
FACILITATOR GUIDE

for Individuals, Small Groups, Advent Programs, and Retreats

Living Well Through Advent 2018



*Practicing Generosity With All Your
Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind*

A Living Compass Seasonal Resource

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The Living Compass ministry initiative was created with a generous gift from Ab and Nancy Nicholas. While Ab passed away in 2016, their generous support continues to inspire us and makes this resource possible.

Compiled and edited by Robbin Whittington

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Introduction and Welcome

We at Living Compass are delighted to share this *Advent Facilitator Guide* with you. We are especially honored to include the voices and deep reflections of four guest writers. These voices represent diverse backgrounds, yet all come together to reflect upon the theme of this year's guide: *Practicing Generosity With All Your Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind*.

The 2018 Advent devotional and this facilitator guide can be used for individual reflection and study, small groups, a congregational Advent program, and/or a retreat. If you are using the facilitator guide with a group, we suggest you read through it first to familiarize yourself with the contents, concepts, and supplies you may need.

Each Sunday and Monday, we use the Sunday Gospel readings and the reflections, found in *Living Well Through Advent 2018* as the foundation for reflection and practice. Each Monday we invite you to engage more deeply with the theme of *practicing generosity* through a specific daily practice for the week. The daily practice for week one is “being generous with ourselves,” week two is “being generous with others,” week three is “being generous with God,” and the daily practice for the fourth week in Advent is “receiving the gift of generosity.” We have also included a “making it personal” section following all of the daily reflections. This is an opportunity for you to take what you are discovering from the reflections and go deeper with these insights in your own life.

However you choose to use these resources, we pray that this season of Advent be a time of spiritual renewal and recommitment to your relationship—with yourself, with each other, and with God. Our prayer is that both your faith and your capacity for practicing generosity be strengthened by your journey through this holy season of Advent.



A special thank you to the writers who contributed reflections for the guide.

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Amy Cook, Faith Formation Working Group Head for the Episcopal Diocese of California

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The Rev. Dr. Scott Stoner, founder of Living Compass, a Faith and Wellness Initiative, and co-creator of *The Teen Compass* and the *Parent Wellness Compass*

The Role of the Facilitator

You do not need to be an expert in any way to lead a group. Instead, you are much like a midwife who helps guide the process. You will be the one who prepares the space, makes sure everyone feels welcome, has needed materials, understands the process, and has enough time to speak.

We hope this guide offers the tools and support you need to provide a safe space to listen to each other, and to create an environment where authentic learning and conversations can occur about faith and generosity during the season of Advent. If you have any questions, please ask: info@livingcompass.org.

Tips for Facilitating

- Create a safe, supportive, friendly, and confidential environment (what is talked about in the group stays in the group).
- Familiarize yourself with the Guidelines for Listening (p. 6).
- Remain friendly and open and maintain a sense of humor.
- Ask thoughtful, open-ended questions to increase the interaction and meaningful conversation in the group. We provide questions for reflection in the Advent Guide for you to use. And, feel free to come up with additional questions in response to the needs and desires of your group.
- Ask group to commit to attend all meetings if at all possible, and to let the facilitator know when unable to attend.
- To create connection and community, consider sharing a simple potluck meal before the meeting.

Group Dynamics

- All groups take on their own personality and energy. As a facilitator, it is important that you tune into your group and align with its energy, building rapport and trust. You can do this by:
 - Warmly greeting each participant when they enter the room.
 - Calling on participants by name.
 - Remembering key issues and concerns they discuss and refer back to them throughout the program. This lets them know you are listening deeply.
- Using feedback appropriately. For example, thank a person for sharing, compliment when opportunities arise, or ask a participant to repeat something important that he or she just shared for emphasis.
- Actively listening by focusing completely on what the participant is saying and then repeating back what was heard for clarity.

Suggestions for handling special situations

The overly chatty person

- Affirm that you “hear” them and are listening by reflecting back or summarizing what they are saying and then move on.
- Don’t look at this person when asking a question.
- Thank the person for their positive contribution, and then ask for others to share.
- If it continues, talk to the person privately outside of the session.

The quiet person

- Watch for signs that the person wants to participate, and engage them at that time.
- Respect their desire to not share much, but trust they may be benefiting from the session despite their silence.
- Connect with them before or after the meeting.

