

REA 2019 Poster Session
Field-testing Sabbath Friendship as an Ecological Model of Religious Education

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Background: What is Sabbath Friendship?

Sabbath Friendship is a mindful practice of green faith, faith that seeks restored relationships not only with God and others, but also with the earth and our creaturely bodies. Sabbath Friendship functions as an ecological way of learning that forms practitioners in an ecological way of being – an ecological self. An ecological self can be defined as a self that consciously and practically embraces interconnectedness where there has been estrangement – seeking healing of estrangement from God, other persons, groups, one's embodied self, and from the earth.

The ecological self knows and lives the profound oneness of reality. Growing toward an ecological self is the journey of Sabbath Friendship. Grounded in embodied spiritual practices, Sabbath Friendship offers a model of ecological religious education.

As theological and ethical prisms, both Sabbath and friendship shed a kaleidoscope of light from the core of Judaism and Christianity. As practices, both Sabbath and friendship tutor us in living the ancient wisdom of these traditions. They teach us to practice God's ways in the world, a way of life that resists our anthropocentric, consumeristic, 24/7 mode of estranged existence.

Rooted in a covenantal view of reality, which posits the sacred interrelatedness of all life, Sabbath and friendship are respected in Jewish and Christian traditions as sacred practices originating in the life of God. The interrelated practices of Sabbath Friendship draw us into the sacred reality that undergirds our common life. Sabbath Friendship offers a pathway toward reconciliation, wholeness, and kinship with creation.

To begin a journey towards an ecological self, Sabbath Friends covenant together to learn and practice Sabbath ways of relating to God, to self, and to all creation. Sabbath Friends befriend the Sabbath, Creation and each other as they are drawn into God's Sabbath delight and God's reconciling friendship with all humanity and all of creation.

Examples of Sabbath Friendship as an Ecological Model of Religious Education

Sabbath Friendship as a learning partnership between small groups or pairs of friends: Sabbath Friendship requires a learning-covenant relationship with at least one friend and can be practiced within a small group. A pair of friends or a small group begin their journey by making a covenant to study and practice the Sabbath as friends and to be mindful of how this covenant of Sabbath Friendship is forming and transforming their theology, their sense of self, and their relationships. Their practice opens them to wider circles of Sabbath Friendship with those from whom they have been separated and estranged, including their estrangement from their own bodies that are calling them to slow down and rest. An (as yet) unpublished guidebook that I have co-written with a Sabbath Friend, Judith Sutherland, can be used to help friends begin their journey. See source list.

Sabbath Friendship as a Congregational Practice: Lake Nokomis Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis provides a great example of a congregation engaging in Sabbath Friendship as an ecological model of religious education. Twice a month they take Sunday's off from church to allow families and friends to practice a full day of Sabbath rest. On those weekends they meet on Saturday evening for a contemplative service as preparation for their Sabbath. This practice has revitalized a congregation that had been on the verge of disbanding. See source list.

Sabbath Friendship as a Connection to the Slow Culture Movement: With their book *Slow Church: Cultivating Community in the Patient Way of Jesus*, John Pattison and C. Christopher Smith have launched a movement that incorporates the wisdom of Sabbath and Friendship as practices needed to resist the earth-wounding and community-destroying impact of our culture of speed. Modeled on the Slow Culture movement, Slow Church adds the Judaic-Christian practice of Sabbath as a core framework for rethinking congregational mission related to local human and biotic communities. The Slow Church movement values Sabbath as an ethical, ecological, and economic practice of community building. See source list.

Research Focus and Design Questions

Can a year of participating in the practice of Sabbath Friendship move persons toward a more ecological self – a self realizing greater degrees of healing one's estrangement from other persons, groups, one's embodied self, and from the earth?

What action research design will help adults self-evaluate qualitative changes in their relationship to the earth, to their embodied self, and to persons and groups from whom they have been estranged after participating for one year in a Sabbath Friends practice?

Sources

1. Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices*.
2. Willie Jennings, "Redeeming the Creature: Race, Place, and the Hope of the Church," 2018 Sprunt Lectures, Union Presbyterian Seminary, Richmond, VA.
3. Sally Johnston & Judith Sutherland, *Sabbath Friends: Practicing Green Faith*. (Unpublished manuscript.)
4. Sallie McFague, *Blessed Are the Consumers*.
5. Joanna Macy, *The Greening of the Self*.
6. David W. Orr, *Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, & the Human Prospect*.
7. Edmund O'Sullivan & Marilyn Taylor, *Learning Toward an Ecological Consciousness*.
8. Parker Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known*.
9. Kara Root (pastor of Lake Nokomis Presbyterian Church), "Beloved Congregation, Stay Home on Sunday," <https://www.lakenokomispc.org/horizons-2016-article.html>
10. Pattison & Smith, *Slow Church: Cultivating Community in the Patient Way of Jesus*.
11. Pattison & Smith, *Slow Church Study Guides*, <http://slowchurch.com/study-guide-resources/> or <http://slowchurch.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Slow-Church-SG-Intro-Ch.1.pdf>
12. Ernest Stringer, *Action Research*.
13. Norman Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath*.
14. Flora Slosson Wuellner, *Prayer and Our Bodies*.