

## Important Dates

<b>February 22:</b> First Sunday of Lent	<b>May 7:</b> National Day of Prayer
<b>March 6:</b> World Day of Prayer	<b>May 10:</b> Mother's Day
<b>March 29:</b> Passion/Palm Sunday (Holy Week Begins)	<b>May 14:</b> Ascension Day
<b>April 2:</b> Maundy Thursday	<b>May 24:</b> Pentecost
<b>April 3:</b> Good Friday	
<b>April 5:</b> Resurrection of the Lord/Easter Sunday	



# People of the Book By Dr. Rusty Douglas

**P**resbyterians are “people of the Book.” What book? The Bible—God’s story told in the Old and New Testaments, 66 books, put together over a period lasting more than 1,000 years. The Old Testament (39 books), written in Hebrew, and the New Testament (27 books), written mostly in Greek, combine to give us God’s Word.

## The Bible as Revelation

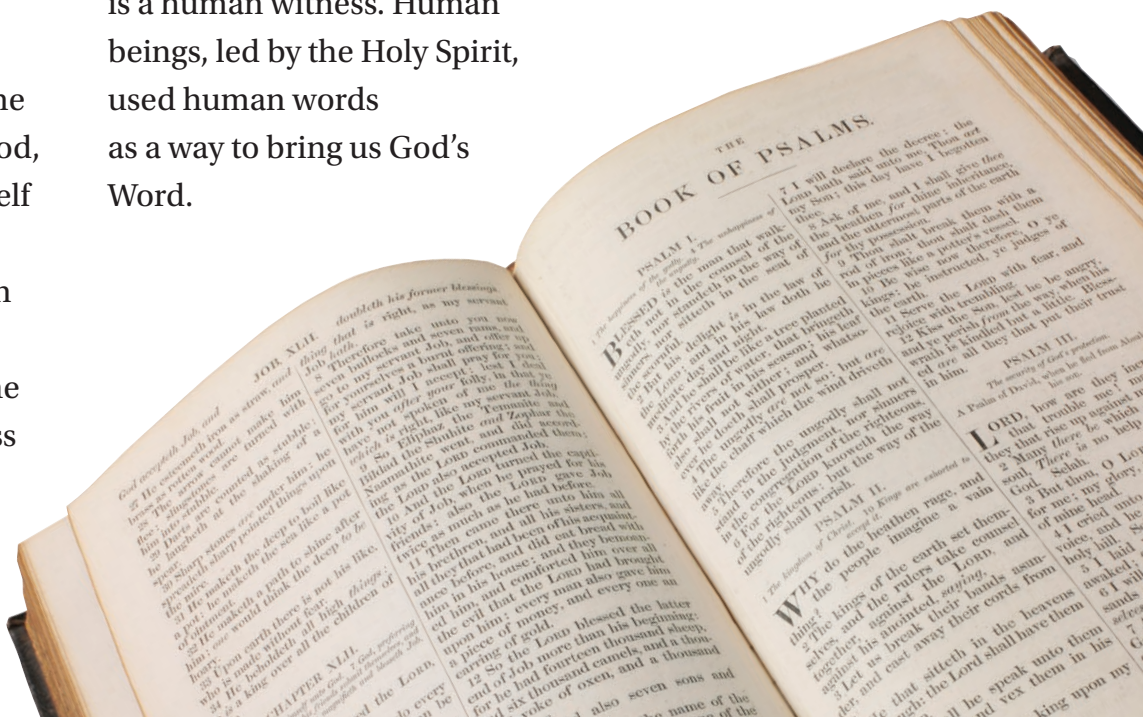
Presbyterians believe that the Bible is “revelation” from God, that is God disclosing Himself to His people. The Bible did not just appear from Heaven in a complete form from start to finish. Rather, it came together in a gradual process over a long period of time—a process guided by the Holy Spirit and

recognized by the Church.

What we have in Scripture is a witness to God’s revelation by faithful persons who desired to remember, celebrate, and share God’s action. The Presbyterian faith is not in a book, but in the God we come to know *through* the Bible. The Bible is a *witness* to God’s revelation.

We believe that the Bible is a human witness. Human beings, led by the Holy Spirit, used human words as a way to bring us God’s Word.

