



Co-Creating Heaven on Earth

A regional project sponsored by
Bread of Life

www.breadoflife.org

A Resource Packet for Congregations

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|-------------|---|
| Pages 1-2 | The Invitation |
| Page 3 | Talking Points for Leaders |
| Pages 4-5 | Texts from the Traditions |
| Pages 6-12 | Steps for Engaging Personal Story &
Scripture; Process Notes; Special Situations |
| Pages 13-17 | Creative Expression: How & What |
| Pages 18-20 | Connecting Creative Expression & Prayer |
| Pages 21-22 | Resource Sheet |
| Pages 23-28 | Sermon Starters |

Bread of Life is an educational public benefit non-profit #20-4538532 which has been serving northern California and beyond since 1997. We depend on your voluntary contributions for our support. Your gifts are fully tax deductible. THANK YOU!

The Bread of Life Mission

The mission of Bread of Life is *cultivating practices that transform lives*, helping individuals and organizations live from their deepest values and sense of a common good. Our emphasis on Spirit is broad and inclusive. The founders come from and practice in their own Christian traditions, a rooting which opens to and honors the weaving of the Spirit through diverse traditions. We actively encourage engagement across faith perspectives for mutual learning.

We offer a safe place, supportive companionship, and a variety of practices and pathways that include the integration of creative arts as a spiritual practice. A core value is treating one other as people of sacred worth and value while celebrating the diversity of ways God meets us each for the good of all. These attitudes and practices then deepen into choice-making that benefits both the person and society.

Benefits of noticing, developing and tending one's spiritual resources include:

- ❖ A sense of purpose that enables focus and investment to happen.
- ❖ Resilience in meeting life's difficulties in a way that becomes life-giving.
- ❖ The capacity to engage life with creativity, energy, hope and joy.
- ❖ A growing capability to connect to and offer one's authentic gift in the world.
- ❖ The moral will to reach across human barriers that separate and divide.

A Brief History

Bread of Life began in Davis in 1997 with a focus on bringing the 'sacred story' of every person and organization into view as a foundation for freer and fuller participation in the common good. Our training programs in spiritual direction and Dynamic Dialogue (among others) are nationally recognized and draw participants from across the country.

As an expression of our mission we opened our Spirit in the Arts program in 2004 which spun off into the separate non-profit *The Creative Edge* in 2015. This *Co-Creating Heaven on Earth* packet was a collaboration joining Martin Rutte's vision with ours as an arts-based center for transformational expression. Our goal then and now was to provide a common table where the sacred in each person's life is discovered and celebrated and becomes a source of life and encouragement for the benefit of the world we share.

Co-Creating Heaven on Earth: An Invitation

On Monday April 16, 2007 Bread of Life initiated our 3 month project, *Creating Heaven on Earth*, which ends with a public “Second Saturday” art show on Saturday, July 14.

You are invited to participate with your congregation via 6 simple and accessible steps (see next page) for exploring your local vision of ‘heaven on earth’ over the next 3 months. These steps will give powerful public witness to what you are already doing in the world and will grow awareness of the invitation of God for your communal life and mission today.

As a **spiritual formation center** with an **open art studio space**, we see real potential for this project to **assist congregations in their own spiritual formation** as a body, and we’d love to partner with you in this effort. In April we offered a **complimentary resource packet** to congregational leaders which we now extend to you along with the invitation to join in this regional effort.

The accompanying materials include talking points for presenting the project, the basic steps for engaging a group in accessing their experience of and vision for ‘Heaven on Earth,’ sermon starters, ideas for creative expression, and a resource sheet. If you are interested in a PowerPoint presentation, please contact Martin Rutte through his website for more information.

MORE ABOUT MARTIN RUTTE, THE PROJECT INITIATOR

Martin Rutte is the president of Livelihood, a management consulting firm in Santa Fe, NM, where he explores the deeper meaning of work and its contribution to society. Rutte’s pioneering work on spirituality in the workplace was featured on the ABC-TV special *Creativity: Touching the Divine*, in which he addressed the World Bank. Visit his website, www.projectheavenonearth.com.



WHY THIS THEME?

A Jewish man of deep spirit, Martin has a passion for lifting up ‘heaven on earth’ as a unifying thread-in-common across religious traditions of the world. He believes there is genuine power in bringing into focus the deep yearnings of the human heart for our vision of the kind of world we long for... a world with life, beauty, harmony, right relationship or whatever passion is planted in the particular soul of a person. Noticing and collaborating with the Spirit’s activity in the world gives us, as global citizens, strength, hope, and creative perspective for engaging and transforming the world’s problems.

SIMPLE STEPS FOR CONGREGATIONAL PARTICIPATION IN PROJECT *HEAVEN ON EARTH*



1. **Use the Talking Points to present the concept to your leadership group.**
2. **Commit to preaching a sermon on the topic in the next 3 months.** Sermon starters are part of the resource packet.
3. **Put information from the resource packet as well as what emerges in the process into your weekly bulletins, monthly newsletters, and on your website** to encourage Bible study groups, men's and women's groups, youth groups, Sunday School classes, etc. to participate.
4. **Schedule time, space, and supplies to engage participants in the components for reflection, creative expression, sustainable action, and public witness.**
5. **Commit to engage regional public witness via:**
 - ❖ Posting creative expressions of 'heaven on earth' (or having other venues for sharing) in your church or neighborhood
 - ❖ Participation in the July 14 regional Spirit in the Arts celebration

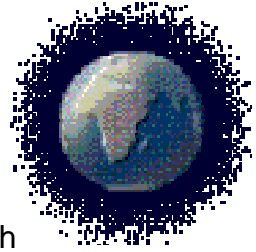
Call Bread of Life now at (916) 648-1803
for more information.

Project Heaven on Earth **TALKING POINTS**

Why would we want to engage this project?

