



A Booklet for New Common Life Groups



“Common Life gives me a safe and supportive community in which to share my complete spiritual life—my care for myself, my loved ones, and the world around me.”

“I really look forward to the book discussions or movie viewings that we do in our group”

“Our monthly gatherings ground me in my faith. They give me strength and compassion to bring to the rest of my life.”

“My group helps me to find clarity and simplicity in my life.”

“When I leave (my group) each time, my priorities are clearer.”

“It is here, in the Common Life community, that I am challenged and supported to examine and adjust my spiritual practice and my engagement in the world. As a result, there is a continual flow back and forth, and both enrich and inform the other. I don’t want prayer and action to become separated in my life. I have come to understand that living faithfully requires a constant interaction between the two.”

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INTRODUCTION

The Common Life Coordinating Committee offers this *Booklet for New Common Life Groups* in electronic format as a resource for Atlantic Common Life groups who are inviting in new members or who are mentoring a new group. The benefit of such a handbook became apparent to us last fall. At that time we were engaged in the process of making recommendations for restructuring the role of the Coordinator's position, a task we were mandated to do at the Annual Meeting at the Tatamagaouche Centre in May 2009. In that process, it became clear that in order to make the position more manageable and sustainable, the Coordinator was not going to be able to continue hands-on orientation of new members or groups. The role instead would focus on coordinating strategic growth and administrative support. The responsibility for hands-on orientation would need to be carried by local groups.

In looking back over our seven years as an Atlantic Common Life Community, we were also reminded that our local groups from the start have been continually and actively engaged in welcoming and orienting new members and mentoring new groups. This seems to be a built-in feature of our Common Life culture. Although each group has experienced this process differently, in general it seems it is one that takes considerable discernment, time, care, and risk.

In this process of looking back we were reminded that Common Life has a unique potential to speak to a wide range of people. We hear of the growing number of "churched" and "un-churched" in our communities whose spiritual needs are not being met - people who are seeking the company of others with whom they can share their spiritual yearnings and who will support them in living out their faith in the world. It reinforces for us that Common Life as such a community might be a good fit and thus a good thing to share. If individuals or local groups are inspired to engage in this broader community building, then too a collection of resources might be helpful.



This *Booklet for New Common Life Groups* then is a way then to draw together our collective wisdom and experience building the Common Life community. It represents just a start in the gathering. It is offered not to as a resource "to follow", but rather a resource where one might find pieces helpful to the process of orientation and mentorship.

It is our hope that the Booklet will grow and in the process promote conversation among groups around this process. And so we invite you in your local groups to consider approaches, materials, strategies, that you have found successful from your own experience and which you would be willing to share. We are suggesting new resources be distributed electronically through the Coordinating Committee by way of your local representative. They will then be shared with the other groups to add to the *Booklet*. We also welcome your feedback on anything you find in here. We will try and incorporate your suggestions into future changes.

In community and spirit,
Bob Childs and Charlotte Campbell
For the Common Life Coordinating Committee, 2009-2010

Agenda for Orientation, used 2 Nov., '08, Oak Bay, NB

3:10-3:30 Welcome and Introduction

Share briefly (1) who are you, (2) where are you from and (3) why are you here.

3:30-3:40 Opening

- *Prayer
- *Light Candle
- *A Reading
- *Song: "Deep In Our Hearts"
- *Silence



3:40-4:10 Overview of Common Life program

- **Personal reflection** about what draws me to Common Life.
- **Overall description** of Common life – What is it, history, national and Maritime flavours.
- **Brief description of five practices**
 - Attending to the spirit
 - Commitment to community
 - Dedication to Learning
 - Engagement with justice
 - Retreat
- **How Meetings Work**
 - 1) **reiterate purpose:** group (smaller & larger) to support each other in deepening one's faith and living this out in their ordinary and extraordinary places in lives
 - 2) **Respect for everyone's active lives** – no one needs another commitment that feels like obligation, commitment to CL because it feeds learning & growing.
 - 3) But **committed to attending** and actively participating– monthly and **annual (May 8-9 Fri. Sat.);** rotate houses (living room), include a meal, (6-8)
 - 4) **Therefore: independently evolved** so that preparation and work is life-giving and happens inside the meetings. So far **no community projects** as group – **but influence** what and how I do. i.e. peace rally. Social justice group, spiritual journey group
 - 5) **leadership shared**
 - 6) **for each group the meeting format develops to fit the particular group, but a similarity has evolved** (opening ritual with silence, check-in, educational component (with personal reflection & sharing), business, closing, meal
 - 7) **develop norms-** return to these frequently at first and evaluate how group is doing.
 - 8) **Personal commitment/s to stretching in one or more of the practices.** This is often done early in the year and individuals share how they are doing several times during the year, holding each other "gently accountable."