While acknowledging the humanity of the biblical writers, we stress that the Bible is the Word of God, given by God’s inspiration. Faith enables us to see in all these human words the true Word, Jesus Christ, the full incarnation and embodiment of all that God wants to say to us.





## **Inspiration of the Bible**

What do Presbyterians mean when they say the Bible is inspired? In 2 Timothy 3:16, Scripture is mentioned as being “God-breathed” (NIV). While there are different views of inspiration, a balanced Reformed-Presbyterian view tells us that it is the Holy Spirit who leads us to take the Bible seriously. It is the Spirit who inspired the writers of Scripture to record their words, and in our own time we ask that same Spirit to illumine our hearts and minds as we seek to listen to the words of the Bible, to the end that they will be for us the “Word of God.”

## **Authority of the Bible**

John Calvin believed that one could not convince someone else of the authority of

God’s Word. This was the Holy Spirit’s job. Presbyterians believe in the authority of the Bible because in the words of the Book we hear the voice of God speaking to us. It is in Scripture that we are pointed to Jesus Christ and claimed by His love.

The Bible is our final authority in matters of faith and practice. It is authoritative for what we believe about God and how we are to live in the world. The Bible derives its authority from God because it points to God, bears witness to God, and God speaks to us in its pages. When we read the Bible, God calls us to Himself and His Kingdom through the life and work of His Son, the Word of God Incarnate—Jesus Christ.

**“The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture . . .”**  
(Chapter 1, *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1646)





# The Bible— Through the Eyes of Little Children

Adapt these activities for your toddlers, preschoolers, and early elementary students. Consider sending them home for families to use together.

## Active Reading

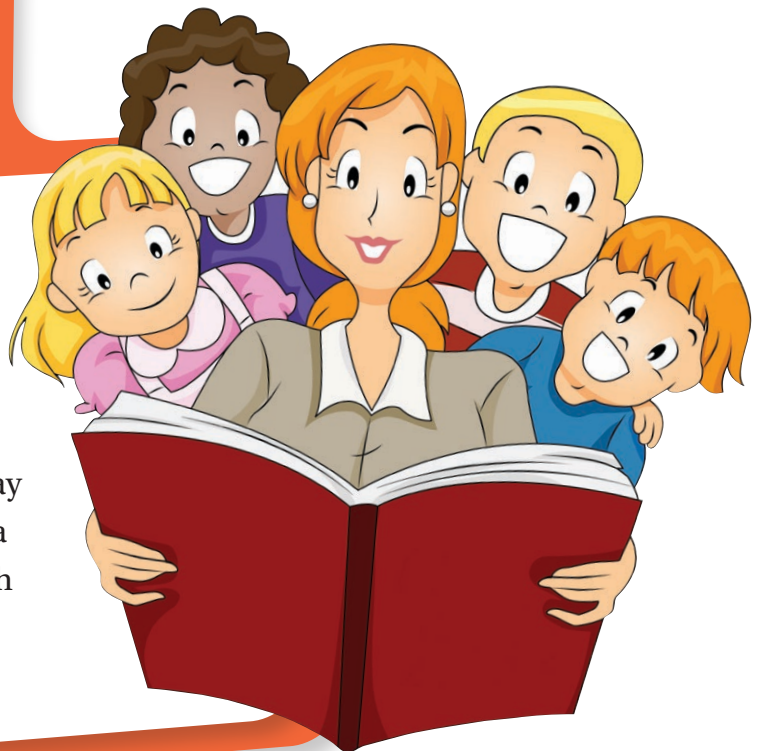
Before the story starts, pick specific words within the story and assign actions to them for the children to do. For example, in 2 Samuel 6, when King David celebrates bringing the Ark into Jerusalem, you might tell the children, “When I read the word *dance*, get up and dance, and when I read the word *rejoice*, yell the word ‘hooray!’”

## Prop Box

Collect a box of Bible-time props. Things like towels and ties work for making headdresses. Old adult-sized shirts can be cut down to make tunics. Let your class use the props to help you tell the story or act it out as a review. You can also use the props yourself as you tell the story, perhaps putting on a robe or headdress and pretending to be the main character.

## Creative Retelling

After you read the story, have the children retell the story in their own way. They could simply tell you the story in their own words. You could have them act out the story the way they remember it. Perhaps they could draw a picture of their favorite part of the story. With older children, have them pretend that they are in the story and ask them how they felt when Jesus healed or fed them.