1. **There is real and powerful story growing among us that is God’s own invitation and initiative – and which this project lifts up to view.** The theme of *heaven on earth* is a thread-in-common across all faith traditions. (See following pages for some representative texts). Conscious participation *with* God and others as it emerges provides an authentic common ground for healing, tending, and enjoying our precious world together.
2. **The opening question in this project, “When have you experienced heaven on earth ?” evokes a very different focus than the familiar public emphasis on problems, enmity, and divisions.** A problem focus – and the resulting heroic call to action - often has the unintended effect of weighing down the human heart and sapping creative response. Noticing instead how each of us has already been met by goodness gives a basis for hope, a foundation for envisioning the next step, and strengthens the will to engage life-giving service.
3. **The process is simple to engage with the powerful effect of helping people access their personal story and relate it to The Story of the activity of God in our world.** Engaged in groups, it helps to drop the level of awareness beneath the mundane to the sacred. As individuals tell their story, the pace slows and voices quiet while listening becomes attentive. The Spirit is attractive, and the quality of presence in the room reflects the group experience of ‘holy ground.’ This experience of slowing down to notice what is already true is the essential first step in becoming more available to one’s particular calling or corporate mission.
4. **The process connects the inward spiritual journey to outward expression or action.** Engaging in the *sustainable* work of justice grows the spiritual capacity and perceptions of individuals and groups and makes a difference in the world. After reflection on where/when/how God has already given the individual person or community a taste of *heaven on earth* and the resulting vision of what is possible, the follow up question is simply ‘*What small next step in your power are you willing to take to move this vision forward?*’ The intention, personally stated and spoken aloud in one’s community of faith, already begins to shape awareness and action. An opportunity to come back together and share what is emerging from one’s actions (and reactions), helps the community deepen spiritually, meet resistances that naturally arise, and become more mature partners in the ongoing work of *heavening earth*.
5. **Goodness is attractive and meant to be shared as it draws others to life, hope, and conscious participation in work of grace among us.** Opportunity to see the good radiating out is a great encouragement and public witness like “the city on the hill that cannot be hid,” and empowers ongoing co-creation with God and others. It is the necessary antidote to the self-absorption that comes from despair, discouragement and sense of futility.

Heaven on Earth



The following quotes from several of the world's major faith traditions on the theme *Heaven on Earth* have been collected by Martin Rutte. The traditions are listed alphabetically.

Buddhist

...the Pure Land is the ultimate and absolute reality, and that is everywhere, so that we may be identified with it right here where we are.”

Ryoyo Shogei, Buddhist monk-scholar, 1385

“While everyone has a responsibility to help the world, we can create additional chaos if we try to impose our ideas or our help upon others. Many people have theories about what the world needs. Some people think that the world needs communism; some people think that the world needs democracy; some people think that technology will save the world; some people think that technology will destroy the world. The Shambhala teachings are not based on converting the world to another theory. The premise of Shambhala vision is that, in order to establish an enlightened society for others, we need to discover what inherently we have to offer the world. So, to begin with, we should make an effort to examine our own experience, in order to see what it contains that is of value in helping ourselves and others to uplift their existence.”

Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche

Christian

As you go, proclaim, 'The kingdom of heaven is near!'
Jesus, Matthew 10:7

“Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

Luke 11:2

“The Kingdom of God is not to be found in some other world beyond, but in the midst of this world...God wants us to honor Him in our fellow man — and nowhere else.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“It’s all right to talk about heaven. I talk about it because I believe firmly in immortality. But you’ve got to talk about the earth.... It’s even all right to talk about the new Jerusalem. But one day we must begin to talk about the new Chicago, the new Atlanta, the new New York, the new America.”

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr

Hindu

Only spiritual consciousness – realization of God’s presence in oneself and in every other living being – can save the world. I see no chance for peace without it. Begin with yourself. There is no time to waste. It is your duty to do your part to bring God’s kingdom on Earth.

Paramahansa Yogananda, Hindu

“I do not ask for temporal power, nor do I ask to go to heaven, nor even to attain nirvana. What I ask for is that I may be able to relieve the pain of those who are in pain.” To which Gandhi adds: “The prayer, you will note, is not exclusive. It is not restricted to one’s own caste or community. It is all-inclusive. It comprehends the whole of humanity. Its realization would thus mean the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.”

(This quote of Gandhi begins with a shloka, a morning prayer)

Indigenous

"[The leaders of the Ghost Dance] told people they could dance a new world into being. The dancers believed that by their actions they were bringing about a happy hunting ground for the living, right down here."

Lame Deer

"Once you feel what it means to live in a state of bliss, you will love it. You will know that Heaven on Earth is truth—that Heaven truly exists. This way of life is possible and it's in your hands. Moses called it the Promised Land, Buddha called it Nirvana, Jesus called it Heaven, and the Toltecs call it a New Dream."

Don Miguel Ruiz
The Four Agreements

At this point in human history, we have the opportunity to literally bring Heaven to Earth... to pick up the profound work of our Earthly ancestors and move responsibly into...action...

Brooke Medicine Eagle
The Last Ghost Dance

Jewish

"The Golden Age of Humanity is not in the past, but in the future (Isaiah II and XI); and all the children of men are destined to help in the establishment of that Kingdom of God on earth."

The Pentateuch and Haftorahs,
Hebrew Text English Translation and Commentary,
Edited by Dr. J. H. Hertz, C.H.,
Late Chief Rabbi of the British Empire 2nd Ed.

"In the beginning, a person develops a feeling of love and a desire to impart and fill the needs of his friends and family. As he develops further, this trait of imparting increases within him to include the others in his city or his nation. This continues until he develops a love for all [human]kind."

Entrance to the Zohar

Hope imagines the Real.

Martin Buber

Muslim

"A man's true wealth is the good he does in the world."

The Prophet Mohammed (PBUH)

We Muslims believe we need to live our earthly life in a Heavenly way. To create heaven on earth is obligatory in Islam, it is ordered... We should contribute to creating all the features of Heaven here on earth...

Dr. Hassan Hathout
The Islamic Center of Southern California

"Let the beauty we love be what we do!"

Rumi



Project Heaven on Earth

THE BASIC ENGAGEMENT STEPS

1. Think of a time when you experienced 'heaven on earth.'
Describe it.
2. Imagine that you can have heaven on earth... then ask yourself,

What is heaven on earth for you?
3. What small, concrete step within your power can you take to move this vision forward in the next 24 hours? Commit to take that next step.
4. Finally, imagine the power of **collaborating with others in a public witness** to the Good that is already among us, inviting our response and participation – as individuals, faith communities, neighborhoods, businesses, and public institutions.

There are as many ways of creating heaven on earth as there are people. Out of our commitment to creative expression as a way to access and express the experience of God, Spirit in the Arts encourages participants to use some form of creative expression to flesh out the vision in step 2 and lift it up publicly in step 4.

For example, as your vision of heaven on earth takes shape, imagine expressing its essence in a way that is visible to others. Perhaps a swirl of color on a canvas, a poem, or a song gives voice to the vision and/or the action. Perhaps a dramatic re-enactment, a collage, a photographic exhibit or a weaving invites others in to 'taste and see' your glimpse of the possible and let's others see what happens concretely as you experiment with taking a small step to make your vision a reality.

Please see the accompanying Resource Sheet in this packet for more information about how you can participate regionally in a Second Saturday art festival as part of your public witness.

Project Heaven on Earth

PROCESS NOTES

General Thoughts

Touching the personal experience of *heaven on earth* gives access to one's sacred core. It is where the Desire of God indwells and meets our own deepest desire, for the unique gifting and contribution of each person in the world. To consciously enter this experience is re-touch joy and to know vulnerability. Even in the most loving circumstances, it is a common human experience to resist, hide from, and 'forget' what we most deeply long for, because connecting with it calls us beyond the comfort zones of the familiar into "something More." To touch the place of heaven is to be brushed by one's deeper calling or mission, an awareness that evokes both anticipation and alarm.

