**A Methodist Way of Life service outlines**

**Before using this service outline,
read the notes on** [**how to use the sessions**](https://www.methodist.org.uk/mwoloutlines)**.**

**Learning and Caring**

The Methodist calling to ‘Learning and Caring’ contains three practices: learn, care and openness. While these are commitments we can practise and receive with all people, they particularly relate to how we connect and form community within the ‘community of believers’ – those who have committed to exploring a relationship with God. This does not just mean Methodist members, but may include people who attend groups run by the church, or friends and neighbours who are spiritually seeking but would not call themselves ‘Christians’. The commitments help us to support each other both practically and spiritually.

**Care**

**“We care for ourselves and those around us”**

**Key themes**

* It's all about love: love for God, other people and yourself. Loving each other is at the centre of our spiritual journey. Love transforms acts of service into acts of care (both are good to practise).
* How we love ourselves and each other reflects the way we believe Jesus loves us.
* This caring love is mutual – we both give it and receive it.

**Relevant Bible passages**

1 Kings 19:4-9; Mark 6: 30-32, 45-46; Luke 10:38-42

**Background reflection**

Society is always asking us to be more, buy more, do more. There is a constant pressure to do, want or be more, which can cause us to feel like we are constantly not doing well enough. A Methodist Way of Life (MWOL) should not end up as yet another thing we feel we have failed at. It is not a tick-box exercise, but a framework that can be used to help us grow in our faith as far as we are able to do so, with God’s help. This is a very important qualifier. It gives us permission to give ourselves a break. We are not superheroes, and should not aspire to be. The ‘Care’ commitment combines care for self as well as care for others because caring is a mutual practice involving both giving and receiving.

*This would be a good time to ask a discussion question about care.*

The practice of Sabbath in the story of creation continues throughout the Bible. In the first book of Kings, after Elijah has had an incredibly stressful time, the angels take care of his physical needs: God does not demand more prayer or action from him but allows him to rest from ‘doing’ and just ‘be’. God loves us, no strings attached. We must make time to listen to God’s voice and treat ourselves as if we are enough just as we are, not constantly trying to prove we are loveable.

From this strong base of prayer, self-knowledge and compassion, we are much more able to give to others with true generosity of spirit. Our personal well of love and compassion can only be deeper the more fulfilled and flourishing we feel. We also model good self-care to others.

*Ask a discussion question about hearing God’s voice.*

The Church is often very good at loving our neighbour, following part of the greatest commandment: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” (Mark 12:31, NRSVA). Many of us can think of times our church offered hospitality or food provision to those in need, as well as community spaces. But we can also think of many stories where caring for others has come at the detriment of caring for ourselves. We treat ourselves far more harshly than we ever treat others, at the disservice to ourselves and others.

The stress bucket analogy is one used in mental health training. The levels of stress we can deal with have a limit, and most of the time we are able to manage the incoming stresses of work, relationships, health and money, as these are counterbalanced by the things we do to relieve stress – prayer, resting, exercise, socialising and, of course, a good night’s sleep.

We are not naïve enough to think that our whole life can be fun, rewarding and energising. The more difficult parts of our lives are necessary, and these are the things that help us to grow. Yet there may be things in our lives that we could do more or less of to make us feel that we are flourishing and caring for ourselves a little better.

There are places in the Gospels where Jesus takes some time for himself and takes time for the disciples to have a break (eg Luke 5:16; Mark 6:30-32 and 45-6). He does it for a few different reasons – to recharge, to prepare, to spend concentrated time with God before making a big decision.

The story of Martha and Mary is sometimes cited to suggest that we should spend more time in prayer and Bible study, and less time in hospitality and service. But these are all good things – in fact, hospitality and service are two other commitments of MWOL! [Dr Lucy Peppiatt suggests](https://www.premierchristianity.com/columnists/misunderstanding-mary-and-martha/16186.article) that the underlying issue in the story is ‘fretting’. “Looking after our guests and making sure people are fed are good things... It’s not the work, but the *underlying worry* that’s the problem – and this can apply to any person in any situation.” What causes you to fret at the expense of your emotional, spiritual and mental health, so that you are missing out on the abundant life Jesus desires for us all (John 10:10)?

