening” questions. Ask group members to answer one of the following questions:
 - What is really challenging you in your ministry right now?
 - What are you really enjoying or do you feel most hopeful about in your ministry setting right now?
 - Are there any “issues” that keep reappearing in your ministry? Can you name them?
- Ask the group if anyone would be willing to be the Focus Person for today and open up a bit more deeply for the group discernment experience.

Clearness Committee, Session #3—45 minutes

- Opening and Intros (no more than 5 minutes)
 - Brief check in about previous experiences.
 - To the previous Focus Person: as you’ve had time to process your experience from last month, could you share about how the experience was valuable for you?
 - To all: Did anyone have any questions about the process? Does anyone want to say anything about the Clearness Committee before we start?
 - Opening Prayer for the Holy Spirit’s guidance
 - Facilitator refreshes the rules

- *Focus Person*: keep the “backstory” or side comments to a minimum. Don’t get distracted by things not central to what’s at the heart of the discussion.
- *Group members*: Focus on listening through the power of the Holy Spirit. Keep notes of the actual words that the Focus Person shared. Ask questions that emerge from the listening posture and stick to questions that bring up clarity. Don’t try to “fix” the thinking or the actions of the focus person.
- Identifying the Focus (10 minutes)
 - Facilitator asks the Focus Person the following questions:
 - Would you share with us a challenge or an opportunity that you’re facing in ministry right now?
 - Who are the main “players” in the situation? What is each person’s role?
 - Are there other non-people dynamics that are important in considering the tension around the challenge or opportunity?
- The conversation (15 minutes)
 - The Facilitator starts a conversation with the first question (perhaps something like: what aspect of what you’ve shared is most pressing on your mind or heart right now?)
 - The group will discuss with open and honest, non-leading questions.
- The Reflection (10 minutes)
 - The Facilitator asks the Focus Person if she is ready to suspend the questions and begin the “mirroring.” If not, continue questions. If so, move on to the process of reflecting her own language and body language to identify if what you observed resonates with her experience. She can respond, “Yes, that’s me,” “no, that’s not me,” or even just be silent.
- The Closing (5 minutes)
 - The facilitator asks the group members to affirm and celebrate the gifts of the focus person.

Shared Reading, Find Me Lord—15 minutes

Share the following reading and invite members of your group to each read a section (OR ask someone to read the whole thing). Following the reading, reflect on the questions noted below.

Find Me Lord

Ted Loder, in *Guerrillas of Grace: Prayers for the Battle*

Oh, Eternal One,
it would be easier for me to pray
if I were clear and of a single mind and a pure heart;
if I could be done hiding from myself and from you, even in my prayers.

But, I am who I am,
mixture of motives and excuses,
blur of memories, quiver of hopes,
knot of fear, tangle of confusion,
and restless with love, for love.

I wander somewhere between gratitude and grievance,
wonder and routine, high resolve and undone dreams,
generous impulses and unpaid bills.

Come, find me, Lord.
Be with me exactly as I am.
Help me find me, Lord. Help me accept what I am,
so I can begin to be yours.

Make of me something small enough to snuggle,
young enough to question, simple enough to giggle,
old enough to forget, foolish enough to act for peace,
skeptical enough to doubt the sufficiency of anything but you,
and attentive enough to listen
as you call me out of the tomb of my timidity
into the chancy glory of my possibilities
and the power of your presence.

Amen.

Group Reflection Questions:

- How does this reading articulate where you are right now?
- Do you feel tension between wanting to be found or wanting to hide—even from God?
- Where are you encountering the Holy Spirit’s activity in your life, bringing clarity or direction?
- Read it a second time, just to linger a bit longer with some of the possibilities that could emerge from these words: Is there a word, a phrase, or an idea that you may want to “hold on to” in the season ahead?

Inviting Response—5 minutes

- Is there anything that you've not said yet that you'd like to say?
- Who would be willing to go next by presenting something to us as a Clearness Committee next month?
- Confirm next meeting time.