Spiritual teachers from across the traditions reference the human conundrum of wanting to be transformed without having to change. Transformation is a 'death' of how we've known ourselves and so the resistances to it are natural and reflexive. The spiritual journey is typically a long, slow committed process in which the capacity and willingness to tolerate change gradually expands. Resistance is a normal part of spiritual growth for both individuals and groups, and its presence is a sign something important is happening. Resistance protects something, usually the status quo. Simply noticing it and naming its presence when it appears while keeping the focus on the invitation is the most appropriate approach for the work engaged in Project Heaven on Earth.

The process notes on the following pages are based on spiritual formation practices to help people engage *Project Heaven on Earth* in a way that will hopefully meet them where they are and help them grow their capacity for engagement. One of the basic rubrics we use at Bread of Life is that it is never appropriate to do spiritual violence to someone in the name of spiritual growth. Simply stated, we can never know with certainty the work of God in a person, so we offer opportunity and supportive structures but do not force. There must always be freedom for a person to say "I don't want to do this" or "That's as far as I can go for now."

The first section gives general principles and the second section talks about special circumstances. This is only a beginning, and we welcome your experiences and feedback. Should you want further assistance, we do have experienced spiritual directors on our staff that would be happy to consult with you.

Sandra Lommasson

Process and Procedures

The first two steps for engagement are the entry into the individual's sacred story.

Contemplative listening-- or listening to receive the essence of the experience-- is the mode that allows this essential piece to unfold. It is not listening to respond with "I had the same experience!" or listening to analyze. The only questions allowed are those that are open ended or amplify the experience: "*Is there anything else that comes to mind as you remember that experience?*" Encourage 'fleshing out' the story with details that make it concrete. Lingering with and amplifying the experience gives access to the 'more' of the Spirit which hovers within such experiences, waiting to be noticed.

1. Think of a time when you experienced 'heaven on earth.' Describe it.

Be sure to allow time for persons to connect with, remember, and savor the experience themselves before attempting to describe it to another. These experiences touch moments when ordinary time (chronos) shimmers with the Presence of the Holy (kairos) and there is always more to be discovered. Some silence with the encouragement to journal if someone desires is always appropriate. Depending on the group size you might then invite dyad sharing of 5 to 10 minutes per person with a signal between so they know when to change roles. Alternately, if the group is small enough you can invite open sharing in the whole group. What is important is that every person have opportunity to both share their experience and to hear the experience of others.

2. Imagine that you can have heaven on earth... then ask yourself, "What is heaven on earth for me?"

This second round is an invitation to go more deeply to the heart of the particular experience and notice the qualities or characteristics that make it important, life-giving, and of lasting value. This is where the personal or corporate vision begins to take shape. The assumption is that however the person experiences 'heaven on earth' resonates with who they are and how God has uniquely gifted them for participating in the work of God on earth. What emerges here will be different for each individual. That's part of the richness. Giving voice to these experiences and having them witnessed by another enables what is moving to take deeper root in conscious awareness

Again, give time and space for personal reflection followed by sharing in some form that fits your group size. Having simple art media available for 'praying with hands' as the individuals reflect on this question can open the awareness even further.

NOTE: You might choose at this point to invite the whole group to reflect on what it has been like to give and receive these stories. Learning to recognize and linger with holy moments is part of what grows our capacity for fuller relationship with God and one another. It may also be appropriate to ask what, if anything, participants are noticing (inside or outside) as they listen across the group. Are there patterns, commonalities, themes, wonderings etc? Just notice and receive them together. It may point to something the Spirit is moving in the congregation.

3. What small, concrete step within your power can you take to move this vision forward? Commit to take that next step.

Once articulating the personal vision has begun, it is important to ground the vision in sustainable action. Otherwise it slips away into mere memory; Spirit wants to incarnate. 'Putting legs on' our prayers, values and vision grows our hearts and opens our perspective even more fully. In the gracious ways of God this is how we learn and grow and how healing happens. This is where the folk wisdom emerges that "We'll never think our way into better acting; we have to act our way into better thinking." Steve Wirth (Centre for Contemplative Dialogue) says that the work of justice is 'optimally incomplete' meaning it's not all or nothing. What is important is to make our particular contribution in the small, sustainable, incremental way that is part of the real work of the Spirit among us.



Invite the group into reflective silence again (some people reflect best while walking or moving) and ask each person to playfully imagine several small steps *in their power* to take to move their vision forward. Identify the one that particularly beckons now and write it down on an index card to keep in view in the coming weeks. Encourage small group sharing so that others in the congregation know and can pray for each person's intention. You may also want to devise a ritual sharing of intentions in the whole group and collect or scribe what is emerging for a follow-up gathering when people can report back what has happened.

NOTE: *This is the place where resistance manifests and can be worked with most effectively. Some will 'forget' their intention, some will begin and then slip away, some will have transformative experiences. All these rhythms and seasons are part of us, but coming together to share the truth, whatever it is, and to hear what IS emerging is liberating and encouraging. You might look for other forums and opportunities for bringing this forward in your congregation as well.*

A Follow-up Activity:

Relating Personal Story to Scripture

This activity is best done in a small group which has already engaged the basic process. In a group that meets regularly this theme can extend for as long as it is fruitful.

1. **Think of a scripture that most expresses ‘heaven on earth’ to you today. Find it and read it aloud in your group.** (Members of one group recently chose passages from Psalm 8; “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you;” “Do not worry about your life...” (Luke 12:22-24); and several others.)
2. Invite the group members into a period of silence asking each one to reflect on their passage noticing any **images, memories, or felt senses that arise about how it speaks to heaven on earth here and now.** Invite sharing around the circle.
3. Invite a third period of silence with the question, **“How does this passage speak into my life/our life today, inviting a concrete next step?”** Invite sharing around the circle, with the invitation to name a specific focus or intention for the coming week. Encourage folks to engage this as a living experiment rather than a do-or-die duty. Pray together for what emerges. (Subsequent meetings will include the opportunity to remember intentions and what we are learning about God/self/world as a result.)

SUBSEQUENT MEETINGS

Begin with a simple check-in asking “What have you learned about God, yourself and your connection to the world since we last met?”

The group at this point can take one scripture passage that emerged last time to pray with as a whole group in depth. A modified *lectio divina* process in which it is read in full several times is an effective way of entering the text. Continue each week with another scripture.