Guidelines for Listening

- (Print copies for everyone and read them at the beginning of each session, taking turns so they can be heard in different voices.)
- Take a moment to be fully present and to rest in God’s presence.
- Listen with your mind, heart, and intuition.
- Listen to others deeply in order to understand, rather than trying to “fix” anything, or to challenge what is being said.
- Speak only for yourself, expressing your own thoughts and feelings, your own experiences. Use “I” rather than “you” statements.
- Wait for others to finish speaking—allowing a pause in order to fully ingest what has been said, as well as what has not been said—before speaking.
- If you’ve talked, wait until everyone else in the group has spoken before speaking again.
- Listen with openness and curiosity, leaving judgement and criticism at the door.

Tips for Preparing

- Pray for God to guide you as the facilitator. You are not alone. And pray for each person in the group.
- Read the Sunday reflection and scripture at least twice before you meet.
- Keep the main ideas from the material to be covered firmly in mind. Make notes on this and refer to them as often as necessary to keep you grounded and focused. This will help you feel confident and relaxed and receptive to the needs and desires of the group.
- Prepare room ahead of time, arranging chairs in a circle, or around a table.
- You may want to bring flowers and a candle to light (explain that it serves as a reminder that we are in the presence of the Holy).
- Make sure to have any needed supplies on hand.

Suggested supplies for each week

- Bibles or copies of the scripture for the week (listed at the beginning of each week’s session)
- A *Practicing Generosity With All Your Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind* devotional for each person
- Copies of the prayers (p. 24) and practices (pp. 7–9)
- Copies of Guidelines for Listening (p. 6)
- Music and/or music player
- Pens/Pencils
- Candle/matches
- Bell or soft timer alarm to signal shifts
- A contact form to be passed around to build a list to share among members of the group

Guidelines for Listening

Take a moment to be fully present and to rest in God's presence.

Listen with your mind, heart, and intuition.

Listen to others deeply in order to understand, rather than trying to "fix" anything, or to challenge what is being said.

Speak only for yourself, expressing your own thoughts and feelings, your own experiences. Use "I" rather than "you" statements.

Wait for others to finish speaking—allowing a pause in order to fully ingest what has been said, as well as what has not been said—before speaking.

If you've talked, wait until everyone else in the group has spoken before speaking again.

Listen with openness and curiosity, leaving judgment and criticism at the door.

Suggested Practices

Invite the participants to journey through Advent by using one of the following practices or another mindfulness practice that speaks to them. You can do these either during your session or invite them to take these practices home. (Print as many copies as needed for your group.)

1. The Daily Examen. The Daily Examen is an ancient and powerful way of reflecting on the day so that we can more clearly identify how and where God has shown up in our lives and where God may be guiding us. You could re-read the Daily Spiritual Practice for the week, found in the Advent guide each Monday. Then, apply the practice of the examen around the week's practice. Following is a brief description of the practice.

At the end of the day, sit quietly for a few minutes, seeking God's presence. Then, keeping the practice and theme for the week in mind and heart (*Being Generous with Ourselves; Being Generous with Others; Being Generous with God; Receiving the Gift of Generosity*):

- Remember times in the day when you felt most alive, and thank God for those moments.
- Remember instances when you felt the least grateful, and offer those with thanks to God.
- Notice times in the day when you experienced being aligned with God's purpose for you, and give thanks for those times.
- Notice any moments when you felt far from living out God's purpose for your life, and offer those to God.
- Ask God to help you live ever more closely to God's plan and purpose for you tomorrow, and then turn everything over to God to hold while you rest.

For more resources, a good place to start is the Ignatian Spirituality's website: <http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen>

2. Theme and Daily Spiritual Practice for each week. The suggested daily spiritual practices are found in the Advent guide each Monday. Re-read Monday's reflection and consider what speaks to you about this practice. Take time to think about how this particular practice can help you draw closer to God and the people around you.

3. Gratitude Practice. Each day, think about three things for which you are grateful and write them down in a journal. It might be helpful to consider one or more of the eight areas of wellness seen through the lens of *Practicing Generosity*. Read them each day during the season of Advent as a powerful reminder of the goodness and grace and generosity that surrounds you.

4. Journal. Take time this week to further reflect on the readings and *practicing generosity*. Journaling is a great way to keep track of your thoughts and feelings. Writing down your thoughts, or drawing images, will help you to order and process them. You can use the reading, reflection, or discussion questions as prompts.