Closing Prayer—5 minutes

Remind them of the Group Commitments, one being prayer for one another. Are there any updates or new prayer concerns within this group? Share them now. Ask each person to pray for another person. (Agree upon those prior to praying.)

Meeting 20, 90 minutes—Clearness Committees, Session #4

Note to Mentor: Two lesson plans are provided, Plan A for use when someone has prepared to be a “Focus Person” for the Clearness Committee and Plan B for use when no one prepared in advance.

PLAN A

The Gathering Time—15 minutes

- As people join the meeting, welcome them and create a place of hospitality. When all have arrived, open your time in prayer.
- Provide an opportunity for a brief “check-in” by choosing one of these questions (or another of your choice). Model brevity by going first, but do intentionally give everyone an opportunity to share what is most pressing for them, as the focus this month will be on one member of the group:
 - What’s new and good since we were together last?
 - What is a high, a low, or an “a-ha” (something you’ve learned) in the last month (or share all three)?

Clearness Committee, Session #4—50 minutes

- Opening and Intros (no more than 10 minutes)
 - Brief check in about previous experiences.
 - To the previous Focus Person: as you’ve had time to process your experience from last month, could you share about how the experience was valuable for you?
 - To all: Did anyone have any questions about the process? Does anyone want to say anything about the Clearness Committee before we start?
 - Opening Prayer for the Holy Spirit’s guidance
 - Facilitator refreshes the rules
 - *Focus Person:* keep the “backstory” or side comments to a minimum. Don’t get distracted by things not central to what’s at the heart of the discussion.
 - *Group members:* Focus on listening through the power of the Holy Spirit. Keep notes of the actual words that the Focus Person shared. Ask questions that emerge from the listening posture and stick to questions that bring up clarity. Don’t try to “fix” the thinking or the actions of the focus person.
 - Focus Person reads (or speaks from) her prepared statement
- The conversation (25 minutes)

- The Facilitator starts a conversation with the first question (perhaps something like: what aspect of what you've shared is most pressing on your mind or heart right now?)
- The group will discuss with open and honest, non-leading questions.
- The Reflection (10 minutes)
 - The Facilitator asks the Focus Person if she is ready to suspend the questions and begin the "mirroring." If not, continue questions. If so, move on to the process of reflecting her own language and body language to identify if what you observed resonates with her experience. She can respond, "Yes, that's me," "no, that's not me," or even just be silent.
- The Closing (5 minutes)
 - The facilitator asks the group members to affirm and celebrate the gifts of the focus person.

PLAN B

This plan is to be used when no one has prepared to be the "Focus Person" for the Clearness Committee.

The Gathering Time—20 minutes

- As people join the meeting, welcome them and create a place of hospitality. When all have arrived, open your time in prayer.
- This time will allow everyone to have a quick "check-in" but the hope is for one person to be opened up to sharing more deeply later on in the meeting. These questions are intended to probe a little deeper than our usual "opening" questions. Ask group members to answer one of the following questions:
 - What is really challenging you in your ministry right now?
 - What are you really enjoying or do you feel most hopeful about in your ministry setting right now?
 - Are there any "issues" that keep reappearing in your ministry? Can you name them?
- Ask the group if anyone would be willing to be the Focus Person for today and open up a bit more deeply for the group discernment experience.

Clearness Committee, Session #3—45 minutes

- Opening and Intros (no more than 5 minutes)
 - Brief check in about previous experiences.
 - To the previous Focus Person: as you've had time to process your experience from last month, could you share about how the experience was valuable for you?
 - To all: Did anyone have any questions about the process? Does anyone want to say anything about the Clearness Committee before we start?
 - Opening Prayer for the Holy Spirit's guidance