- ❖ The **first reading** is simply so that the whole group hears it aloud together.
- ❖ The **second reading** is slower, and more contemplative and the invitation is to notice the word or phrase which ‘shimmers’ or arrests attention and to sit in silence holding that word or phrase like a mantra. The leader can then invite each person to speak it aloud without explanation.
- ❖ The **third reading** is preceded with the invitation to notice any images, memories, felt senses, pieces of song, colors, etc. that arise. This opens the door to the deeper stirrings beneath analytic thought. After a period of silence, open the floor for each person to share what they notice.
- ❖ The **fourth and final reading** is preceded with the invitation to notice, “*How this passage speaks into my life/our life today? Does awareness of a concrete next step arise?*” After a period of silence each person is asked to bring forward what is evoked. Pray together for what emerges, and be sure to allow time for the focus/desire/ or intention for the coming week to be stated.

Special Situations

If you find yourself working with those who have been overwhelmed by change or who have needed significant 'armor' to survive, be aware that it can feel threatening to hope or to connect with deep desires. Some suggestions for engagement follow with the caveat that it is never appropriate to engage spiritual violence in the name of spiritual growth. Be invitational and give permission for individuals to proceed at their own pace.

- a. Be aware that there might be sub-cultures where the 'soft' in the metaphorical software that enables us to recognize *heaven on earth* is ridiculed or experienced as dangerous. (*If I let you know what matters, it might be used against me*). It doesn't mean the experience of 'heaven on earth' isn't there, but it may need to be protected and drawn out slowly as the person 'tests' your intentions. Knowing one's desire and experience makes a person vulnerable - and all the more so when it is brought out in public view - and that vulnerability may need protection.
- b. Even cynical comments can serve as pointers and can be engaged toward deeper possibilities. In general this sort of conversation is best engaged one to one rather than in a group which can add another whole layer of dynamics. Part of the goal here is making it safer to access and express foundational desire. Engaging the conversation with openness to what might be hidden can be a kind of seed-planting.

For example,

"When have you experienced heaven on earth?"

"When we jacked a car and were riding around getting blasted."

"So, what was good about that experience for you?"

"I dunno. It was just fun."

"What was fun part?"

"Just feeling free to do what we wanted to do."

"So there's something important for you about feeling free... I wonder if there's another time in your life you felt really free and everything felt just right - even if for a moment. Just notice what comes to mind, even if it seems small and silly. What can you tell me about that time?"

Now, imagine a small step that is in your power to take today that could make some part of that experience happen here and now. What might you do?

- c. Listen carefully and engage what comes with love. For people who have suffered a lot, this might take them back to memories of lost people, times, circumstances, which can be quite painful as well as bringing precious memories.

*What we're trying to evoke in this process is the **longing that draws life forward rather than the pining which moves focus backward** to an irretrievable time. It's easy to get sucked into the pain and loss, which might need attention in the person's life, but remember that this is not a therapeutic process. Some options: acknowledge the pain and invite a re-focus:*

Now imagine you could take that experience and make it a part of your day today - where would you be and what would you be doing?

In this example – and throughout the process – we are following a spiritual direction principle which is to focus on the movements of Spirit rather than the 'problem.' The assumption is that if we can connect with what is of God in whatever is going on (the trust that God is both everywhere and “everywhen”), that this is the small seed that can grow for fuller, freer life.



Helpful Art Ideas for "Project Heaven on Earth"

Ideas to consider when artists are doing self-directed projects:

* **While art is being created, offer no judgment, either positive or negative.**

When an art piece is being created, comments on the actual art can stop the artist's ability to work freely, whether the comments are positive (How beautiful!) or negative (Why would you make that?). If the comments are negative, or even neutral, the artist might get discouraged and stop, or engage in self-criticism. Although positive comments may make the artist feel good, he or she may not want to make any changes that might "ruin" the piece, and again, the free-flowing creative process can get disrupted. In addition, some artists get dependent on those viewing their work for feedback about the validity of the work, instead of trusting their own process of creation. If you feel the need to say something, ask how the artist feels about what is happening, or just encourage the person to keep exploring and working. Use phrases such as "I see you are really engaged in what you are creating.", "You seem to really be enjoying this process.", "What can you tell me about this creation?", or "Can you tell me the story behind this art?"

* **Encourage artists to express themselves in creative, personal ways.**

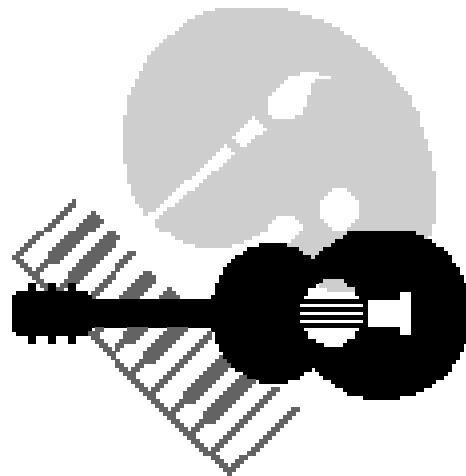
Many artists have been injured by experiences in the past when their creative efforts were minimized or criticized. Because of this, they may be hesitant to allow themselves the freedom to truly explore their creative visions. They may also have been trained that there are right and wrong ways to do art, and punishment happens if things are done wrong. To experience putting a deeply personal vision of heaven on earth into visual form, artists need to be actively encouraged to set aside those pre-conceived ideas and just follow their own instincts. We are all creative beings, even if our usual outlet for creativity isn't using art materials. When we create from a place of inner knowledge, we can do no wrong. Someone once said "Throw away your mental file box of what a mouth looks like, or how an animal should look, and simply allow the creation to be itself, in all it's messy, unstructured and one-of-a-kind glory!"

* **It's okay to express the 'dark' side of Heaven on Earth.**

Life isn't always easy, and there are times when creating uplifting, positive art is impossible. It is ok to give visual life to 'hell on earth' if that is what the artist needs to do. Both the 'positive heaven' and the 'negative hell' are parts of the whole. They cannot exist without each other. Sometimes we need to express the difficulty and anguish of life in order to find ways to create a better world.

Encourage artists to dialogue with their art as a first step towards heaven on earth.

Creative expression accesses the same place as our dreams. Dreams – and creative play - reveal what is getting ready to move into our conscious awareness and into the world. Even more, giving expression to a dream or vision of heaven on earth, and then sharing it with others, can be the first step to helping it happen. So, after the artists complete their art, encourage them to linger with their piece, noticing what attracts and surprises them in it. Do they get any sense of how it connects to a do-able next step which is in their power to take? Have them tell one person they trust about their vision and the step the artist will take. When they can, encourage the artist to take it. Then have the artists notice what difference it makes to their inner and outer lives. Then, encourage them to take another.