5. Daily Prayer. Consider praying each day between now and the next time the group meets. Think about how prayer applies to your journey through Advent, generosity, and who God is calling you to be. Prayer is one way to ground yourself each day. If you are using this guide as part of a group, you may want to have a prayer partner for whom you commit to pray each day.



6. Prayer partners. Offer an opportunity for group members to pray for a prayer partner each day, praying for them by name and asking God to bless their desires. Encourage the group to contact their prayer partner at least once a week. A phone call, meeting for coffee or a meal, etc., are warmer ways of making contact. If time is an issue, emails work, too. The goal is to stay in touch between gatherings. This will build trust and rapport more quickly and help those who may feel shy gain confidence and more ease in a new group setting.

7. Living Compass Wellness Assessment and FAITH Step. Using this tool, take some time to reflect on the ways in which practicing generosity is showing up in the eight areas of wellness. Reflect on how each area of wellness is impacted by the spiritual practice for the week.

There is no “right” way to do this. Just allow yourself to see your life as a garden. Identify the areas of wellness you’ve tended and watered, and celebrate them. Then, identify any areas you may have neglected that you may want to focus on. You’ll shade in each area on the Assessment Tool on p. 9 as a value (0–100) based on how you feel you are doing, right here, right now. Then, choose one area to focus on for the week. A FAITH step is a place to write down the one thing you commit to do during the coming week. If you have a prayer partner, you could share that with him/her. If you have any questions, please ask: info@livingcompass.org

Note: If there is a lot of interest in this practice, you can invite the group to identify a FAITH step for each week, choosing the same or a different area of wellness to focus on. They should also feel free to continue to focus on the same FAITH step for more than one week.



Sample completed Wellness Assessment

This Advent season, however you use this guide, our hope and prayer is that you feel supported in your desire to more fully practice your faith in a way that is deeply renewing. Thank you for taking on the role of being a facilitator on this Advent journey. We hope this companion guide will help you as you walk with others during this season.

Wellness Assessment and FAITH Step

Shade in each of the eight areas on the compass with the value that reflects your current state of wellness and balance.

0 = Uh-Oh! / 100 = Awesome!

Using this tool, reflect on how the theme for the week is showing up in one or more of the eight areas of wellness and choose one area to focus on for the week. Notice what happens when you focus on this area through the lens of practicing generosity.



FAITH Step

Now that you've put yourself on your own map of wellness, pick one area you feel called to focus on. Remember that whatever we pay attention to is what will grow.

Area I feel called to focus on:

List one FAITH step you are ready and willing to take in the next 24 hours.

Is there someone you would like to share this FAITH Step with?

Support + accountability = much greater chance for success.

- F Focused.**
Specific and narrow in scope.
- A Action-Oriented.**
An action that is observable and measurable.
- I Inspired.**
I feel that God wants me to take this step.
- T Time-specific.**
I will do at this time, or within a finite time frame.
- H Heartfelt and Honest.**
Commit to a step we are ready to take, true to wherever we are in the stages of change.

Change is inevitable. Growth is optional. —John C. Maxwell

Using for an Advent Retreat

This program can be used as an Advent Retreat in a variety of ways. Below are two sample schedules. Please feel free to adapt and use however will be helpful for your retreat. It is important to leave space for silence, prayer, reflection, and creative

responses, so don't force the entire contents of the Advent guide into a single retreat. If you want to offer your own reflections on *Practicing Generosity* by expanding on any of the material in the booklet, feel free to do so.

Full-day Retreat

9:00 AM Welcome and outline for the day
9:15 AM Week One Reflection and Spiritual Practice (*Being Generous with Ourselves*)
Small-group discussion and reflection time
10:15 AM Break
10:30 AM Week Two Reflection and Spiritual Practice (*Being Generous with Others*)
Small-group discussion and reflection time
11:45 AM Break
Noon Lunch
1:00 PM Week Three Reflection and Spiritual Practice (*Being Generous with God*)

Small-group discussion and reflection time
2:00 PM Break
2:15 PM Week Four Reflection, Spiritual Practice, and Christmas Day (*Receiving the Gift of Generosity*)
Small-group discussion and reflection time
3:15 PM Break
3:30 PM Whole-group synthesis, shared reflections (share FAITH steps if desired), and celebration of time together
4:30 PM Close with prayer