*Share what rest means to you and how you create spaces for prayer, but also for fun.*

**Further notes**

* MWOL, like other ‘rules of life’, is not just a mandate to more action. It is not asking us to do more than we are capable of and allows us lots of space just to ‘be’. Similarly, John Wesley, founder of Methodism, said, “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, to all the people you can, at all the times you can, as long as ever you can.”
* God’s plan for us includes time to rest and have fun, as indicated in the observance of a Sabbath. There is a rich history and theology of the Sabbath, going right back to the creation story in the first two chapters of Genesis, where all the days lead us towards resting with God on the seventh day. This is part of our calling as Christians, and it is amazing what God will do with even small periods of rest. People will often say how after times of rest they feel both mentally and physically rejuvenated. God will bless and honour those times of Sabbath.
* Caring looks different for different people, dependent on our interests, levels of introversion/extraversion, etc. Let people know how they can show care for you. And ask other people how you can care for them, rather than making assumptions.

**Song and hymn suggestions**

Make you feel my love – Adele

Brother, sister, let me serve you (*StF* 611)

For the world and all its people (*Sent by the Lord*, Wild Goose)

I will speak out for those who have no voices (*StF* 702)

Let love be real (*StF* 615)

Make me a channel of your peace (*StF* 707)

Pray for a world where every child (*StF* 527)

Would you walk by on the other side? (*StF* 257)

**Creative activity suggestions**

* The ‘PIES’ activity is a simple way to reflect on your health in four areas: physical, intellectual, emotional, and social. Give people time to reflect on their own health, where they are doing well, and where there is room for improvement. Create a board with space for each of these areas (decorate it with drawings or stickers) and ask people to write their celebrations and commitments as a way to check in with each other over coming weeks. Be alert to anything stirred up which may require pastoral support and/or immediate prayer.
* Write down the names of your job, family, friends and interests. Break those down further into the specific people, activities, tasks and groups that make up each section of their lives. Invite everyone to make a different mark or use a different colour for the things that are energising, draining, fun, challenging or rewarding.
* Spend some time thinking and praying about the shape of your life currently in all its variety; the life-giving and the challenging. How full is your stress bucket at the moment? Write down what a full life would look like for you. How close is it to how you live now? Is it realistic or would you be exhausted if you lived like that? Where is your Sabbath within it?

**Discussion questions**

* How are you caring for yourself in this phase of life?
* Who are you caring for at the moment?
* How can we hear the still small voice of God telling us we are loved?
* **What would you tell your childhood self about caring for yourself?**
* How can we be more loving to ourselves?
* What does an abundant life look like for you?
* What causes you to fret at the expense of your emotional, spiritual and mental health?

**Prayer ideas**

Lift burdens to God – name things that weigh on you, perhaps by writing them down and placing them in a bowl. Take a moment to simply lift these things to God, and wait in silence for any immediate response. Even if you hear nothing, thank God for listening to your concerns. Continue to be aware of God’s presence as you deal with these burdens over coming days, weeks and months.

Intercessory prayer – ask for ‘daily bread’ for yourself and for others, those things you need this day in order to be cared for. You may wish to write them down, draw them, speak them aloud, or share them with God in silence.

*Explore creative ways to pray with all ages, using the Methodist prayer cards, available as*[*a printed pack*](https://www.methodistpublishing.org.uk/books/EGIPC22/intergenerational-prayer-cards)*for meetings and events,*[*a PowerPoint*](https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/28465/intergenerationalprayercards-smaller.pptx)*for church services and meetings or*[*as a PDF*](https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/28466/digital-prayer-cards-131222.pdf)*for digital use.*

**Ways to respond**

* For another take on the Mary and Martha story, you might like to listen to Rob Bell’s podcast [What She Knows](https://robbell.podbean.com/e/what-she-knows/).
* Create a timeline of your life, plotting key spiritual and life moments. Where are the times of joy? What was going on and how can you learn from this for the future?
* Golden circles exercise – in groups (no more than five), share three stories of times in your life when you felt joy and/or were at peace. Others in the group make notes on where they see similarities in your stories, e.g. always outside, always with other people. What can you learn from this?
* Plan a spa day, a meal with friends, a walk in the forest, a video-games marathon – whatever helps you care for yourself.