Suggested Simple Art Supplies

- ❖ White drawing paper of various sizes (8 1/2 x 11, 11 x 14, 18 x 24 are some possibilities)
- ❖ Heavy weight paper for painting
- ❖ Colored construction paper, variety of colors
- ❖ Scissors (adult and child sizes if appropriate / include left-handed scissors also)
- ❖ Decorative edge scissors
- ❖ Glue sticks
- ❖ Rubber cement
- ❖ White glue
- ❖ Scotch tape
- ❖ Colored drawing pencils
- ❖ Colored marking pens
- ❖ Glitter
- ❖ Crayons
- ❖ Magazines for collage
- ❖ Tissue paper, various colors
- ❖ Stencils
- ❖ Rubber stamps
- ❖ Paint: tempera (good for kids); acrylic (craft paint); water color sets
- ❖ Paint brushes (a selection of fine, medium and large-tipped brushes, if possible)
- ❖ Cups or jars for paint water
- ❖ Paper or plastic plates for paint
- ❖ Fabric scraps
- ❖ Fancy patterned paper sheets (like for scrap booking)
- ❖ Rulers
- ❖ Compass
- ❖ Ribbon and yarn
- ❖ Lace
- ❖ Shells, feathers, beads, sequins, leaves or anything else available

Simple Art Projects to Suggest

* **Collage and Assemblage**

Collage is an artistic composition of materials and objects pasted over a surface. (A limited surface like 8 1/2 x 11 sheet of paper or a paper plate gives an economy of scale that focuses the images into what is most essential, rather like a poem.) Most often it is done with pictures and words cut from magazines, but other objects and materials can be added (ribbon, lace & yarn, for instance). Assemblage is similar to collage, but often utilizes more three-dimensional objects, like shells, boxes, stones and fabric. Rather than looking for specific images to represent the artist's vision, encourage them to simply hold their vision in heart and mind and browse magazines, noticing what is attractive, even without understanding why. When the gathering of images and materials feels finished, the artists should play with arranging them, choosing what is most essential in the elements and using scissors to cut away unnecessary parts. Finally, use an adhesive like rubber cement to glue pieces in place. This is a good project for those who feel they "can't do art".

* **Realistic Drawing or Painting**

Many artists will automatically want to make realistic representations of their vision. Some will be completely comfortable with this, but others may feel they have no talent or experience. Encourage the artists not to worry about accuracy or skill. This is creative play they are doing, and everything created, no matter how simple or out-of-proportion, is a wonderful expression of their own unique vision. So, if the people drawn have extra large bodies or the trees are blue and the animals larger than the houses, it doesn't matter. It is OK if the images go in different directions, overlap in creative ways, or are one-sided. And remember, stick figures are perfectly acceptable creative expressions if that is what the artist wants to do.

* **Abstract Drawing or Painting**

Draw or paint abstract shapes and colors that evoke the feelings about what you are imagining. Abstract means the drawing doesn't have to look like something real. Abstract images can range from very abstract, such as colors swirled together without any shape to only slightly abstract, where images could be distorted or oddly presented. This style of art is a good way to get around any concerns about drawing realistic images. Anything goes in abstract art!

* **Rubber stamping or stenciling**

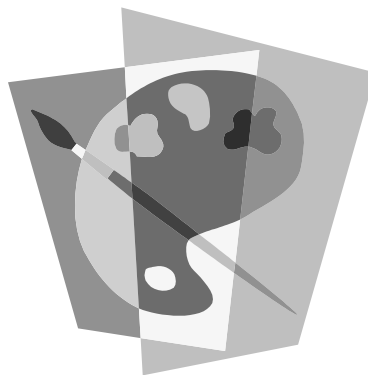
This easy technique is very good for people uncomfortable with drawing. Artists use rubber stamps to make designs and images. Use a fine-point paint brush and acrylic paints to put multiple colors on each stamp, being careful not to put too much paint on at once. Using paint instead of stamp pads means the artists can create very colorful images quickly and easily. Stencils can be used with paint or markers also. Stamped and stenciled designs can be combined with cut pictures, ribbons, etc. to make wonderful creations.

* **Found word poetry**

Another easy technique is making a poem with words found in magazines. Have the artists go through magazines and search for words or phrases that seem appropriate for their vision of heaven on earth. Cut them out. When there is a nice selection, start to put them together into a poem, song or story. Poems can be as short as one line, or as long as desired. Poetry doesn't require complete sentences. Poetry often eliminates extra words, only keeping the most important words (for instance, instead of having the phrase: "the bluebird sits on a branch and sings", you might condense the idea down to: "bluebird sings"). Let the words collected create the poem. If really desired, the artists can go back to the magazines to hunt for specific words to complete the poem. Participants can also cut individual letters to make specific words. After the poem is done, the artists can collect magazine photos that go with the poem if they desire, or draw, paint or stamp around the words.

* **Cutting, folding and pasting to create three-dimensional forms**

Paper can easily be cut, folded and manipulated into wonderful three-dimensional forms. Artists can color the paper first with other mediums, or use colored or printed paper. Paper with words or writing is also fun to use. The possibilities are abundant. Glue and tape can be used to build structural forms, or to make interesting layers.



Praying with Hands: Creating a Torn Paper ('Messy') Mandala

An Example of Connecting Creative Expression with Prayer

MATERIALS:

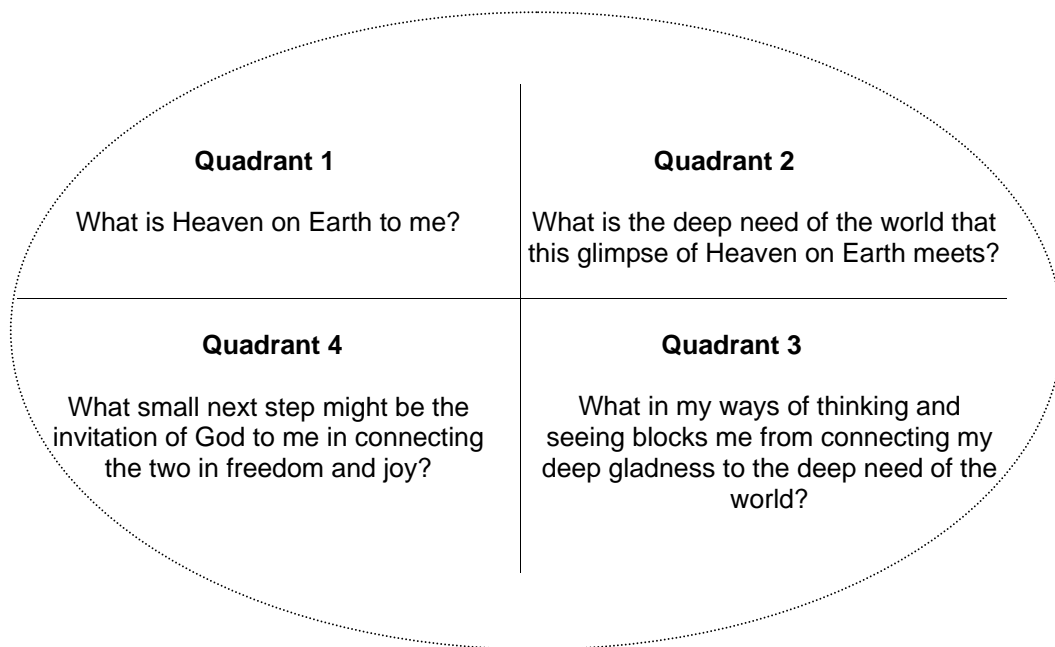
A large sheet of drawing paper (11 x 17 or larger) with a circle drawn in pencil in the center and divided into 4 quadrants. (The image above below is oval rather than circular for purposes of making the print large enough to read).