Half-day Retreat

9:00 AM Welcome and outline for the day
9:15 AM Weeks One and Two (read Sunday's reflection for both)
Small-group discussion and reflection time (on one of the reflections; group to choose)
10:30 AM Break
10:45 AM Weeks Three and Four (read Sunday's reflection for both)

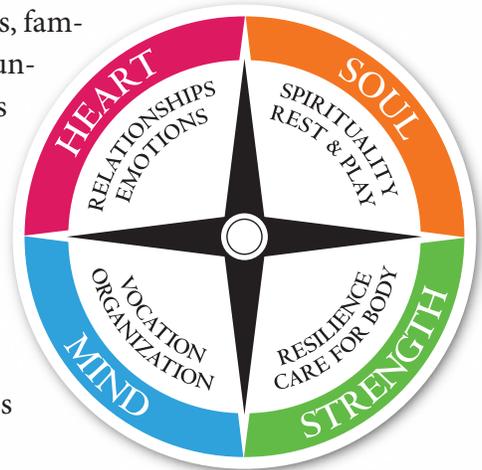
Small-group discussion and reflection time (on one of the reflections; group to choose; could write down a FAITH step and share with at least one other person)
Noon Lunch
1:00 PM Whole-group synthesis, shared reflections (share FAITH steps if desired), and celebration of time together
2:00 PM Close with prayer

The Living Compass: A Brief Overview

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind.

—Luke 10:27, Deuteronomy 6:5

Living Compass provides tools and trainings to assist individuals, families, congregations, and communities as they seek to live the abundant life God intends for them in all areas of life. The compass points us toward the four dimensions of our being: heart, soul, strength, and mind. These dimensions are interconnected, and each one affects the other. Whatever impinges on one dimension of our lives (positively or negatively) has an impact upon the other dimensions. Our call is to live an undivided life, where heart, soul, strength, and mind are integrated into both our *being* and our *doing*. We use these four as our compass points to help guide and equip us in eight areas of wellness.



Areas of Wellness

Heart

- **Relationships.** The ability to create and maintain healthy, life-giving connections with others.
- **Handling Emotions.** The ability to process, express, and receive emotions in a healthy way.

Soul

- **Spirituality.** The ability to develop and practice a strong personal faith, and to discover a meaningful purpose in life.
- **Rest and Play.** The ability to balance work and play and to renew oneself.

Strength

- **Resilience.** The ability to deal positively with the adversities of life.
- **Care for the Body.** The ability to build healthy habits and practices regarding our physical well-being, as well as the ability to end unhealthy ones.

Mind

- **Organization.** The ability to keep track of and make good use of possessions, money, and time.
- **Vocation.** The ability to align our life's purpose with the gifts and talents given by God. This includes work, volunteer service, and any educational/enrichment activities.

Creating resources grounded in the integration of faith and wellness makes Living Compass different from other wellness programs. Living Compass believes we all have many compasses that compete to guide our lives, often outside of our awareness. When we choose to make faith the compass that guides decisions in all areas of our lives, we are better able to experience wellness and wholeness. It is worth noting that “health,” “healing,” “wholeness,” and “holy” all come from the same root word “hal” or “haelen.”



Being Generous with Ourselves



Readings for the First Sunday of Advent

First Reading: Jeremiah 33:14-16

Psalm: Psalm 25:1-10

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Gospel: Luke 21:25-36

Session One Outline

- Opening music, either recorded or sung (optional)
- Welcome
- Minute of silence to still our hearts and minds and to prepare for our time together
- Prayer
- Introduce yourself
- Go around the group with introductions. You can ask them to tell their name, where they are from, and what they hope to get out of this time together.
- Hand out a copy of and read out loud *Guidelines for Listening*, (p. 6).
- Read the Gospel for the first Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- Read the Reflection from the first Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- Announce the theme and suggested daily spiritual practice for the week: *Being Generous with Ourselves*. Read Monday's reflection out loud as a way of more deeply engaging as a group with the suggested daily spiritual practice. Invite brief responses.
- Reflect and Learn
 - Suggested questions for reflection, journaling, and discussion
 - Reflection and journaling time (5 min)
 - Small-group breakout for discussion (3–4 in each group, depending on size of group; 10 min)
 - Whole-group reflection and a brief time to share small-group discoveries
- Organize prayer partners (optional).
- Introduce Practices and invite group to choose one to use during the week.
- Wrap-up. Give any reminders for upcoming meeting.
- Close with prayer.
- End on time.