- Facilitator refreshes the rules
 - *Focus Person*: keep the “backstory” or side comments to a minimum. Don’t get distracted by things not central to what’s at the heart of the discussion.
 - *Group members*: Focus on listening through the power of the Holy Spirit. Keep notes of the actual words that the Focus Person shared. Ask questions that emerge from the listening posture and stick to questions that bring up clarity. Don’t try to “fix” the thinking or the actions of the focus person.
- Identifying the Focus (10 minutes)
 - Facilitator asks the Focus Person the following questions:
 - Would you share with us a challenge or an opportunity that you’re facing in ministry right now?
 - Who are the main “players” in the situation? What is each person’s role?
 - Are there other non-people dynamics that are important in considering the tension around the challenge or opportunity?
- The conversation (15 minutes)
 - The Facilitator starts a conversation with the first question (perhaps something like: what aspect of what you’ve shared is most pressing on your mind or heart right now?)
 - The group will discuss with open and honest, non-leading questions.
- The Reflection (10 minutes)
 - The Facilitator asks the Focus Person if she is ready to suspend the questions and begin the “mirroring.” If not, continue questions. If so, move on to the process of reflecting her own language and body language to identify if what you observed resonates with her experience. She can respond, “Yes, that’s me,” “no, that’s not me,” or even just be silent.
- The Closing (5 minutes)
 - The facilitator asks the group members to affirm and celebrate the gifts of the focus person.

Shared Reading, Guest House—15 minutes

Share the following reading and invite members of your group to each read a section (OR ask someone to read the whole thing). Following the reading, reflect upon the questions provided below.

Guest House

Rumi

This being human is a guest house.

Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness, some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all! Even if they're a crowd of sorrows, who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture,

Still, treat each guest honorably. He may be clearing you out for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice, meet them at the door laughing, and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes, because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.

Questions for Group Reflection:

- What stands out to you from the reading?
- How does this reading articulate where you are right now?
- What do you think about the idea of welcoming every thought, emotion, or experience as a guide sent from God?
- Where are you encountering the Holy Spirit's activity in your life, bringing clarity or direction?
- Read it a second time, just to linger a bit longer with some of the possibilities that could emerge from these words: Is there a word, a phrase, or an idea that you may want to "hold on to" in the season ahead?

Inviting Response—5 minutes

- Is there anything that you've not said yet that you'd like to say?
- Who would be willing to go next by presenting something to us as a Clearness Committee next month?
- Confirm next meeting time.

Closing Prayer—5 minutes

Remind them of the Group Commitments, one being prayer for one another. Are there any updates or new prayer concerns within this group? Share them now. Ask each person to pray for another person. (Agree upon those prior to praying.)

Meeting 21, 90 minutes—Clearness Committees, Session #5

Note to Mentor: Two lesson plans are provided, Plan A for use when someone has prepared to be a “Focus Person” for the Clearness Committee and Plan B for use when no one has prepared in advance.

PLAN A

The Gathering Time—15 minutes

- As people join the meeting, welcome them and create a place of hospitality. When all have arrived, open your time in prayer.
- Provide an opportunity for a brief “check-in” by choosing one of these questions (or another of your choice). Model brevity by going first, but do intentionally give everyone an opportunity to share what is most pressing for them, as the focus this month will be on one member of the group:
 - What’s new and good since we were together last?
 - What is a high, a low, or an “a-ha” (something you’ve learned) in the last month (or share all three)?

Clearness Committee, Session #5—50 minutes

- Opening and Intros (no more than 10 minutes)
 - Brief check in about previous experiences.
 - To the previous Focus Person: as you’ve had time to process your experience from last month, could you share about how the experience was valuable for you?
 - To all: Did anyone have any questions about the process? Does anyone want to say anything about the Clearness Committee before we start?
 - Opening Prayer for the Holy Spirit’s guidance
 - Facilitator refreshes the rules
 - *Focus Person:* keep the “backstory” or side comments to a minimum. Don’t get distracted by things not central to what’s at the heart of the discussion.
 - *Group members:* Focus on listening through the power of the Holy Spirit. Keep notes of the actual words that the Focus Person shared. Ask questions that emerge from the listening posture and stick to questions that bring up clarity. Don’t try to “fix” the thinking or the actions of the focus person.
 - Focus Person reads (or speaks from) her prepared statement
- The conversation (25 minutes)
 - The Facilitator starts a conversation with the first question (perhaps something like: what aspect of what you’ve shared is most pressing on your mind or heart right now?)