- **Examples of Focus Themes – Each group discerns their own interest and direction, often for the year and usually around the regional theme established at CLAG is.** (For several years it has been *Living simply so that others may simply live and Make Poverty History*)
 - 1) New groups often devote a sessions or two on each practice.
 - 2) Stewardship of personal finances
 - 3) A book study i.e. Ched Myers: *Household Economics, Say to this Mountain*
 - 4) videos: (often borrowed through AVEL) on environment, social justice, spirituality, community etc.
 - 5) retreat: several groups have taken 3-day retreats together.
 - 6) Water Project (which included a retreat by Pedicodiac River; conversations with a local resource person on Acadian history, natural history of river, river walk, sacredness of water,
 - (7) Study of Earth Charter
 - (8) Each member presents a session on an “area of passion” that is related to one of the practices.

4:10-4:20 Questions-So Far

4:20-4:35 Reflection

- Pick a practice and reflect on it individually
 - ...how might this practice nurture you?
 - ...How might this practice challenge you?
 - ...What might be God’s yearning for you through this practice?

(Materials provided for people to write, draw, create a symbol ...)

- In silence and consider what emerges for you.

4:35-5:05 Sharing

5:05-5:25 Next Steps;

- ✓ where to go from here?
- ✓ We are available to help plan/lead next meeting
- ✓ Some/all might attend meeting of Fredericton

5:25-5:30 Closing

5:30- 6:30 Shared Meal

Fredericton Common Life

September 22, 07

Agenda

(First "real" meeting after orientation)

2:30 Arrive (*greeting & conversation*)

3:00 Opening and Check-in

3:45 Introduce and Review:

Purpose of Common Life and Five Practices

4:15 Exploring Norms (*our way of being together re attendance, confidentiality...*)

4:30 Reflection and Sharing:

Of the five practices /disciplines (a) which practice(s) is most strongly rooted in your present life? (b) which practice(s) most needs to be strengthened in your present life?

- 10 minutes silence
- 35 minutes sharing

5:15 Mapping Our Future

- structure of meetings
- dates / times / locations / children / meal...
- topics
- facilitation

5:45 Closing

5:50 Supper

7:00 Going Home

South Eastern New Brunswick Common Life Group Outline

Candle Lighting:

As we gather in this Common Life circle, we light this candle as a symbol of your light and love present with us.

In its lighting, we remember our commitment

Engagement for justice

Attending to the spirit

Dedication to learning

Commitment to community

Retreat

May we be attentive and alert to how you would have us live in ways that bring healing to our world. Amen

Psalm or Reading

Silence

Check In:

In what ways is *your life*, and *Common Life* connecting these days? Joys? Challenges? Questions?

Gift of Content and Time for Discussion

Silence and Prayers of Intercession

Closing Prayer: (Iona Abbey Worship Book, 2001)

This we know, the earth does not belong to us.

We belong to the earth.

This we know. All things are connected,

Like the blood that unites one family.

This we know, we did not weave the web of life,

We are merely a strand in it.

This we know, whatever we do to the web,

We do to ourselves.

Let us give thanks for the gift of creation,

Let us give thanks that all things hold together in Christ. Amen.