Rhythm of Weekly Gathering

Each session is timed to be 50–60 minutes long and can easily be adapted as needed.

Feel free to use the suggested opening and closing prayers, as well as incorporating anything you choose that would work well with the theme of *Practicing Generosity*.



Opening Invitation

As we embark on this Advent Journey together, I invite you to think about what this season means for you.

Invite participants to share their thoughts and reflections.

The Gospel for the First Sunday of Advent

Luke 21:25-36

The Coming of the Son of Man

“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Suggestions for reading the Scripture

As you read the scripture out loud, we invite you to think about creative and engaging ways in which these readings can be done.

Different translations. Depending on the length of the passage, you may want to read it two or three times, using a different Bible translation.

Different voices. If you are reading in parts or using different translations, be sure to use a variety of voices (male and female, young and old, etc.).

Opening Prayer

Eternal Word, only begotten Son of God,

Teach me true generosity.

Teach me to serve you as you deserve.

To give without counting the cost,

To fight heedless of wounds,

To labor without seeking rest,

To sacrifice myself without

thought of any reward

Save the knowledge that I have done your will.

Amen.

—St. Ignatius of Loyola, Prayer for Generosity



Read the Living Compass Reflection for the First Sunday of Advent

Found on pp. 11–12 in the Advent guide.

Then, read Monday's reflection out loud as a way of more deeply engaging as a group with the suggested daily spiritual practice for the week: *Being Generous with Ourselves* (found on p. 13 in the Advent guide).

Invite brief responses.

Reflection and Journal Time

Reflection Questions/Small Groups

Reflect on questions you select from the weekday reflections in the guide (pp. 13–18) as a whole group, or break into smaller groups of 4 or 5. You can also use this time to invite responses by journaling.

The theme and suggested daily spiritual practice is: *Being Generous with Ourselves*. Have you ever had the thought that self-care is self-ish? When you consider ways of being generous with yourself, what comes to mind? Do you feel any resistance to thinking about specific ways to be generous with yourself? What do you think about Scott's invitation for us to "think about self-care, not as being self-centered, but as a way of nurturing a centered self, a person who is able to care for others from a non-anxious place of fullness"?

Group Discussion

If you broke into small groups for the reflection questions, invite each group to share their responses to one or more of the questions. As you listen, take note of any themes or where responses tie together. If you discussed as a group, reiterate themes and tie-ins.

Briefly review Practices on pp. 7–8 and invite group to engage with at least one during the week.

Closing Prayer

We seek the mighty God
in the most unlikely places
as a child in a stable,
and in an empty tomb.
May God hear these prayers,
which come from the unlikely corners
of our lives. *Amen.*



Being Generous with Others



Readings for the Second Sunday of Advent

First Reading: Baruch 5:1-9 OR Malachi 3:1-4

Psalm: Luke 1:68-79

Second Reading: Philippians 1:3-11

Gospel: Luke 3:1-6

Session Two Outline

- Opening music, either recorded or sung (optional)
- Welcome
- Minute of silence to still our hearts and minds and to prepare for our time together
- Prayer
- Read *Guidelines for Listening* to encourage active and respectful listening (p. 6)
- Open time with an invitation for group to share what practice they chose and stories of where the awareness of the theme/suggested daily spiritual practice showed up during the past week.
- Read the Gospel for the second Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- Read the Reflection from the second Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- Announce the suggested daily spiritual practice for the week: *Being Generous with Others*. Read Monday's reflection out loud as a way of more deeply engaging as a group with the suggested daily spiritual practice. Invite brief responses.
- Reflect and Learn
 - Suggested questions for reflection, journaling, and discussion
 - Reflection and journaling time (5 min)
 - Small-group breakout for discussion (3–4 in each group, depending on size of group; 10 min)
 - Whole-group reflection and a brief time to share small-group discoveries
- Explore how the theme for the week shows up in the areas of wellness from one of the four Living Compass quadrants that are introduced Tuesday-Friday of each week. Encourage them to choose an area to focus on during the coming week.
- Wrap-up. Give any reminders for upcoming meeting.
- Close with prayer.
- End on time.

Rhythm of Weekly Gathering

Each session is timed to be 50–60 minutes long and can easily be adapted as needed.

Feel free to use the suggested opening and closing prayers, as well as incorporating anything you choose that would work well with the theme of *Practicing Generosity*.