Tissue paper in lots of colors can be used to create a background or 3-D shapes. **Vano starch** in cups and **paintbrushes** affix the tissue paper to the mandala.

Magazines, catalogues, calendars, etc. with lots of pictures – National Geographic, news magazines, etc. Local libraries often sell old ones for a fraction of the original cost.

Rubber cement

Colored pencils or crayons



PROCESS:

This process begins *after* the initial remembering of a time when you have experienced Heaven on Earth. (See p. 8). Take one question/quadrant at a time until it is complete if you are working individually. In a group, allow 30 minutes **minimum** for each reflection period (45 – 60 minutes is better), and ask the group to **maintain silence** during each work session. Be sure to ask people who finish early to pray or journal with what has come (suggestions follow) rather than moving ahead to the next quadrant.

If you want to encourage group sharing:

With a group, you may choose to build in time between quadrants for dyad sharing, or you may want to wait until the whole mandala is finished. During the sharing that comes, listeners are to simply receive and witness whatever reflections the mandala maker offers for a designated period of time. No judgment either positive or negative, please – this is someone’s prayer! If the mandala maker desires, s/he may allow time at the end for the listener to share a response to the mandala or what has been shared in the form of: “I notice...” or “What most strikes me is ...” For example, “I notice the density of the red in this quadrant about what blocks you.” Or, “Or I notice that many of the people represented have bewildered expressions.” Or “What most strikes me is the sense of freedom that grows through the different quadrants.” This is not a time to analyze, confer meanings, or tell your own story as in “It reminds me of when I...”

For work on each quadrant

1. Hold the question for the quadrant in your awareness, and browse the magazines. Notice which images/words attract you, and tear them out. Don't go looking for anything specific – let yourself be surprised by what draws you even if you don't understand why. Once you have a sense of ‘enough’ move to step 2.
2. Focus in on what is most essential in each picture and tear away everything else. Affix the images to the quadrant using rubber cement (or Vano starch for tissue paper). You can combine the pictures with torn tissue paper for a background or use colored pencils or crayons as well.
3. When it feels complete, pray with it using some of the following suggestions or whatever else fits you

PRAYING WITH YOUR MANDALA

Praying with hands accesses the same place as our dreams, and the Talmud says “a dream unexamined is like a letter unopened.” Dreams – and creative play -- reveal what is out of awareness, what our conscious mind cannot know. Each comes like a prophet to speak to us, bringing a word of comfort and grace when all feels lost, or a word of challenge when we've become complacent. Why? In the loving purposes of the One who desires our partnership in co-creating heaven on earth, it is *always* God's desire to draw us toward greater freedom, wholeness, and participation. In other words, your 'creation,' whether or not you like it or understand it, is a *treasure* and a *messenger*. So, linger with it and pray with it.

Here are some suggestions:

PAY ATTENTION

Much of the spiritual journey involves 'waking up' – noticing more – becoming more contemplative inside and out. My favorite definition of the contemplative attitude is “to *take a long, loving look at the real.*”

(Walter Burghardt)

Notice how easy or hard it was for you to:

- Let images 'choose' you rather than being the active driver of the process.
- Tear paper rather than using scissors or other instruments that give more control.
- Let yourself create something 'messy' and evolving.

Notice the images:

- Are there any surprises in the images themselves, or in what was most essential to you within the image? Any sense of how they connect to or speak to your life? (You might choose to 'talk' with one directly in the prayer of active imagination, asking questions like, “*What is your name? What is your gift? What is your wound? What do you come to say to me?*” or whatever else feels appropriate to you. Many people do this sort of dialog in a journal.
- What do you notice about how the images came together with other images or colors or...?
- What is your response to your 'soulcape'?

Notice the inner voices and quality of your own gaze toward each part of your mandala:

- How do you regard the unknown in your mandala and in yourself?
- Does your gaze travel out to others working nearby to make comparisons? What is the result?

TELL THE TRUTH

Prayer is about bringing the truth of oneself to God. As you engage your 'noticing,' practice bringing what you notice intentionally to God. Then 'listen.' Notice what arises inside and out ... perhaps a memory or a thought or a passage of scripture or piece of song. Perhaps an insight or a wondering. Perhaps later in the day a friend says something that touches you in a new way. Bring back to God your honest response to whatever comes (or doesn't when you want it to!)

Many people find that having a spiritual companion or a spiritual director can be a great help in this process as we all have blinders and limitations. Another pair of eyes and ears on our journey can be very helpful in bringing human perspective to our primary relationship with God. Please call Bread of Life to explore whether this might fit you.



RESOURCE SHEET CO-CREATING HEAVEN ON EARTH

The following resources may be of assistance to you as you move forward with activities for your group:

1. **Project Ideas:**

- a. **Bread of Life:** The spiritual directors and the artists connected to Bread of Life would be happy to talk with you about weaving creativity and spirituality in group settings. Check out the Bread of Life website: www.breadoflife.org for contact information or call the office at 916-648-1803.

- b. **Spirit in the Arts has become The Creative Edge. Contact Carol Mathew-Rogers** our former art director: who will gladly help you with ideas for art projects and ways to lead groups into creative processes.

- c. **Peruse Galleries and Art Shows:** All over the greater Sacramento area you can find art shows and galleries—even art festivals and interactive events to help you get ideas. Check out the Sacramento Bee Ticket, Scene and Neighborhood sections for events and show also check out the Sacramento News and Review and other local papers. Check out Second Saturday shows—usually in the evening each Second Saturday of the month—most are clustered in the Mid-town and Del Paso Boulevard areas. Get on the internet and plug in “art”, “Sacramento”, etc.

2. **Art Materials and Supplies:** What you need depends on what you want to do so be thinking ahead to the kinds of projects you want to offer, then decide what art materials and supplies you may need. Here are some places to find them:

- a. Michaels is an all around crafts store—there are several in the greater Sacramento area—most supplies and materials can be found there. JoAnn’s Fabric has a variety of art materials and supplies. Target, Dollar Stores, K-Mart,

Wal-Mart, and other variety stores will have some art supplies and can be inexpensive especially when they have sales.

