

ONE

Closing the Door, Opening the Way

PREPARATION

The host should have on hand a small box (perhaps left over "rice bowl" boxes) or envelope for each member of the group plus crayons or colored pencils, colored paper, ribbon, etc.

GATHER AND PRAY

After a moment of silent recollection, each person might mention one thing for which she or he is thankful this evening. Close the prayer time by praying the Lord's Prayer.

Connect

Decorate a box or an envelope in a way that symbolizes yourself. Take a few minutes to introduce yourselves and explain the symbols on your box or envelope.

Reflection

The Sabbatical Year. The LORD said to Moses on Mount Sinai, "Speak to the Israelites and tell them: When you enter the land that I am giving you, let the land, too, keep a sabbath for the LORD. For six years you may sow your field, and for six years prune your vineyard, gathering in their produce. But during the seventh year the land shall have a complete rest, a sabbath for the LORD, when you may neither

sow your field nor prune your vineyard. The aftergrowth of your harvest you shall not reap, nor shall you pick the grapes of your untrimmed vines in this year of sabbath rest for the land. While the land has its sabbath, all its produce will be food equally for you yourself and for your male and female slaves, for your hired help and the tenants who live with you, likewise for your livestock and for the wild animals on your land."

Leviticus 25: 1-7

Treasure in Heaven. "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroys and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroy, nor thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be."

Matthew 6:19-21

- What happens to the soil during the seventh year (fallow time)?
- In what ways are we like the soil?
- How could a "sabbath year for the Lord" help us to refocus on where our "treasure" is?

SOCIAL INQUIRY

Let the Land Lie Fallow. In Leviticus, Jubilee teaching begins with the command to keep a Sabbath for the land. The Dakota and Lakota peoples of North America are good examples of how to engage in such practice. Their care for the non-human world is expressed in the phrase "Mitakuye oyasin," [mee'dah'cue'wee oh'ee'ah'see] which functions in their prayer the way "Amen" does in ours. "Mitakuje oyasin" translates as "for all our relations" and symbolizes care not only for human beings, but for all the beings of the planet: the winged, the gilled, the four-leggeds, as well as the two-leggeds; the trees, the mountains, the rivers, the oceans, the ozone.

The Sabbath command also directs us to rest ourselves,

for in allowing a Sabbath for the rest of creation, we necessarily practice a Sabbath, a period of stillness and contemplation, for the created being we are. We rest in imitation of the Creator God who rested when creation was complete. We also rest so that we may give our attention, our prayer, and our worship to this Creator Spirit, continually breathing life into the dust we are. Indeed, some are beginning to speak of the entire year 1999-2000 as a time when they will let the land of their own spirits lie fallow, as a way of making the Jubilee Sabbath complete.

--Maria Harris "Proclaiming the Biblical Jubilee,"
Presentations from Convocation 1997
Open Wide the Door to Christ
NCCB/USCC, 1997

The jubilee was an ideal, a reminder that Yahweh, the Creator of all, was the true owner of creation and that those who live in a covenant relationship with Yahweh must also seek right and just relationships with all people. ...

The "year of the Lord's favor" was a time to proclaim "liberty in the land for all" (Lev 25:10), to "bring glad tidings to the lowly" and "release to the prisoners" (Is 61:1). It was a time to restore freedom and justice among people, to reestablish relationships of equality, remedy conditions that kept people oppressed (Is 61), and to cancel debts (Dt 15). The jubilee was intended to relieve the burdens of the weak and give people an opportunity to start anew. There was a clear social message in the jubilee. The jubilee year was an invitation for people to see their lives from a divine perspective: all that they were and all they did should be in accord with God's will for building a community of justice, mercy, love, and peace. ...

The word of God calls believers to become "the salt of the earth, the light of the world." ... Our society urgently needs the everyday witness of Christians who take the social demands of our faith seriously. The pursuit of justice is an essential part of the Catholic call to holiness, which is our true vocation: to live "in Christ" and to let Christ live and work in our world today.

Everyday Christianity: To Hunger and Thirst for Justice
A Pastoral Reflection of the National Council
of Catholic Bishops, 1998 (pp. 12-13, 10-11)

Observe:

1. In what way have you practiced Mitakuye oyasin (caring for the planet and all its beings)?
2. Ask two friends or co-workers how they observe the Sabbath.
3. Give an example of people who live in the Lord's favor by bringing glad tidings to the lowly, release to the prisoners, or help for the oppressed.
4. Where do you toil? (What tasks are you responsible for?)

Judge

1. How would lying fallow require some effort for you?
2. What keeps you from finding rest, finding solidarity with all creation (Mitakuje oyasin)?
3. What would help you live a year of the Lord's favor?
4. Wherever you toil, what can you put aside? What would be lost? What would be gained?

Act

[To be done by all at the meeting]

1. Make the Christian Commitment for the New Millennium at the end of this meeting.
2. Choose one area in your life to simplify, set aside, or lie fallow. Write this on a piece of paper. Put into your box or envelope. Let it rest during this year. **[Leader will collect and save for the final meeting.]**
3. **[Before the next meeting]** Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy: Take a Saturday or Sunday and devote it to God. Avoid economic activity (buying or selling) and work. Read and

reflect on scripture. Pray. Take time to enjoy and contemplate God's creation. Include the family in these activities.

Preparation for next meeting

1. Date _____
Time _____
Place _____

2. Turn to the next meeting. Read aloud the Observes to prepare for the next meeting.

CLOSING PRAYER

*Have no fear for what tomorrow may bring.
The same loving God who cares for you today
will take care of you tomorrow and everyday.
He will either shield you from suffering
or give you unfailing strength to bear it.
Be at peace, then, and
put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginations.*

--Francis de Sales

*Praise you God for the care and strength you give
me. Thank you for the peace and the ability to
put aside cares. Amen.*

African-American literature has many references to the Jubilee themes such as freedom, justice, and song. See such works as the *Fires of Jubilee: Nat Turner's Fierce Rebellion*, Fredrick Douglas' *Civil War: Keeping Faith with Jubilee*, and Margaret Walkers' *Jubilee*.

A CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT
FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

The jubilee of our Lord's birth calls us

*"to bring glad tidings to the poor.
... to proclaim liberty to captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free" (Lk 4:18).*

As disciples of Jesus in the new millennium, I/we pledge to:

PRAY regularly for greater justice and peace.

LEARN more about Catholic social teaching and its call to protect human life, stand with the poor, and care for creation.

REACH across boundaries of religion, race, ethnicity, gender, and disabling conditions.

LIVE justly in family life, school, work, the marketplace, and the political arena.

SERVE those who are poor and vulnerable, sharing more time and talent.

GIVE more generously to those in need at home and abroad.

ADVOCATE public policies that protect human life, promote human dignity, preserve God's creation, and build peace.

ENCOURAGE others to work for greater charity, justice, and peace.

Signature