Open Invitation

Open time with an invitation for group to share what practice they chose and stories of where the awareness of the theme/suggested daily spiritual practice showed up during the past week.

The Gospel for the Second Sunday of Advent

Luke 3:1-6

The Proclamation of John the Baptist

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.
Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth;
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

Suggestions for reading the Scripture

As you read the scripture out loud, we invite you to think about creative and engaging ways in which these readings can be done.

Different translations. Depending on the length of the passage, you may want to read it two or three times, using a different Bible translation.

Different voices. If you are reading in parts or using different translations, be sure to use a variety of voices (male and female, young and old, etc.).

Opening Prayer

God of timeless grace,
you fill us with joyful expectation.
Make us ready for the message that
prepares the way,
that with uprightness of heart and
holy joy
we may eagerly await the kingdom of
your Son, Jesus Christ,
who reigns with you and the Holy
Spirit, now and for ever. Amen



Read the Living Compass Reflection for the Second Sunday of Advent

Found on pp. 19–20 in the Advent guide.

Then, read Monday's reflection out loud as a way of more deeply engaging as a group with the suggested daily spiritual practice: *Being Generous with Others* (found on p. 21 in the Advent guide).

Invite brief responses.

Reflection and Journal Time

Reflection Questions/Small Groups

Reflect on questions you select from the weekday reflections in the guide (pp. 21–26) as a whole group, or break into smaller groups of 4 or 5. You can also use this time to invite responses by journaling.

The theme and the suggested daily spiritual practice is: *Being Generous with Others*. Shannon Kelly invited us to consider a gratitude practice, to write down three things for which we are grateful. Is that something you would like to do this week? If yes, how can you make sure to make time to do that? As we think about being generous with others and giving thanks, it is easy to be grateful for those whom we love, but what about those with whom we struggle? Scott invites us to reflect on how we might be generous with someone we find difficult to love. Can you think of someone like that in your life? How does it feel to think about being generous with them?

Group Discussion

If you broke into small groups for the reflection questions, invite each group to share their responses to one or more of the questions. As you listen, take note of any themes or where responses tie together. If you discussed as a group, reiterate themes and tie-ins.

Briefly review Practices on pp. 7–8 and invite group to engage with at least one during the week.

Closing Prayer

Out of the embrace of mercy and
righteousness,
you have brought forth joy and dignity
for your people,
O Holy One of Israel.
Remember now your ancient promise:
make straight the paths that lead to you,
and smooth the rough ways,
that in our day
we might bring forth your compassion
for all humanity. *Amen.*



Being Generous with God



Readings for the Third Sunday of Advent

First Reading: Zephaniah 3:14-20

Psalm: Isaiah 12:2-6

Second Reading: Philippians 4:4-7

Gospel: Luke 3:7-18

Session Three Outline

- Opening music, either recorded or sung (optional)
- Welcome
- Minute of silence to still our hearts and minds and to prepare for our time together.
- Prayer
- Open time with an invitation for group to share what practice they chose and stories of where the awareness of the theme and suggested daily spiritual practice showed up during the past week.
- Read the Gospel for the third Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- Read the Reflection from the third Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- Announce the theme/suggested daily spiritual practice for the week: *Being Generous with God*. Read Monday's reflection out loud as a way of more deeply engaging as a group with the suggested daily spiritual practice. Invite brief responses.
- Reflect and Learn
 - Suggested questions for reflection, journaling, and discussion.
 - Reflection and journaling time (5 min)
 - Small-group breakout for discussion (3–4 in each group, depending on size of group; 10 min)
 - Whole-group reflection and a brief time to share small-group discoveries
- Explore how the theme for the week shows up in the areas of wellness from one of the four Living Compass quadrants that are introduced Tuesday-Friday of each week. Encourage participants to choose an area to focus on during the coming week.
- Wrap-up. Give any reminders for upcoming meeting.
- Close with prayer.
- End on time.

Rhythm of Weekly Gathering

Each session is timed to be 50–60 minutes long and can easily be adapted as needed.

Feel free to use the suggested opening and closing prayers, as well as incorporating anything you choose that would work well with the theme of *Practicing Generosity*.



Open Invitation

Open time with an invitation for group to share what practice they chose and stories of where the awareness of the theme or the suggested daily spiritual practice showed up during the past week.