- The group will discuss with open and honest, non-leading questions.
- The Reflection (10 minutes)
 - The Facilitator asks the Focus Person if she is ready to suspend the questions and begin the “mirroring.” If not, continue questions. If so, move on to the process of reflecting her own language and body language to identify if what you observed resonates with her experience. She can respond, “Yes, that’s me,” “no, that’s not me,” or even just be silent.
- The Closing (5 minutes)
 - The facilitator asks the group members to affirm and celebrate the gifts of the focus person.

PLAN B

This plan is to be used when no one has prepared to be the “Focus Person” for the Clearness Committee.

The Gathering Time—20 minutes

- As people join the meeting, welcome them and create a place of hospitality. When all have arrived, open your time in prayer.
- This time will allow everyone to have a quick “check-in” but the hope is for one person to be opened up to sharing more deeply later on in the meeting. These questions are intended to probe a little deeper than our usual “opening” questions. Ask group members to answer one of the following questions:
 - What is really challenging you in your ministry right now?
 - What are you really enjoying or do you feel most hopeful about in your ministry setting right now?
 - Are there any “issues” that keep reappearing in your ministry? Can you name them?
- Ask the group if anyone would be willing to be the Focus Person for today and open up a bit more deeply for the group discernment experience.

Clearness Committee, Session #5—45 minutes

- Opening and Intros (no more than 5 minutes)
 - Brief check in about previous experiences.
 - To the previous Focus Person: as you’ve had time to process your experience from last month, could you share about how the experience was valuable for you?
 - To all: Did anyone have any questions about the process? Does anyone want to say anything about the Clearness Committee before we start?
 - Opening Prayer for the Holy Spirit’s guidance
 - Facilitator refreshes the rules

- *Focus Person*: keep the “backstory” or side comments to a minimum. Don’t get distracted by things not central to what’s at the heart of the discussion.
- *Group members*: Focus on listening through the power of the Holy Spirit. Keep notes of the actual words that the Focus Person shared. Ask questions that emerge from the listening posture and stick to questions that bring up clarity. Don’t try to “fix” the thinking or the actions of the focus person.
- Identifying the Focus (10 minutes)
 - Facilitator asks the Focus Person the following questions:
 - Would you share with us a challenge or an opportunity that you’re facing in ministry right now?
 - Who are the main “players” in the situation? What is each person’s role?
 - Are there other non-people dynamics that are important in considering the tension around the challenge or opportunity?
- The conversation (15 minutes)
 - The Facilitator starts a conversation with the first question (perhaps something like: what aspect of what you’ve shared is most pressing on your mind or heart right now?)
 - The group will discuss with open and honest, non-leading questions.
- The Reflection (10 minutes)
 - The Facilitator asks the Focus Person if she is ready to suspend the questions and begin the “mirroring.” If not, continue questions. If so, move on to the process of reflecting her own language and body language to identify if what you observed resonates with her experience. She can respond, “Yes, that’s me,” “no, that’s not me,” or even just be silent.
- The Closing (5 minutes)
 - The facilitator asks the group members to affirm and celebrate the gifts of the focus person.

Shared Reading, I Tremble on the Edge of a Maybe—15 minutes

Share the following reading and invite members of your group to each read a section (OR ask someone to read the whole thing). Following the reading, share in a group reflection with questions noted below.

I Tremble on the Edge of a Maybe

Ted Loder in *Guerrillas of Grace*

O God of beginnings
as your spirit moved
over the face of the deep
on the first day of creation,
move with me now,
in my time of beginnings,
when the air is rain-washed
the bloom is on the bush,
and the world seems fresh
and full of possibilities,
and I feel ready and full.

I tremble on the edge of a maybe,
a first time
a new thing,
a tentative start,
and the wonder of it lays its finger on my lips.

In silence, Lord,
I share now my eagerness
and my uneasiness
about this something different
I would be or do:
and I listen for your leading
to help me separate the light
from the darkness
in the change I seek to shape
and which is shaping me. Amen.

Questions for Group Discussion:

- What stands out to you from the reading?
- How does this reading articulate where you are right now?