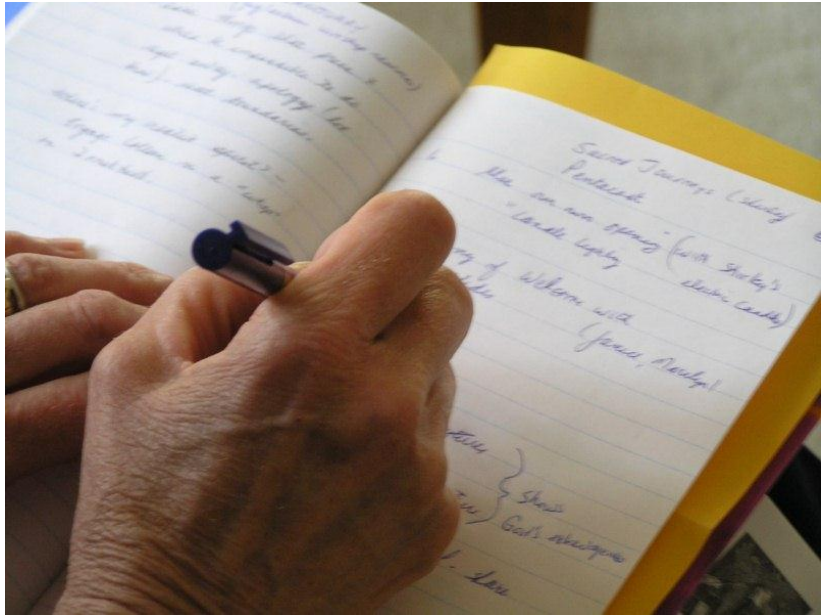


Table Grace: For food before us, friends beside us, and your Presence among us, we give you thanks O God. Amen.

South Eastern New Brunswick Common Life Group The beginnings of a Rule: [Commitments we share]

We are committed ...

- To the Common Life practices
 - To continue to deepen our commitment to, and learning of the CL practices, individually and together.
- To meet every 4-5 weeks, and make it a priority
 - To share in leadership; to follow the “pattern of meeting” that has evolved,
 - To check-in around the five CL practices; to ask for what we need from each other by way of follow-up; to ask when we need to be held in prayer in a particular way,
 - To share worship that deepens our experience of the Liturgical seasons and our place in the universe.
- To hospitality with sharing a simple meal together of soup, bread and cheese, (and wine) and a simple dessert.
- To pray for each other, and all Common Life groups weekly.
- To discern justice-seeking actions that we might take together (e.g. letter writing...).
- To Retreat together at least once a year.



A spiritual practice is any intentional act which opens and deepens our awareness and consent here and now to the Great Spirit's love of us, as people in community, and sooner or later stimulates our loving response to the call of the Creator to join in loving the world into being.

~Don MacDougall~

Thoughts on Attending to the Spirit

Spirituality is rooted in desire. We long for something we can neither name nor describe, but which is no less real because of our inability to capture it with words."

~Mary Jo Weaver, *Springs of Water in a Dry Land*

"Each thought, each action in the sunlight of awareness becomes sacred. In this light, no boundary exists between the sacred and the profane."

~Thich Nhat Han, *Peace Is Every Step*

"Christian spirituality means eating together, sharing together, drinking together, talking with each other, receiving each other, experiencing God's presence through each other, and, in doing so, proclaiming the gospel as God's alternative vision for everyone, especially for those who are poor, outcast, and battered..."

~Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*

A spiritual practice is that breathing space for the soul that lets us live more fully moment by moment from the larger Presence 'in whom we live and move and have our being' rather than living from our own separated sense of self-effort.

~Tilden Edwards

Christian practices are not activities we do to make something spiritual happen in our lives. Nor are they duties we undertake to be obedient to God. Rather, they are patterns of communal action that create openings in our lives where the grace, mercy and presence of God may be made known to us. They are places where the power of God is experienced. In the end, these are not ultimately our practices but forms of participation in the practice of God.

~Craig Dykstra

Thoughts on Commitment to Community

The first thing that Jesus did after coming from his desert solitude was to gather around him a small group of companions, making his life communal. Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed and Moses were community makers. They saw necessity of companions on the Exodus experience, the path from slavery to godliness. ~Prayers from a Planetary Pilgrim



The communion / community of saints is a symbol, developed in Christian usage, to express the experience of persons connected to one another in virtue of being connected to the sacred mystery at the heart of the world. Potentially it is the most inclusive symbol for it not only relates cultural groups around the world, women with men, and the most socially marginalized with the powerful, all with in an egalitarian community of grace, but also the living with the dead and the yet to be born, all

seekers of the divine in a circle around the table, the body of Christ, which encompasses the earth itself. ~Elizabeth A. Johnson, CJS. *Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints*, 1998.