# Jump into ... The Bible with Elementary Students

Adapt these activities for your elementary students. Consider sending the ideas home for families to use together.

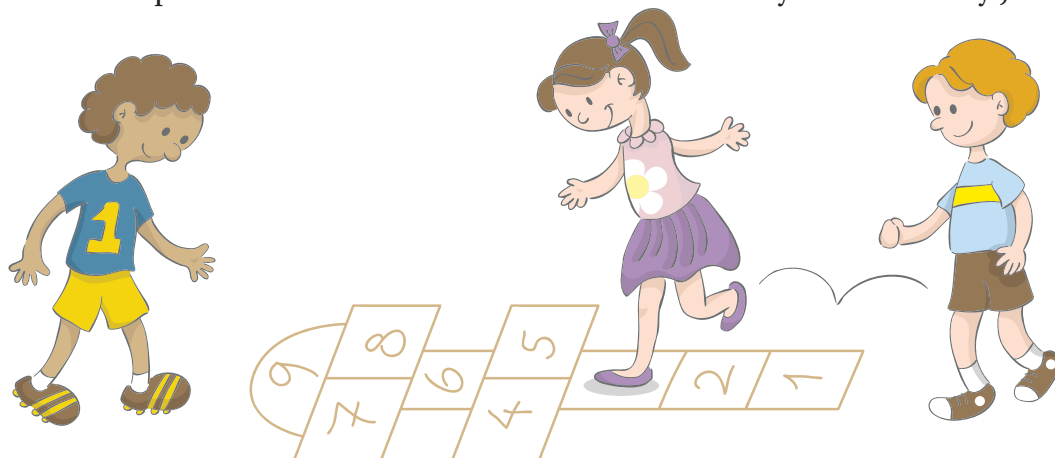
Elementary children are at a great age for learning the books of the Bible. Their reading skills have advanced to the point where they are able to read parts of God's Word on their own. Letting them

find Bible passages also helps get them into the Bible so that they can feel that the Bible is for them too. Use these activities to help your student jump into learning the books of the Bible.

## Hop Scotch Game

Use masking tape to mark off a 66-block hopscotch game in a church hallway. Have the class chant the names of the books aloud as they jump down the hall. For younger children, do a 39-block Old Testament game, then another time, a 27-block New Testament game. Or use different colors of tape for the Old Testament and the New

Testament. After your class has learned the books of the Bible, have a fun family day. Use sidewalk chalk to make a giant hopscotch on the sidewalk in front of the church. Invite parents to play Books of the Bible Hopscotch after church or Sunday school. How far can they go? (Have a camera handy for this activity!)



### You will need:

- » Masking tape
- » Sidewalk chalk (optional)

## Tips for Helping Your Students Learn the Books of the Bible

» Use a song tune to help children learn the books of the Bible. A familiar tune for the books of the Old Testament is the Irish folk song "Michael Finnegan." There are also several different songs that can be found on YouTube.

» Teach in small bites! Your class can learn the books of the Bible in eight sessions (with LOTS of repetition!) by learning just seven or eight books at a time. Divide the books of the Bible into groups of eight. Add a group a week to what they have learned.

# YOUTH STYLE!

## Bible Game

**Plan a Bible game day as a fun way of getting into the Bible with your youth.** You'll not only teach the Bible, but you will also create conversations and theological study. Think of a favorite board game that your youth talks about playing. Then challenge them to work in groups to create a Bible version of the game. If you have just finished a particular study, all the game questions could somehow relate to the topic. Using games in this way gets teens into the Bible, as well as giving them a chance to show what they have learned. It also gives youth a chance to talk about God's Word in a fun and non-threatening environment. In some cases, a Bible edition may exist for a popular game.

**Here's a sample idea** based on the popular game Apples to Apples®. You will need markers, Bibles, yellow index cards, and green index cards. Take one week to create the cards and another week to play the game.

Divide your teens into four groups. Ask one group to write adjectives, based on a specific topic like the miracles of Jesus, on the green cards. There should be one adjective on each card. The other three groups should write down nouns or verbs about the topic on yellow cards. Have them put Bible references on each card in case there is a challenge or discussion.

