

EcoFaith Recovery’s Practices for Awakening Leadership

“The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any.” – Alice Walker

As people of faith drawing inspiration from ecology, progressive Christian faith, recovery movements, and grassroots relational organizing, we seek recovery to right-relationship with God and the spiritual/relational power God offers. We see God’s power of love being enacted as compassion and justice *through us* for the sake of the world. We call this “leadership.”

To support ourselves and our faith communities in taking courageous public action for the recovery of human life and the healing of God’s creation, we engage in the following practices:

1) **Spiritual Grounding** which realigns our lives with the life-giving patterns of God’s creation.

- a) **We are reclaiming the Bible and re-imagining our theological traditions** to inspire compassionate action in service of the diversity, interdependence and well-being of all of God’s creation.
- b) **We are engaging in spiritual practices which help us see ourselves within God’s evolving universe and reconnect us to an earth-honoring faith.**

In particular,

- **we practice silence and presence** with God, ourselves, one another and God’s creation;
 - **we practice abstinence and gratitude**, turning from patterns destructive to ourselves, community and creation in order to participate in all that gives life.
 - **we sing and make music** to reconnect with creativity, emotion, our bodies, creation, and one another;
 - **we spend time in the natural world** to be nurtured by God’s creation and learn to become literate in the “languages” of God’s living earth.
- c) **We are learning to lead spiritual practices** that enable others to reconnect with God, themselves, one another, and the larger community of life.
 - d) **We are planning and leading public worship and rituals** that reconnect us with the sacredness of creation and God’s particular love for the oppressed.

2) **Relational Practices** which help us come out of denial, despair and isolation into spiritual communities capable of taking courageous action for the recovery of human life and the healing of God’s creation.

- a) **We are engaging in Intentional Relational Conversations (One-to-One’s)** to recover our relatedness to others within our larger communities. In this way we develop leaders and identify potential issues for collective action.
- b) **We are seeking authentic, mutual Relationships with the most vulnerable and oppressed and those who dwelled on this land before we did.** We learn about the ways in which injustice to the land is typically linked to injustice to its peoples and the ways in which environmental injustice enacts oppression. We seek to become visible allies with one another by examining our disproportionate resources and privileges and using them with thoughtfulness, transparency and respect.
- c) **We are organizing focused Listening Seasons** in which a group or congregation conducts multiple one-to-one conversations over several weeks to discern common concerns, ideas, and themes arising from members of our communities, including those who are often invisible and discounted.
- d) **We are Reflecting in Groups** to discern together what our one-to-one conversations are revealing to us. By so doing, we generate the motivation and capacity to act together for the common good.



3) **Telling Our Stories** to inspire life-giving change.

- a) **We are becoming curious about our own stories.** We are claiming responsibility to educate ourselves about the ways our personal journeys have been shaped by the stories of our families, ancestors, communities, cultures, economies, political systems, societal institutions, faith traditions, land, and the 13.8 billion-year unfolding of God’s universe. We are becoming literate about the ways these various stories do or do not contribute to a sustainable planet for all.

- b) **We are practicing sharing our stories and motivation for action whenever appropriate opportunities arise.** In the process, we become more confident of the ways God can use our stories to inspire recovery for human life and healing for God’s creation.
- c) **We are publicly sharing our stories and visions for the future.** Discovering that our personal stories can be both instructive and inspiring for others, we are seeking opportunities to tell our stories publicly, practicing them in advance, and requesting feedback from others.
- d) **We are organizing opportunities for our stories to make public impact** on policies and collective practices which impinge upon God’s living earth. We creatively bear witness to God’s vision of a world in which compassion is expressed in every dimension of life.



4) **Rhythms of Engagement** expressed through Action-Reflection-Evaluation-Sabbath. We reduce depletion and burn out by realigning our rhythms with creation’s regenerative cycles.

- a) **We are organizing Public Actions** which are creative, bold and strategic in reducing injustice and promoting the health and resilience of the greater community of life.
- b) **We are Reflecting** on our leadership efforts and public actions within our families, congregations, and communities.
- c) **We are Evaluating** each public action we take together, celebrating our successes and identifying specific areas for growth.
- d) **We are Keeping Sabbath**, pausing to delight in our relationships with human communities and all of God’s creation before moving onto the next daily, weekly or monthly cycle of action.

5) **Mentoring** and nurturing a culture of Mutual-Mentoring to consciously and intentionally develop leadership capacity for the recovery of human life and the healing of God’s creation.