- b. If you are a teacher or have teachers in your group ask them for resources—they often know places for inexpensive art supplies (often low to medium quality) and/or have discounts at a number of stores. The “At Report Card Stores” are worth checking.
- c. Depending on the kind of art projects you want to offer, you can browse thrift stores, flea markets and garage sales. Projects involving found art are perfect for this kind of material. You can make a connection between care for the earth and using recycled or found art items.
- d. Ask your group members to clean out their closets and garages for all the arts and crafts supplies they have and do not use—you may be amazed at the materials. If you get too much feel free to donate to your favorite art program. With creativity and a “fun” attitude you can use most anything for art projects.

Showing Art:

- e. Spirit in the Arts is arranging for Second Saturday Art shows July 14. We would love to show the art your group creates in July. Art projects must be completed and brought to the Spirit in the Arts Center by June 28th to be included in the Second Saturday show.
- f. If you want to show art at your facility plan ahead. You want to make sure that you have the art projects completed in time to put them up in a manner that will show well. We are hoping groups will complete their work by the middle of June, in time to show it in their facility before the Second Saturday Art Show on July 14. If your projects are completed later then plan to show them in your facility at the end of July after the Second Saturday Art show in July 14.
- g. If you have a large body of work and you want to host a show in your area please let us know. We would love to work with you to help that happen. Some art galleries, churches and other venues would be happy to show art work on this theme. Feel free to use your own contacts to find venues for show.

Be sure to visit Martin Rutte’s site

www.projectheaveonearth.com

for a glimpse of how others around the world are engaging this work

or

to contact him for more information.

Co-Creating Heaven on Earth Sermon Starters or Thoughts to 'Prime the Pump'

The following reflections (which are loosely organized) combine my response to Martin Rutte's chapter *The Work of Humanity: Project Heaven on Earth* in Seeking the Sacred (ECW Press, Toronto), and my own work in spiritual formation. My focus as a spiritual director is on walking with people who seek to deepen in their relationship with God. My role is to help them listen to their life as a primary meeting place with the Holy - and to grow in the capacity to respond with an ever-fuller "Yes!" to the movement and invitation of God every day.

My own rooting and practice is Christian, a path that has opened me to the wide welcome of God that crosses human boundaries and traditions. You will notice that I reflect more out of the Western religious traditions, not because these themes aren't in the East, but because I have more familiarity with the West. These notes assume that you will be using the scripture of your own master Story as you address these themes in your particular context, and so I haven't included extensive quotes from scripture.

My prayer is that these notes will be of service to you as we seek to lift up and engage together the work of co-creating heaven on earth in our region. I welcome your comments and reflections in turn, that we might learn more together than any of us can know alone.

*Sandra Lommasson
Founder Bread of Life*

Heaven on Earth' - a universal template?

"I've asked hundreds of people to tell me a time when they experienced Heaven on Earth. The responses were very illuminating. People don't hesitate or ask me what I mean; they immediately tell me about a moment when they experienced it. They go deeply into themselves when answering my question, shutting out the entire world and answering with clarity, with certainty. People instinctively know what it is... I believe there already exists within us a template, a reference point, a built-in standard that tells us what Heaven on Earth is. We then search for those experiences in our lives that match it. Heaven on Earth, like love, peace, and joy is hardwired into us, an eternal innate truth."

*The Work of Humanity: Project Heaven on Earth,
Martin Rutte, in Seeking the Sacred p. 97.*

Martin Rutte describes this template as 'metaphorical software' written into the human person and reflected across all the major religious and wisdom traditions of the world - something I would name as part of our innate religious capacity. Human beings are made for relationship with God. The root of the word **religious** is *re* [a prefix meaning "return" or "again"] and *ligare* [meaning "to bind together" or "connect"] in the same way a *ligament* connects. Without a ligament to bind together the bones in an elbow, the arm hangs useless. Perhaps this template is part of what connects us to 'something More,' to the deep desires of our Creator for the wholeness of creation, and to our own freedom and power to participate *with* God in bringing this goodness into being.

Primal Desire

There is a desire, a longing in each of us, for a world that works, for the immoral, unnecessary, and recurring problems of the planet - like war and hunger and disease and hatred and suffering and poverty and environmental degradation - to end. We have forgotten and suppressed the dreams that emanate from our soul, the dreams of having a world that works, a world that inspires hope, engagement, creativity...

The Work of Humanity: Project Heaven on Earth,
Martin Rutte, in Seeking the Sacred p. 95.

Mystics of the Western traditions often speak of a God who lures, seduces, and pursues humankind. So it is that Jewish tradition calls the people to read, study and sing the *Song of Songs*, a celebration of intimate and passionate love in the midst of the celebration of freedom in the great festival of Pesach or Passover. The whole Torah is Holy," says Rabbi Akiva, "but The Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies." (*Initiation on the Path of Love*, Rabbi Shefa Gold).

So too Rumi, the Sufi poet, can write of the mysterious truth that,

*This longing you express is the return message.
The grief you cry out from
Draws you toward union.
Your pure sadness
that wants help
is the secret cup.
Listen to the moan of a dog for its master.
That whining is the connection.*

Love Dogs from The Essential Rumi, translated
by Coleman Barks

Catholic theologian Ronald Rohlheiser writes that "Desire gives no exemptions. It does however admit of different moods and faces. Sometimes it hits us as pain – dissatisfaction, frustration, and aching. At other times its grip is not felt as painful at all, but as a deep energy, as something beautiful, as an inexorable pull, more important than anything else inside us, toward love, beauty, creativity, and a future beyond our limited present. Desire can show itself as aching pain or delicious hope."

The Holy Longing, Doubleday, 1999, pp. 4-5.

In this view, the deepest desire of the human heart (as distinct from the many consumer desires of the surface ego) are God's own Desire written into us. This desire both draws us God-ward toward relationship and outward toward participation in the desire and purpose of the heart of the Holy in our world. The traditions speak in various ways about the desire of God for right relationship -- with Godself, one another and the creation -- for the fullness of peace, for abundant provision, for wholeness, for the welcoming of the stranger, for reverence of life, for appreciation of beauty, for right tending of the precious resources entrusted to our care, for a quality of freedom that is both a freedom *from* whatever binds and oppresses and *for* our engagement in the world, and so on.

Connecting/ Re-connecting/ Re-membering the Experience

To take 'heaven on earth from the realm of an abstract concept of afterlife to participation here and now with God and one other, there are two related approaches. One is to ask the question of memory, "**When have you experienced Heaven on Earth?**" and the other is to ask the question of imagination, "**What is Heaven on Earth for you? Imagine there are no obstacles in front of you and you have the ability to create Heaven on Earth instantly. What would it be?**"

The people of God are frequently invited by the traditions to look back and re-member (put together again) those moments when the presence of God's activity in our lives and world breaks into personal and collective awareness. These awakenings or revelations brush us with what is eternally true, transforming everyday awareness and time [chronos] into something timeless, eternal, powerful, and Real [kairos].

