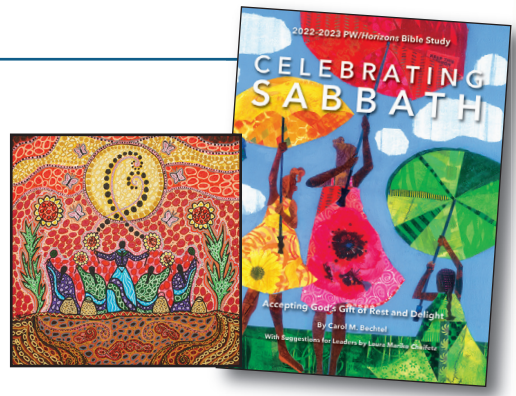


# A Community Celebration

BY DANELLE CRAWFORD MCKINNEY

For use with Lesson Nine of the 2022–2023 PW/Horizons Bible study, *Celebrating Sabbath: Accepting God's Gift of Rest and Delight*, by Carol M. Bechtel



**Scripture: Acts 2:42–47**

Many of us associate spending time in communion with the Triune God—our Father, Son and Holy Spirit—with solitary prayer, discernment or connection with God. At least, prior to the *Celebrating Sabbath* Bible study, most of us viewed celebrations of Sabbath as a time to focus on the inner self. But as Carol Bechtel reminds us, “some part of our Sabbath celebration needs to recognize and connect with the wider community of faith” (85).

The same balance of personal examination with community connection is also true in Indigenous teachings. We’re taught to nurture the inner self in order to keep ourselves true for the good of the people. In tribal communities as in Christianity, ceremonies bring the community together. Even being with people we haven’t met we still know who they are. They are a part of who we are as individuals as well.

I sometimes jokingly say I became a Presbyterian pastor for the wedding cake. It is one of my favorite ceremonies I am fortunate to join as a leader of a community. I love the sacraments of baptism and communion, and I am happy to be with families as they celebrate other milestones with family ceremonies for events such as graduations, anniversaries, birthdays, births and even deaths.

Indigenous people’s ceremonies also remain very sacred for me. When our children were first born, the community in which we lived had a *wacipi* (powwow), where all families could come together and meet. The parents met the babies that their babies would grow up with, young children played together, adults chatted. It was a special ceremony to dedicate ourselves to helping each other in becoming our best selves and community members. Having elders serve us and our

babies the gift of *wasna* (a mixture of traditional superfoods) really connected us to each other and our community.

During an *inipi* ceremony (sweat lodge), the extreme heat and a mixture of traditional medicines blend and absorb into one’s skin. The scent that lingers afterwards continues to elicit a range of feelings that cannot be described. When a person first comes out of the *inipi*, as their body cools off from the extreme heat, their senses often feel sharper. Many people say that they feel an overwhelming sense of oneness with Creator. Sometimes more difficult feelings like fear overwhelm or suppress positive emotions. Yes, fear, as in “did I really survive that extreme heat and am I okay?” Simply working through the self-check to make sure that everything is working okay can bring anxious feelings. We learn that those who can sit with their fear and focus on opening their heart can experience an overwhelming sense of connection to God and to creation.

**What ceremony or ceremonies do you find particularly meaningful? Reflect on or describe the intent behind these ceremonies and how they make you feel.**

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What are the characteristics of your community that emerge through these ceremonies?

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Which one of your names is your favorite and why?

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Of all the names of God, which one is your favorite and why?

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One of the most sacred Indigenous ceremonies is when a person receives a name from the ancestors. Many people in western societies call this “getting an Indian name.” The name can come from a personality trait or even a name that belonged to the family in previous generations. But the name is not just a novelty. It is a sacred name, given and received with reverence. Most of the time this name comes to the person because of something they have earned, or from a dream from an elder. When the name comes to a person, particular duties and traditions follow in order to celebrate the name with the community.

The name becomes a part of the person who receives it. It is believed that when the time comes for the person to move to the next realm or world, the person’s relatives who have already moved to that next realm call that name. It is believed that God calls that name. While it is true that our Christian names will be used and are important part of our identity, when our names are called in our Native language, it validates who we are as the people we were born to be.

I remember the first time I observed a person receiving a name. I cried. I was an adult and had never witnessed a ceremony like that. I never knew, until that ceremony, how my traditional language could identify, or give name to, who I am. My traditional name means something special to me, and I celebrate my Christian name as well. My family name or surname offers additional meaning and identifies me in yet another way. All of my names are sacred to me.

As we close our study of *Celebrating Sabbath*, I would like to thank Presbyterian Women for the opportunity to write these Bible study resources. It has truly been an honor. I hope that your journey to discover Sabbath has been enriched. I am happy to share my experiences and perspectives in order for us to become an even closer community in the name of God.

**Prayer:** Creator, God, Wakantanka, Holy One, on the day when you call us by our name, we thank you. We thank you because we will know your voice, we will know your breath, we will know your hand that reaches out to us. We will know because you know us. We thank you for the opportunity to become closer to you through our sabbath times and our learning. We thank you for the opportunity to serve you as we learn and share the love you have so graciously shown us. When times get tough and we suppress or fail to hear your voice, walk with us and talk with us and tell us we belong to you. Continue with us on our sacred journeys and continue to bring us closer to you through the songs of the birds, the scents of the flowers, the beauty in your creation and in the resources you provide us within Mother Earth. In your Holy Name we pray. Amen.

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