- Do you sense that something in your life is on the edge of a maybe? How are you in the midst of possibility and uncertainty?
- Where are you encountering the Holy Spirit's activity in your life, bringing clarity or direction?
- Read it a second time, just to linger a bit longer with some of the possibilities that could emerge from these words: Is there a word, a phrase, or an idea that you may want to "hold on to" in the season ahead?

Inviting Response—5 minutes

- Is there anything that you've not said yet that you'd like to say?
- Who would be willing to go next by presenting something to us as a Clearness Committee next month?
- Confirm next meeting time.

Closing Prayer—5 minutes

Remind them of the Group Commitments, one being prayer for one another. Are there any updates or new prayer concerns within this group? Share them now. Ask each person to pray for another person. (Agree upon those prior to praying.)

Meeting 22, 90 minutes—Final Meeting

The Gathering Time—5 minutes

- As people join the meeting, welcome them and create a place of hospitality. When all have arrived, open your time in prayer.
- Today's meeting has various opportunities to **connect** with one another and **reflect** on our season as a group. When it has been a good experience, it can be hard to end the group, but it is important that we wrap up our time well, acknowledging God's presence in the midst of this community and identifying expectations for our group members in the future.

Reflections—10 minutes

- Telling our Story
 - Think back over the last two years together. Do you have a memory from our meeting together that stands out to you from our time? Would you share it?
 - How have you grown since we first met? What role did this group play in that growth?
 - When we first met, we shared the following Group Rules. Would you reflect on them...how did we do?
 - Maintain confidentiality. No one else present in room during meeting. What is shared in group, stays in group, unless there is a safety concern.
 - Be present. Attend the groups and don't multitask during the meeting.
 - Don't judge. Respect others' actions, choices, and theology.
 - Don't pastor each other. Just create a safe space to share.
 - Pray for each other.
 - Did you add anything?

Sharing Gifts—60 minutes

- It has been a privilege to walk through this season with one another and we've been blessed by many gifts, most notably the community of these women. We want to have some time for naming some specific gifts that we've seen in one another. Think of this as an affirmation, a gratitude, or a calling forth the best from one another.
 - You can share the gifts two ways, in a written format and verbally. The facilitator can open a "White Board" on Zoom (you may need to look in advance how to open a White Board—it may be an option on your menu, or, it may be in the "More" section—with the three dots). Identify one person to be the first one whose gifts you're lifting up. Type their Name in the middle of the whiteboard and ask each person to write a word or phrase that describes some gifts that you see in this person...something for which you're grateful. After your group is done, invite each person to (briefly) share the words as an affirmation of her presence among you. Ask someone to pray for

your first group member. You can save the whiteboard and send it to the group member as a tangible expression of the affirmation. Whomever prays can be the next person to go.

- You may need to set a time limit so that there is time to share about each group member. Consider the following option:
 - Instruction and invitation for writing for first group member (5 minutes)
 - Verbal sharing about first group member (4 minutes)
 - Prayer, saving Zoom whiteboard (3 minutes)
 - Writing affirmation for second person (2 minutes)
 - Verbal sharing about second group member (4 minutes)
 - Prayer, saving Zoom whiteboard (3 minutes)
 - Repeat. 🔄
- If you have 5 group members and you are included as the leader, this will take about an hour
- If you would prefer not to use the Zoom Whiteboard option, you could eliminate it and just provide time for people to identify gifts, which are shared verbally.

Looking ahead—14 minutes

- We give thanks to God for bringing this group together for this season. After today, we will not formally be an active “group” anymore. Some of us will likely remain connected to one another, others may lose touch. If you’re able to identify what your hopes are for yourself related to the group, could you share briefly about what it could look like for remaining connected to the others in this group?
- Would you consider being a part of another small group of women in the future, like, perhaps a Wesleyan Band? Consider being open to the nudge of the Holy Spirit to invite several other women (perhaps from this group) to form a [discipleship band](#) that meets regularly “who read together, pray together, and meet together to become the love of God for one another and the world.”
- Is there anything that you've not said yet that you'd like to say?

Closing Benediction—1 minute

The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.
(Numbers 6:24-26)