- a) **We are Watching for Opportunities to Mentor and to Be Mentored**, discerning which opportunities best align with our own gifts and call.
- b) **We are Seeking Mentors and/or Mutual Mentors** at every stage of life to help us develop a deeper sense of our call and a greater capacity to live it out.
- c) **We are Serving as a Mentor** to those whose vocation and leadership development we are called to nurture.
- d) **We are Rediscovering how to most effectively Mentor Others** by intentionally learning & cultivating this lost art.



6) **Conscious Leadership Development** to generate a vast & rich ecosystem of courageous leaders capable of taking public action for the common good.

- a) **We are Modeling Interest in our own leadership development and the development of others** by explicitly naming the God-given gifts, call, struggles, and investment we see in ourselves and that which we see in others. We risk inviting and offering feedback for the purpose of growth.
- b) **We are Risking Failure.** We affirm one another’s courage in stepping out into uncharted territory, celebrating how mistakes and failures provide rich opportunities for growth throughout creation.
- c) **We are Inviting Others Explicitly.** We regularly and personally invite others into developmentally appropriate leadership roles, even when this takes more time and energy than doing it ourselves.
- d) **We are Learning to Teach interested others** how to: uncover and awaken the power hidden within their own stories; understand the larger stories of systems that influence us; and locate all those stories within the *great story*: the unfolding of God’s abundant life in creation.

Why do we engage with others in *Practices for Awakening Leadership*?

Like millions around the world who find commonality with those seeking recovery from the destructive effects of growing up in addictive and dysfunctional systems, we in EcoFaith Recovery discovered that we also had many experiences in common. While understanding that not all of these characteristics describe all of us, many of us experienced the following:

- We found that we were not spiritually grounded, that our current institutional faith practices were not sufficiently rooting us to weather the storms (ecological, economic, social, political and spiritual) of climate change and ecological degradation.
- We often felt overwhelmed by the incessant bad news, finding ourselves either compulsively acting to “fix” the problem or “checking out” emotionally.
- We sought ways to get involved in actions or activities of our congregations and local organizations, but sometimes left these experiences and meetings feeling more isolated than when we came.
- We found ourselves exhausted and “burned out” by actions and activities, even and especially from those that were for a “good cause.”
- We kept our feelings of grief, fear and anger inside for lack of a community that could hold and honor the emotional impact that climate change and ecological degradation were having on us.
- We found that we were unconsciously allowing fear of disapproval to keep us from taking risks for the sake of our own development and for the healing of creation.
- We struggled but failed to find words to explain why taking action for the sake of the healing of God’s creation was deeply important to us, thus increasing our isolation and feeling of being overwhelmed.
- We believed that we had no unique gifts to offer our congregation or the larger environmental movement, that we were not leaders, and not worthy of investing in our own development, unless we were prepared to stand up and lead a big group.
- We believed that we had no story, that we had no wisdom, that we had no power, that we were fundamentally victims of a system rather than actors within it.

In response to experiences like these, we are coming together and engaging in the Practices described here.

In the process, we are recovering our true vocation as people of faith and citizens of earth.

We welcome you to join us.

Sample Meeting Format Utilizing the Practices

Make sure everybody has a copy of the *Practices for Awakening Leadership* so leaders can reference which *Practice* the group is engaging in whenever possible. Each Corresponding Practice is in Parenthesis below.

0:00 **Lead a Spiritual Grounding Exercise**

(Practice #1). Ideally, this Practice would connect people to this meeting’s purpose.

0:10 **Sharing of a Story (#3)** - One Person shares a brief story about his/her experience related to this meeting’s purpose or any one of the Practices (revealing how any *Practice* grounds or facilitates public action for the recovery of human life and healing of God’s creation).

0:15 **One-to-One Conversations (#2)** in response to the story that was just shared. [20 minutes is even better!]

0:30 **Full Group Sharing – (#2)** Briefly share any significant insights that arose during the one-to-one’s.

0:35 **Rhythms of Engagement (#4)** – Indicate whether this meeting’s primary focus is *Preparing for Action*, *Engaging in Reflection*, *Participating in Evaluation*, or *Celebrating Sabbath*. Proceed forward with that agenda. [Plan for more time here and a longer meeting, if desired.]

1:15 **Read aloud one or more of the Practices from Mentoring (#5) or Conscious Leadership Development (#6).** Discuss together how those present would like to engage that Practice in the coming week.

1:25 **Spiritual Grounding Practice(#1) to conclude.**

1:30 **Close the Meeting**

For more information visit:

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EcoFaith Recovery

*For the Recovery of Human Life
and the Healing of God’s Creation*

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