Who is our neighbour: The Samaritan? The outcast? The enemy? Yes, yes of course. But it is also the whale, the dolphin, and the rain forest. Our neighbour is the entire community of life, the entire universe. We must love it with our whole self because in fact it is our self. ~Brian Patrick

Any attempt at radical 'social engineering' that does not incorporate God, that does not welcome grace and leave vast room for divine intervention, will utterly fail...Community is an adventure. We never can predict what will happen exactly when a group become authentic and open to the Spirit. It's full of surprises. Thank God because while the outcomes are usually quite different than what we imagined, they are often far better than we could have dreamed.

~M. Scott Peck, *A World Waiting to be Born*, 1993.

Thoughts on Engagement with Justice



The revolution to which the biblical community is summoned is to enact in the world of social affairs a new practice of social relationship marked by justice, mercy, and peace, which touches *all* life.

~Walter Brueggemann

Left: A garden plot in South Africa supporting "The Grandmothers."

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.

The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.

Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.

No prayer fully expresses our faith.

No confession brings perfection.

No pastoral visit brings wholeness.

No program accomplishes the Church's mission.

No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we about.

We plant the seeds that one day will grow.

We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.

We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.

This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own

~Archbishop Oscar A. Romero

The pain we feel at the loss of wild animals and of wilderness spaces represents a participation in the heart of a God who yearns for all beings to enjoy freedom...Ultimate expression of freedom in humans is justice-making. Justice is the conscious intention to ensure that all beings have an opportunity to participate in the freedom God intends and to speak out on behalf of this freedom.

~Bruce Sanguin, *Darwin, Divinity and the Dance of the Cosmos*

A sustainable economy represents nothing less than a higher social order – one as concerned with future generations as with our own, and more focused on the health of the planet and the poor than on material acquisitions and military might. While it is a fundamentally new endeavor, with many uncertainties, it is far less risky than continuing with business as usual.

~Sandra Postel and Christopher Flavin, Worldwatch Institute, Washington, D.C.

Thoughts on Retreat

Contemplative retreats are not [always] about accomplishing anything, getting somewhere, or going home with the answers...The purpose of a retreat is simply to attend to God. We open ourselves to God's grace and receive it with gratitude in whatever form it appears.

~Jane E. Vennard, *Be Still: Designing and Leading Contemplative Retreats*,

A retreat provides an opportunity:

To reflect on the meaning and mystery of life

To meditate on the things of the Spirit

To listen to the voice of the Spirit

To discover God's unconditional love for you

To experience God's gentle forgiveness

To share faith and friendship with others

To become aware of other's needs

To pray a little or a lot

To ponder the past and plan the future

In a word, to be renewed, in body, mind and spirit. ~author unknown



One might have many reasons to retreat: reflect, celebrate, mourn, create, or recuperate, but underlying is to reconnect with the purpose of our life.

~Jennifer Loudon, *The Woman's Retreat Book*, Harper: San Francisco, 1997.

We withdraw not only from the concerns of the world and its preoccupations, but from the incessant monologue and concerns within ourselves, in order for something else to come into being.

~Deena Metzger, *Writing for your Life*

A retreat is a time set aside for yourself; a time for quiet and renewal, for thinking, stillness and connecting; a time to remove yourself from your busy life-style so that you can remember who you are and your purpose in living. ~author unknown

Common Life Practices ~Reflection Questions~

(Note: The following eight pages of reflection questions on the five practices were developed in the initial pilot years of Common Life from 2002-03. As such, they reflect the thinking of those members in years when Home Groups were just starting up. Since our individual and personal journeys are continually changing, we might see some pieces differently now.)

As a means of responding to the call to Common Life, what commitments are you prepared to make?

Note: these are listed alphabetically and are not in any priority.

1. Attending to the Spirit – Spiritual Practice

- What approach to spiritual practice/prayer might you commit to practice and learn more about in a *Common Life* community?
- Are there approaches to prayer you would commit to offer/teach to the community?

2. Commitment to Community

- As part of enabling people who come together in a caring and connected community, what commitment might you make to building community, either within the *Common Life* group or in your own back-home situation?
- What commitment might you make regarding increasing your capacity to enable people to come together in community?
- What commitment might you make to sharing/teaching your skills and understandings in this area?