These kairos moments can be accessed here and now as we re-member [put together again for ourselves today] the sacred story. The capacity for remembrance is a basic gifting of God to help us stay on track - the Arabic word for humankind is literally 'the forgetful' - and without memory we can easily become distracted and discouraged. Right remembrance is a powerful ally and antidote for human forgetfulness. It's why we have ritual, and why Jews tell the story in Passover of what God has done for *me* and Muslims pray 5 times a day and Christians celebrate the sacramental meal of Eucharist [remembrance and thanksgiving].

Similarly, asking "When have you experienced Heaven on Earth?" opens people to a core part of their own sacred story. It's why, as Martin Rutte describes in his many conversations, *people go "deeply into themselves when answering my question, shutting out the entire world and answering with clarity, with certainty..."* In this sort of conversation voices slow and drop and there's the palpable poignancy of expression that radiates holy ground.

The Draw and the Draw-Back

I know as a journeyer and as a spiritual director that being touched by the very thing I/we long for as we are drawn toward the things of God, also evokes a reaction against. We want to be transformed; we just don't want to change. The ego-aspects that want to be 'master of my fate and captain of my soul' rightly sense a de-thronement ahead, and put on the brakes. We call the phenomenon 'resistance' or 'counter-movement' in spiritual formation literature and it's what Martin refers to when he says,

As pragmatic dreamers, in the process of making Heaven on Earth real, we'll naturally encounter roadblocks. They come out of hiding when we consider accomplishing a major objective... If we then multiply any of these roadblocks by the 6 billion people on earth, it gives us a collective story of powerlessness, futility and resignation, one that makes us feel Heaven on Earth is not possible...

The Work of Humanity: Project Heaven on Earth,
Martin Rutte, in Seeking the Sacred, p. 106.

An important principle in spiritual direction is to keep the focus first and primarily on the movements of God in our lives and world rather than on the resistance. It's like looking for the rock that drops in a pond creating ripples. The ripples - both those coming from the point of entry and those which have encountered obstacles, setting up a backwards movement - point to something that happened. In spiritual formation we processes we **are particularly attentive to the initiating movement of God - the kairos moment - the beginning of the movement into human awareness, rather than the consequence.**

Right focus is essential on the spiritual journey, and is often lifted up in the traditions. A saying from Buddhism is simply that "We become what we gaze at." The Jewish theologian Martin Buber says that "Hope imagines the real." Jesus said "The eye is the lamp of the body, so if the eye is healthy the whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is not healthy, your whole body will be full of darkness." (Matt. 6:22-23). The presence, action, and invitation of God grounds and grows us in ways that are true, consistent, graced. And, keeping the focus on the 'draw' rather than the 'drawback' encourages the human heart into active, sustainable contribution.

Sustainable Action

The work of God is often likened to the growth of a seed or leaven in a lump of dough. Of course, the things resistant to God can also grow in the same way, which is why right focus, intention, and practice toward making room for the things of God and refining/purifying the heart are vital.

This is the place where faith and works, inner and outer journey meet, each needing the other for wholeness. I think of the infinity symbol as metaphor for the journey inward/outward/inward (or outward/inward/outward depending on the temperament of the individual).

What is important in either movement is the sustainable next step that leans into the generative power and desire of God for the world. It's not all up to us; and yet the work of God needs us. Martin Rutte simply asks the following of people after they have remembered their personal experience of heaven on earth and/or imagined it out into the world in some way: **What small step in your power can you take to move forward your particular glimpse of a world that works?**

What's important here is beginning, moving into action. It's what Jesus references when he exhorts to activity in the world: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these [the hungry, sick, naked, imprisoned] you did for me." (Matthew 25:40). Notice that it is "whatever you did for ONE," not for all. It's the sustainable next step that matters, because one small next step at a time God is working in us to open the heart and enlarge the capacity for participation... and it weaves a world of difference. A wonderful German proverb says simply, "Begin to weave, and God will give the thread." It points to the power of imagination and commitment together to weave forward together the new thing already being created among us.

In 12 step communities there is a wisdom that says, "You'll never think your way into better acting. You have to act your way into better thinking." This is part of the slow conversion of habituated thought Rutte references when he says,

In order to make real this shared vision and purpose for humanity, we have to expand our minds, our point of view, to include it. We have to refit our minds with new metaphorical software in order to see new possibilities, new opportunities. This challenges the default "What difference can I/we make?" and urges us to rephrase it as "Look at the difference I/we make." To collectively change humanity's story, we must not only create, choose and tell the new story, we must also live it. A story requires actions and events in order to come to life.

*The Work of Humanity: Project Heaven on Earth,
Martin Rutte, in Seeking the Sacred, pp. 104-105.*

So it is we meet the One who both attracts and provokes, who draws us and who sends us. The root of the word provoke is *pro* [for/ forth] *vocare* [to call], pointing toward what Christians refer to as calling or vocation.

A Word about Vocation and Public Witness

I have lingered long with and loved Parker Palmer's book about vocation, Let Your Life Speak. A Quaker educator and mystic, he writes,

Our deepest calling is to grow into our own authentic selfhood, whether or not it conforms to some image of who we ought to be. As we do so, we will not only find the joy that every human being seeks — we will also find our path of authentic service in the world. True vocation joins self and service, as Frederick Buechner asserts when he defines vocation as “the place where your deep gladness meets the world’s deep need.”

...Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you. Before you tell your life what truths and values you have decided to live up to, Let your life tell you what truths you embody, what values you represent... vocation does not come from willfulness, it comes from listening. I must listen to my life to understand what it is truly about -- quite apart from what I would like it to be about -- or my life will never represent anything real in the world, no matter how earnest my intentions.

That insight is hidden in the word vocation itself, which is rooted in the Latin for voice. Vocation does not mean a goal that I pursue. It means a calling that I hear. Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it I must listen to my life telling me who I am. I must listen for the truths and values at the heart of my own identity, not the standards by which I must live - but the standards by which I cannot help but live if I am living my own life.

Let Your Life Speak
Parker Palmer, pp. 3-5

His perspective takes me back to where we began: with the Desire of God written into the deepest desire of the human heart, and recognition that while that holy longing is fully aligned with the purpose of God for our world, it also expresses individually. Rather than being something we must put on top of ourselves like a suit of clothing, it is part of our deepest, truest nature. The task is more about releasing the accretions that distort and muddy what Sufi's would call the many faceted diamond of the heart.

Part of the release, for the corporate good, is giving public witness through action and through expression of the vision. It's not the sort of witness that actively seeks to convert another's viewpoint but rather the living witness of the courageous faith needed to BE the aroma of God's goodness in ordinary, everyday ways. It's about embodying the good news, about being the city on the hill that cannot be hid, about allowing the new heaven and earth to manifest among us.