

GRACE IN ACTION

Discussion Guide: Practice 1

Pastoral Practice, Conscience, and Congregational Freedom

How do you usually describe God? What images do you use to try to understand who God is and what God is like?

What is your congregation or faith community known for? If someone walked around the neighborhood and asked someone what they've heard about your church, what might they say? What are some of the ways that your congregation is involved in the community around it (e.g. food pantries, schools, ecumenical organizations, etc.)?

What does your congregation do to make people feel welcome? How does a visitor get connected to some of the different ministries that are ongoing? What does hospitality look like at your church?

When you have questions about matters of faith or something you've read in scripture, who do you go to? What are some of the things about faith that are difficult to talk about? What do you do when you disagree with something someone has done or said at church?

Follow-up Actions

1. The Book of Acts is full of stories about what believers were doing to try to come together as a community of faith after Jesus was no longer with them. They had questions, they were worried about the future, and they had to trust that God had not abandoned them. Throughout Acts you'll find the Holy Spirit at work in many different ways. **Read through the Book of Acts** and try to resonate with some of the rituals, relationships, and routines that showed up in the early Christian communities.
2. **Reach out to a friend who attends a different church.** Ask questions about what they do and what their values are. Share some of the traditions of your own congregation. Sometimes it helps to talk to someone about what we believe, what matters most to us, and why we've chosen to worship in a certain congregation. Perhaps we'll feel more grounded in our community of faith if we take some time to articulate our experiences.

Resources

What is an RIC congregation?: <https://www.reconcilingworks.org/>

Bible studies: “Love & Sexuality,” “Introduction to What the Bible Is/Is Not,” and other topics: <https://scsynod.com/news/south-carolina-synod-receiving-curriculum-gift-for-2024-2025/>

ELCA social statements on “Human Sexuality,” “Civic Life,” “Church in Society,” and other topics: <https://www.elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-statements>