3. Dedication to Learning –

About Scripture

- What kind of Bible reading or study might you commit to practicing/learning more about?
- What approach might you commit to contributing/teaching to a *Common Life* community?

About Engagement for Justice

- What kind of learning, reading or study about engagement for justice might you commit to practicing/becoming more involved in within a *Common Life* community?
- What might you commit to contributing/teaching to a *Common Life* community?

4. Engagement for Justice

- What might you commit to doing for justice as a member of a *Common Life* community?
- Are there actions you would encourage members to consider taking together?

5. Retreat

- It has been suggested that Common Life members each make an annual retreat. What practice of retreat might you commit to?

Accountability for My Use of Resources

~Reflection Questions~

*It is **not** usual in our society to be accountable for our financial practices and for our impact on and use of the earth's resources. What commitments would help you respond more fully to the call to greater life? They may be new commitments or sharing declarations of present practices. These suggestions are to help our thinking in this. Reflect on the pros and cons of each, make new suggestions and consider what is important for you.*

Money and Finances:

I commit to give away ____ % of my gross income to just causes.

I commit to consuming less, living more simply and lightly on the earth by...

Perhaps commitments in terms of investments, how I use my money, etc...

Other commitments I would make regarding my money and finances...

As an Embodied Being:

I commit to spend ____ hours weekly related to the joy/care/exercise of my body.

I commit to these specific practices related to my own health...

Use of Time, Rest, and Sabbath:

I commit to spending _____ time in Sabbath rest each week.

As part of Creation:

I commit to reflect on my own relationship to Earth's processes and my use of Earth's resources, to respect and to work to restore Creation by...

- How do you feel about being accountable to your Common Life group for use of money, time and use of resources?
- How might that accountability be carried out supportively and effectively?

Attending to the Spirit

~Spiritual Practice~

Reflection Questions

- 1. What terms would you use to talk about your own practice of attending to the Spirit? (*Prayer? Meditation? Spiritual practice...?*)**
- 2. How have these terms, their meaning and form changed over your life?**
- 3. Who taught – and teaches/inspires – you in your spiritual practice?**
- 4. Reflect on times of deep insight and significance in your spiritual practice/prayer life – or on the lack of such.**
- 5. What aspect of spiritual practice/prayer life would you like to learn more about, experience, develop, deepen?**
- 6. What approach to spiritual practice/prayer might you commit to practice and learn more about in a *Common Life* community? What approaches to prayer might you commit to offer/teach to the community?**

Attending to the Spirit

~With Scripture~

Reflection Questions

- 1. Print the word BIBLE in the centre of the page. Then write down every word, thought, idea, concept that comes to your mind – positive or negative.**
- 2. What do these words tell you about what attracts you about the study of scripture?**
- 3. What do these words tell you about what concerns you about the study of scripture?**
- 4. How do you study scripture presently?**
- 5. What might you want to do differently?**
- 6. What kind of Bible reading or study might you commit to practicing/learning more about in a *Common Life* community? What approach might you commit to contributing/teaching to a *Common Life* community?**

Commitment to Community

- 1. On a blank sheet of paper, draw a picture or representation of what community means to you – perhaps a moment when you have had a positive experience of community.**
- 2. What experiences in your life have contributed (*or continue to contribute*) positively or negatively to your understanding of and desire for community life?**
- 3. How does your present living, working and social situation compare to your drawing and to your desired situation?**
- 4. What would be your ideal of a *Common Life* community? What commitments would you be prepared to make to help build such a community?**
- 5. As part of enabling people to come together in a caring and connected community, what commitment might you make to building community, either within the *Common Life* group or in your own home situation? What commitment might you make regarding increasing your capacity to enable people to come together in community? What commitment might you make to sharing/teaching your skills and understandings in this area?**

Engagement for Justice
~Reflection Questions~

- 1. Select a photo or headline that connects with a passion or passions you have for justice.**
- 2. Describe how this issue touches you, calls forth your passion.**
- 3. What actions are you presently taking regarding this issue?**
- 4. Are there other actions you wish to undertake?**
- 5. What might you commit to doing for justice as a member of a Common Life community? Are there actions you would encourage members to consider taking together?**