To play the game, choose one person to be the judge. The judge selects a green card and deals seven yellow cards to the players. Players select the best card from their hands to match the word on the card selected by the judge. The judge then selects the yellow card he or she thinks matches the best and awards the green card to that player. Play continues in this manner, with players taking turns being the judge and drawing a new yellow card after each turn until someone collects five green cards.



# TEACHER'S DEVOTIONAL

## Gnarled Stumps and Embedded Rocks—A Lenten Devotion

Lent is the part of the Church year for thoughtful reflection on and preparation for how we as Christians share in the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The word *Lent* is Germanic in origin and means the “season of spring.” Lent takes place at the time when farmers in the northern hemisphere traditionally “walk their field” and prepare the ground for spring seed. They might have to pick rocks from the soil or pull out tree stumps. Take a look at the box filled with dirt, twigs, and rocks. Think of this box as your own field, full of gnarled stumps and embedded rocks. *How might the twigs and rocks prevent plants from growing well?*

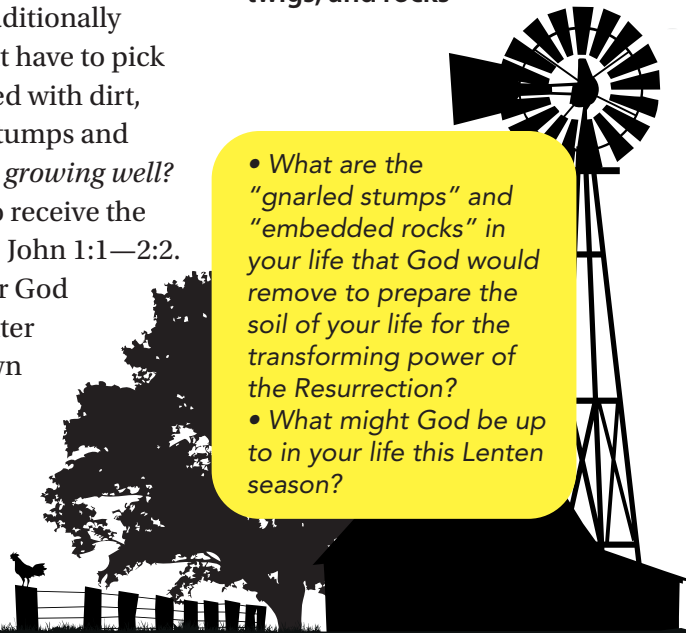
Lent is a time for us to allow God to prepare the soil of our lives to receive the profound power of the Cross and Resurrection. Read Psalm 51 and 1 John 1:1—2:2.

May this Lenten season be a time of rich preparation for whatever God does in and through you. As you encourage your students to encounter the Bible this quarter, spend time encountering the Bible on your own throughout your Lenten journey.

### YOU WILL NEED:

- Bible
- Box filled with dirt, twigs, and rocks

- What are the “gnarled stumps” and “embedded rocks” in your life that God would remove to prepare the soil of your life for the transforming power of the Resurrection?
- What might God be up to in your life this Lenten season?



## FAMILY ACTIVITY

### Learning to Rest

### YOU WILL NEED:

- Bible or Bible storybook
- Kitchen timer



Imagine you are on a long road trip and you haven't stopped for hours. How does it feel to find a rest area and pull off the road for a little bit?

In Old Testament times, the Israelites had to stop working so they could rest. They trusted that God would provide what they needed for that day. For them, keeping the Sabbath showed complete dependence on God. And it was a visual statement to those around them that the source of the fulfillment of their daily needs was God.

Our lives today are crowded with jobs, school functions, church activities, community activities, family commitments—it's like being on a long road trip! And those “Rest Area Ahead” signs are hard to find. We need to take the time and carve out rest times for our families. When we rest, just like the Israelites, we are showing dependence on God. We trust Him with what we are taking time away from and saying, “My job, soccer game, etc., doesn't belong to me. It belongs to God.”

During Lent, take five to ten minutes each week as a family to rest in God. Read through a Bible story or passage together (perhaps the reading from worship the previous Sunday). Then divide up around the house to find a quiet place for each person. Without music or other distractions, encourage each family member to rest from everything happening in life and think on God and what He has revealed in His Word. (You will have to adjust the time and place depending on the various ages in your family. With young children, it may work best to reflect together rather than separately.)