The Gospel for the Third Sunday of Advent

Luke 3:7-18

John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

Opening Prayer

O God of the exiles and the lost,
you promise restoration and
wholeness
through the power of Jesus Christ.
Give us faith to live joyfully,
sustained by your promises
as we eagerly await the day when
they will be fulfilled
for all the world to see,
through the coming of your Son, Jesus
Christ. *Amen.*



Suggestions for reading the Scripture

As you read the scripture out loud, we invite you to think about creative and engaging ways in which these readings can be done.

Different translations. Depending on the length of the passage, you may want to read it two or three times, using a different Bible translation.

Different voices. If you are reading in parts or using different translations, be sure to use a variety of voices (male and female, young and old, etc.)

Read the Living Compass Reflection for the Third Sunday of Advent

Found on pp. 27–28 in the Advent guide.

Then, read Monday's reflection out loud as a way of more deeply engaging as a group with the theme and suggested daily spiritual practice: *Being Generous with God* (found on p. 29 in the Advent guide).

Invite brief responses.

Reflection and Journal Time

Reflection Questions/Small Groups

Reflect on questions you select from the weekday reflections in the guide (pp. 29–34) as a whole group, or break into smaller groups of 4 or 5. You can also use this time to invite responses by journaling.

The theme and suggested daily spiritual practice is: *Being Generous with God*. A few questions from the guide you could offer to get conversation started: What comes to mind when you think of the idea of being generous “with God’s help”? How might you reflect on what it means to ground your generosity in your love for God and in God’s love for you? What might be different in your life if you were to spend time strengthening your relationship with God?

Group Discussion

If you broke into small groups for the reflection questions, invite each group to share their responses to one or more of the questions. As you listen, take note of any themes or where responses tie together. If you discussed as a group, reiterate themes and tie-ins.

Briefly review Practices on pp. 7–8 and invite group to engage with at least one during the week.

Closing Prayer:

God of hope,
you call us home from the exile of
selfish oppression
to the freedom of justice,
the balm of healing,
and the joy of sharing.
Make us strong to join you in your holy
work,
as friends of strangers and victims,
companions of those whom others shun,
and as the happiness of those whose
hearts are broken.
We make our prayer through Jesus
Christ our Lord.
Amen.



Receiving the Gift of Generosity



Readings for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

First Reading: Micah 5:2-5a

Psalm: Luke 1:46b-55 or Psalm 80:1-7

Second Reading: Hebrews 10:5-10

Gospel: Luke 1:39-45, (46-55)

Session Four Outline

- Opening music, either recorded or sung (optional)
- Welcome
- Minute of silence to still our hearts and minds and to prepare for our time together.
- Prayer
- Open time with an invitation for group to share what practice they chose and stories of where the awareness of how the theme and suggested daily spiritual practice showed up during the past week.
- Read the Gospel for the fourth Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- Read the Reflection from the fourth Sunday of Advent out loud, taking turns as readers.
- Announce the suggested daily spiritual practice for the week: *Receiving the Gift of Generosity*. Read the reflections for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day as a way of more deeply engaging as a group with the suggested daily spiritual practice. Invite brief responses. Note: This year, Advent 4 is only two days, so we want to encourage you to invite your group to consider practicing this theme throughout the twelve days of Christmas.
- Reflect and Learn
 - Suggested questions for reflection, journaling, and discussion
 - Reflection and journaling time (5 min)
 - Small-group breakout for discussion (3–4 in each group, depending on size of group; 10 min)
 - Whole-group reflection and a brief time to share small-group discoveries
- Allow time for group members to express their feelings about the material, the season of Advent in general, and their appreciation for each other.
- Thank group for their commitment: to themselves and to the group.
- Offer ways to stay in touch if group members indicate a desire to stay connected.
- Close with prayer.

Rhythm of Weekly Gathering

Each session is timed to be 50–60 minutes long and can easily be adapted as needed.

Feel free to use the suggested opening and closing prayers, as well as incorporating anything you choose that would work well with the theme of *Practicing Generosity*.



Open Invitation

Open time with an invitation for group to share what practice they chose and stories of where the awareness of the theme and suggested daily spiritual practice showed up during the past week.

The Gospel for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

Luke 1:39-45

Mary Visits Elizabeth

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be[a] a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

Suggestions for reading the Scripture

As you read the scripture out loud, we invite you to think about creative and engaging ways in which these readings can be done.

Different translations. Depending on the length of the passage, you may want to read it two or three times, using a different Bible translation.

