

The Practice of Celebrating: Delight in Action

by Chris Schoon, director of Faith Formation Ministries

At a conference I attended, a Christian speaker told a story about an in-flight conversation she had with the person sitting next to her. When the person asked the all-too-familiar conversation starter “So, what do you do?” she decided to change up her typical response. Instead of explaining that she was an evangelist who traveled the country talking about God with university students and church leaders, this time she simply answered: “I party for God.”

That line has resurfaced in my thoughts many times over the years, and inevitably I end up smiling when I remember it. I often wonder how our public witness as Christians would change if we were known as people whose lives are characterized by celebration—people who “party for God.”

Celebrations are commonplace in the North American context. We celebrate all sorts of defining moments in our lives: birthdays, graduations, and weddings being the big three. We also celebrate civic holidays, sporting events, grand openings of new stores, and groundbreakings for new buildings. We like to celebrate, and almost any occasion will do.

But the [spiritual discipline](#) of celebrating, which both expresses and forms our faith, is different from simply throwing a party.

As with all faith practices, celebrating seeks to deepen our attention to the Holy Spirit, and in so doing to enrich and mature the ways we love God and our neighbors. **Through the faith practice of celebrating, we delight in circumstances, relationships, and occasions that help us remember and anticipate God's abundant goodness, creativity, faithfulness, beauty, and love.**

Here are three questions that can serve as an invitation into the faith practice of celebrating.

When, where, and with whom do I catch glimpses of God's declaration that God's creation is very good?

I love the cadence of Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of Genesis 1:31 in *The Message*. He writes: “God looked over everything he had made; it was so good, so very good!” I need that double reminder of the original goodness of all things.

I grew up in a cultural context where “Not bad” served as a pretty high compliment. In the Reformed tradition, we often begin our theological conversations with the condition we find ourselves in: fallen, sinful, broken, and in need of a Savior. But that tendency, though stating something true, often overlooks and is uncomfortable with spending too much time on the “very good”-ness of creation.

Celebrating invites us to recognize the various ways we still catch glimpses of creational goodness. Beholding the colors on a butterfly's wings; marveling at the intricate design of a telescope that allows us to see stars, planets, and galaxies; and even witnessing with awe the miracle of birth, whether human, giraffe, or sea turtle—all become occasions for delighting in God's still-reverberating affection for all of creation. Celebrating helps us remember and immerse ourselves in God's "so very good."

When, where, and with whom do I encounter a foretaste of the new heaven and new earth God has promised and secured for us in Jesus Christ?

The end of the biblical story unfurls God's abundant goodness. I am constantly in awe of the overflowing abundance found in Revelation 21-22. The city entrances are made of giant gems. There are streets of refined gold, and a flowing river. The tree of life is so abundant that it produces a new crop every month and its leaves bring healing to the nations. The original Genesis garden becomes a garden/city where everything and everyone flourishes and all threats to the goodness of that abundance have been removed.

In the light of this assured end to the biblical narrative, celebrating helps us recognize and name present-day foretastes of the coming kingdom of God. We celebrate when poverty is undone, when diseases are defeated, when enemies put down their weapons, and when injustices of all kinds are overcome. We delight in places where the health of creation, human creativity, and communal well-being work together. Doing so deepens our hope and longing for the full flourishing of life that only God can imagine.

When, where, and with whom do I extend and receive God's providential care here and now?

A good celebration can bring us joy, encourage and affirm everyone involved, and strengthen us for the work that still remains. When we "taste and see" God's abundant goodness, creativity, faithfulness, beauty, love, and other characteristics showing up in us, in others, in creation, and in our communities and structures, we long for more of it. In this way, the faith practice of celebrating shapes our desires so that we want to participate in God's world more fully and faithfully.

Said another way, celebrating leads us to join the Spirit in the ongoing work of reconciliation and restoration made secure in Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. Whether through scientific discovery, poetic and artistic truth-telling, justice-seeking advocacy and reforms, reconciliation with family, friends, and neighbors—or even by demonstrating patience, kindness, and care while driving, in the grocery store, and on social media—we seek to bring about more occasions for ever-greater numbers of people to celebrate.

Along with the closing section of [*Our World Belongs to God*](#), we recognize that we can't bring about this new flourishing community of God's kingdom through our own efforts or ingenuity. Rather, we engage in this work, fueled by practices of celebration, in anticipation of the ultimate celebration when Jesus Christ returns to unveil the fullness of his work of making all things new. And on that Day we will be caught up in a celebration that we cannot yet imagine, but toward which all our celebrations and our work of extending and receiving God's providential care here and now have been beckoning and forming us.

Invitation

There are thousands upon thousands of occasions, big and small, for us to celebrate. The "Celebrating" resources of the [Faith Practices Project](#) provide suggestions for how you might practice celebration on your own, with a small group of friends, or in larger gatherings like public worship settings. As you experiment with celebration practices, we'd love to learn alongside you. Share your practices with #CRCFaithPractices and tag us on Twitter (@crc_ffm) and Facebook (@faithformationCRC).