Being open to how God is moving in our lives helps remind us that we are accepted, received, known, and loved by God.



# Threads in the **ROYAL ROBE**

Scripture reveals to us who God is, what He requires of us, and how He shows His love to us in mighty saving acts of grace. We can never begin to know all there is to know of Him, but our gracious God is able to show us enough of Him in order to have life, health, and peace.

Through the written Word of God, the Holy Spirit teaches us all we need to know of the triune God. We learn what He desires to make known to us.

The Bible does not teach us in neat theological categories. Rather, God makes Himself known through accounts of His work in the lives of real people, prophecies and prayers, doctrinal teaching, and wise sayings.

When we follow all these threads of truth, we see a pattern emerging—a royal robe woven from the gathered truths of Scripture adorns our King and displays His love.

To see God more clearly, we express what we learn from Scripture in a coherent way, known as the essentials of faith. The Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed both express the essentials of faith.

The great Reformation confessions of faith further laid out the teaching of Scripture in a

systematic way, weaving together the Golden Threads of Scripture, bringing forth the royal robe that glorifies Jesus, our King. By studying them, we grow in our understanding of God. Such knowledge leads us to put on the robe of Christ by faith. This means that we take our place in union with Him, growing in love and obedience by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The essentials of faith are not all Scripture has to say about God, but they represent the Golden Threads around which the whole royal robe is woven. Under the heading of "Teacher Devotionals," every Bible lesson in this curriculum is keyed to the Golden Threads it expresses. The Stray Threads section picks up additional ideas or notes of the ways in which the Golden Threads may get distorted.

Believers in the Reformed tradition are a people who celebrate that God can be known because He has graciously made Himself known. A crucial part of our faithfulness is learning and studying the essentials that have been revealed. So, we offer these in hopes of enriching every Bible lesson, enabling you as a teacher to trace the threads of Christ's Royal Robe in the teachings of Scripture.

# 1.

## **ESSENTIAL NUMBER ONE: The One True God Is the Triune God of Grace—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—Whom Alone We Must Worship and Serve**

In the Old Testament, we learn that the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is the Creator of the entire world and the constant redeemer through the mighty acts of the people of Israel. In the New Testament, we see that the LORD, Israel's God, actually is the triune God, who reveals Himself to be the eternal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He has entered into covenant faithfulness with His people and will not leave us or forsake us.

# 2.

## **ESSENTIAL NUMBER TWO: The Eternal Son of God Came to Us as a Human Being in Jesus Christ**

In the fullness of time, God the Son took up our humanity as He came to us as Jesus, the man from Nazareth. Jesus is both fully God and fully human. He is all that God has to say to us, in word and deed, about who He is and how He loves us. And Jesus is all we have to say to God, as the one man who lived a life of perfect obedience to Him, on our behalf. In Jesus' relationship with His Father, and in His promise of the Holy Spirit to dwell in us, we come to know that the one God is triune: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

# 3.

## **ESSENTIAL NUMBER THREE: Holy Scripture Is the Word of God Written, Through Which, In the Power of the Holy Spirit, We Truly Meet the Triune God**

One of the great achievements of the Reformation was the recovery of Scripture as our sole authoritative source for knowledge of God and its return to the ordinary people of God. The traditions of the Church could be helpful in interpreting the Bible, but must always remain beneath the written Word of God. The Reformers affirmed at the same time that what needs to be known about God from Scriptures can be known by ordinary people who engage in a plain reading of the Bible. The Bible is clear enough in its essential teaching for all who read with prayerful reliance on the Holy Spirit to speak through the Word.

# 4.

## **ESSENTIAL NUMBER FOUR: The Triune God Is Sovereign Over All**

Our religion is not a human invention. Nor is it subject to human whims for change and supposed corrections. We do not have the freedom to decide who we would like the Lord to be. God is, and He has made Himself known to us in, Jesus Christ and the Scriptures. While what we may know of the triune God is true and reliable, we always recognize that we never know all there is to know about Him. The Lord God is high and holy, completely other, beyond our grasp and control, and splendid in His glory. God is moving history toward its appointed end. The triune God of grace is in control. He reigns. He alone is Judge. He alone is worthy of our praise. We never have dominion over Him. God alone reigns.