Different voices. If you are reading in parts or using different translations, be sure to use a variety of voices (male and female, young and old, etc.)

Opening Prayer

God of promise,
you have given us a sign of your love
through the gift of Jesus Christ, our
Savior,
who was promised from ages past.
We believe as Joseph did
the message of your presence
whispered by an angel,
and offer our prayers for your world,
confident of your care and mercy for
all creation. *Amen.*



Read the Reflection for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

Found on pp. 35–36 in the Advent guide.

Then, read the reflections for Monday and Tuesday, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, out loud as a way of more deeply engaging as a group with the theme and suggested daily spiritual practice: Receiving the Gift of Generosity (found on p. 37–38 in the Advent guide).

Invite brief responses.

Reflection and Journal Time

Reflection Questions/Small Groups

Reflect on any questions the group or you select from any of the week-day reflections in the guide as a whole group, or break into smaller groups of 4 or 5. You can also use this time to invite responses by journaling.

The theme and suggested daily spiritual practice for today is: *Receiving the Gift of Generosity*. A few questions you could ask to get the conversation started: Have you ever experienced receiving in giving? How might you prepare to receive the gift of generosity? How can this daily spiritual practice open your awareness to the gifts of generosity all around you?

Group Discussion

- Allow time for group members to express their feelings about the material, the season of Advent in general, and their appreciation for each other.
- Thank group for their commitment: to themselves and to the group.
- Offer ways to stay in touch if group indicates a desire to stay connected.

Closing Prayer

And could it be
That You have called us so completely
Embodied
that we have no hope
Of knowing You without our feet
touching grass
Our lips smacking blueberries
From the morning cereal
No hope of knowing
Without the miracle of the letter
arriving
From the past saying
Remember?
Remember?
Remember?
No hope without the sheer gathering
Of women holding hands
Of men looking on and wondering
What on earth is happening here
So completely embodied
That here
Here is our hope
Of knowing You
Here

—Catharine Phillips
<http://allwillbewellperiod.blogspot.com/>



Blessing to Summon Rejoicing

When your weeping
has watered
the earth.
When the storm
has been long
and the night
and the season
of your sorrowing.
When you have seemed
an exile
from your life
lost in the far country
a long way from where
your comfort lies.
When the sound
of splintering
and fracture
haunts you.
When despair
attends you.
When lack.
When trouble.
When fear.
When pain.
When empty.
When lonely.
When too much
of what depletes you
and not enough
of what restores
and rests you.
Then let there be
rejoicing.
Then let there be
dreaming.
Let there be
laughter in your mouth
and on your tongue
shouts of joy.
Let the seeds
soaked by tears
turn to grain,
to bread,
to feasting.
Let there be
coming home.
Amen.

—Jan Richardson,
AdventDoor.com

It is Advent and there are glimmers
Of returning
And new beginning
I am being given credit
For faith
When really there are glimmers
Of returning
They are hard to miss
I see them
Faith is hope in things unseen
But I see them
I'm glad for faith credits but really
I see *the things*
Glimmering, glittering signs of return
One by one by one
We can only return ourselves
One by one by one
I see them: one over here
One over there
Watch
Do you see the glimmers
Of return even in the words
Of leaving?
I will collect the glimmers in a basket
They will shine through the weave
Week by week by week
Until Jesus comes
We are separate
No
We are together
We are more together than you
We are more together *with* you
We are We and it is all of us
There are glimmers of returning
I will collect them in a basket
For all to see

—Catharine Phillips, December 5, 2008
<http://allwillbewellperiod.blogspot.com/>



Sent People

This is a season
Of people being *sent*,
Out Into the wilderness (yes),
But also to my office door,
Next to the children
Who sing *Jingle Bells*,
Part of the Advent repertoire.
This is a season of
Sent people:
Bearers of Word and wisdom,
Carriers of overwhelming hope and light,
People of und erstanding, new promise.
I am struck dumb, dizzied, blinded
By those who come
Mute and deaf and blind,
Sent people and me
We stand on the banks
Of the Jordan
Our toes in the water,
Listen to another chorus
Of *Jingle Bells*.
We wait.
We wonder who will join us
Next.

—Catharine Phillips, December 3, 2012
<http://allwillbewellperiod.blogspot.com/>

Make me to know your ways,
O Lord;
teach me your paths.
Lead me in your truth,
and teach me,
for you are the God
of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.

—Psalm 25:4-5