# 5.

## **ESSENTIAL NUMBER FIVE: Humanity Has Fallen Into Sin**

The Scriptures teach us that, although God created us as good, through our own willful choices humanity sinned against Him. The sin of our first parents rocked and wracked the world with terrible consequences. Now, by nature, we are prone to suppress the truth and to choose that which is against our God and our neighbors again and again. There is nothing we do in this world that is not without the taint of our sin. We are helplessly lost in our sin. This means that our hope of getting to the Father on our own is dead. In realizing this hope is dead, we begin the process of crying out in repentance and faith for the righteousness and goodness that can only come from the Lord Himself. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, came to us as a man and enacted perfect obedience, free from sin, on our behalf.





# 6.

## **ESSENTIAL NUMBER SIX: We Are Made Right with God by Grace Alone Through Faith Alone**

Our salvation from our sins and our sinfulness is all from Christ Jesus. We can never earn our way into God's favor, whether by our good works, zealous worship, or many prayers. The Father forgives our sins by the work of Jesus Christ alone. Christ's death alone takes away the guilt of our sin. Christ's faith and obedience alone, the living sign of His covenant faithfulness, comprise our reconciliation with God. He gives us Christ's righteousness. Our record before God is replaced with Jesus' record! When this happens, we believe in who Christ Jesus is and what He has accomplished. We confess that He is our Lord and Savior. But even this belief and confession is a gift of God, the result of the Holy Spirit's work inside us. Salvation is all God. We simply rest in what He has done for us.

# 7.

## **ESSENTIAL NUMBER SEVEN: Election: God Chose Us to Be His Children and Servants**

God chose us to believe in Him that we might spend the rest of our lives serving Him and telling others about Jesus. The essential teaching of election is the awareness that we do not make our way to the Father; He has come all the way down to where we are to claim us. We are elected then, not to a life of ease but to one of service. Those whom He calls, He sends to bring His message to a lost world. If we know Him, it is because He chose us. If He chose us, He sends us to tell others, "Believe the Good News and discover your chosenness!"

# 8.

## **ESSENTIAL NUMBER EIGHT: The Holy Spirit Makes Us More and More Like Jesus**

Sanctification means "to make holy," and it refers to the work of the Holy Spirit to form Christ in us. For we not only receive a new record of righteousness in

Christ, we receive a new nature. God places His own Spirit within us and begins a wonderful series of benefits:

- ▶ The Holy Spirit unites us to Jesus Christ so that all that belongs to Him comes to belong to us (John 16:14-15).
- ▶ The Holy Spirit comes to dwell inside us, fashioning us more and more in the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29).
- ▶ The Holy Spirit opens our hearts and minds to the Scriptures so that we might be transformed by hearing the Word (John 14:26).
- ▶ The Holy Spirit prays within us, crying out to the Father for us and through us (Gal. 4:6).
- ▶ The Holy Spirit assures us that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16), and His presence is the guarantee of our salvation (Eph. 1:13).
- ▶ The Holy Spirit gives us the power to be faithful witnesses to Christ (Acts 1:8) and enables us to do the ministry and works of Jesus (see Matt. 10:1 and John 14:12).

Of course, the old, sinful nature still remains in us. Thus, the new and the old are in conflict. Christian growth involves a hard struggle. We can never do it on our own. We live in constant need of "the sanctifying work of the Spirit" (1 Pet. 1:2). The person of the Holy Spirit then moves us to live in obedience and empowers us to keep going even after we fail or when the way is difficult. His work will continue until we meet Jesus in Heaven at last.

# 9.

## **ESSENTIAL NUMBER NINE: A Life of Obedience**

The people of God, Christ's Church, bring His Word and His love to a broken world. We are in the world, even though we do not belong to this world (John 17:16). We serve the world even though we are aliens and strangers here, passing through on our way to our heavenly homeland. Psalm 84 notes that those who "have set their hearts in pilgrimage" to the city of God cause the dry desert lands to become a place of springs as they pass through. With the Holy Spirit prompting us and empowering us, the grace of Jesus cleansing us, and the love of the Father beckoning us, we both gather for worship and move out in service to God. Even though the Church does not belong to the world, it strives to love the world as Christ did.