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Celebrating Sabbath: An Organic Inquiry into the Transformative Power of a Sanctuary in Time

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Celebrating Sabbath:
An Organic Inquiry into the Transformative Power of a Sanctuary in Time

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May 18, 2016
Abstract

Researchers and scholars indicate that the holistic practice of Sabbath-keeping has several health benefits when done for intrinsic reasons. Most research on Sabbath-keeping is about individuals who have strong community support for observing a regular Sabbath. Little research exists about those who celebrate a Sabbath without such support, or on the transformative effects of Sabbath-keeping. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to describe in what ways celebrating a weekly Sabbath promotes transformation in individuals not part of a strong Sabbath-keeping community. Ten women share their stories through in-depth interviews set in organic inquiry. Six themes emerged: Sabbath-keeping enhances self-awareness, improves self-care, enriches relationships, develops spirituality, and positively impacts the rest of a participant’s week. Participants show that Sabbath practices and philosophies also evolve over time. While not without its challenges, a weekly Sabbath can be an effective, accessible, inexpensive, no-tools-or-training-required holistic practice that can contribute significantly to well-being.
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Introduction

So many of us say, “If only I could take a break, if only I could get away.” Here’s your excuse: God told you to. We often criticize ourselves, friends, or colleagues for acting as if the world rested on our shoulders, for thinking we are God, that the world spins around us, and that we have to take care of everything ourselves. In fact, the person who stops once a week imitates a God who made the world and then ceased.

(Ringwald, 2009, p. xii)

“Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8, The Inclusive Bible) is one of the Ten Commandments—part of the shared Holy Scriptures for Christians and Jews. This commandment asks us to stop working and honor the Sabbath day, but as Ringwald (2009) writes, “the Sabbath remains the dessert most people leave on the table” (p. xi). Muller (2000) argues that this commandment is not just lifestyle advice, but also a sacred precept with other commands that prohibit killing, stealing, and lying. Muller asks, therefore, a provocative question: “How can forgetting the Sabbath possibly be morally and socially dangerous? How can forgetting to be restful, sing songs, and take delight in creation be as reprehensible as murder, robbery, and deceit?” (p. 7). Muller’s response:

Sabbath time. . . is a time to let our work, our lands, our animals lie fallow, to be nourished and refreshed. Within this sanctuary, we become available to the insights and blessings of deep mindfulness that arise only in stillness and time.

When we act from a place of deep rest, we are more capable of cultivating what the Buddhists would call right understanding, right action, and right effort. In a complex and unstable world, if we do not rest, if we do not surrender into some kind of Sabbath, how can we find our way, how can we hear the voices that tell us the right thing to do? (p. 7)
I contend, along with Muller (2000), that we, as individuals and the broader society, would benefit by reviving the best parts of Sabbath-keeping.

Modern life in the United States is often stressful and anything but peace-promoting. Muller (2000) writes:

We make war on our own bodies, pushing them beyond their limits; war on our children, because we cannot find enough time to be with them when they are hurt and afraid, and need our company; war on our spirit, because we are too preoccupied to listen to the quiet voices that seek to nourish and refresh us; war on our communities, because we are fearfully protecting what we have, and do not feel safe enough to be kind and generous; war on the earth, because we cannot take the time to place our feet on the ground and allow it to feed us, to taste its blessings and give thanks. (p. 2)

Brueggemann (2014) states: “Sabbath…declares in bodily ways that we will not participate in the anxiety system that pervades our social environment. We will not be defined by busyness and by acquisitiveness and by pursuit of more” (pp. 31-32). Sapolsky (2004) points out that “predictability makes stressors less stressful” (p. 258). Knowing that a weekly Sabbath is never more than six days away can help us relieve stress understanding we will soon get a break (Greenberg, 1983).

In this thesis, I use different terminology when referring to Sabbath, meaning to rest (Oxford English Dictionary, Sabbath, 2016). Because it is common in Jewish circles to use Shabbat, Hebrew for Sabbath (Diamant & Cooper, 2007), or Shabbos, Yiddish for Sabbath (Oxford English Dictionary, Shabbos, 2016), I also use these terms when referring to a Jewish Sabbath. Sabbath-keeping is a common expression in the literature, so I often use this term.
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Because I wish to focus on the gift of Sabbath, I use celebrating Sabbath as well. It is common in Jewish circles to say observing or making Shabbat. To be respectful, when referring to particular work of researchers and scholars, or the experience of research participants, I normally use the terms they use. As terminology about Sabbath varies, so do Sabbath practices.

Judaism prohibits 39 specific activities on the Sabbath (Greenberg, 1983). These restrictions are meant to provide freedom from work and a structure for what is most important in life (Heschel, 1951/2005). Shabbat is also about engaging in other activities. Diamant and Cooper (2007) write: “resting, eating, and praying are not only permitted, but mandated” (p. 30). Judaism also encourages other activities on Shabbat including: “sleeping, reading, thinking, studying, talking, listening, meditating, visiting the sick, laughing, singing, welcoming guests, and making love” (Diamant & Cooper, 2007, p. 30). How Jewish people in the United States make Shabbat today varies greatly—from those who observe all Shabbat laws, to those who do not observe any, to those who experiment with various aspects of Shabbat often starting with the Friday evening Shabbat meal (Diamant & Cooper, 2007).

Early Christians kept the Jewish Shabbat (Ringwald, 2009). Due to the celebration of Easter on Sundays, for many Christians, Sunday became the Lord’s Day, or Sabbath (Ringwald, 2009). Ringwald (2009) points out this was not an easy or undisputed transition; roots of this controversy still exist today, and some Christians (e.g., Seventh-day Adventists and Seventh-day Baptists) still keep a Sabbath starting Friday at sundown in line with the original Jewish Shabbat. There is no one Christian way of keeping a Sabbath today—common elements focus on prayer, community worship, time with family, rest, and charitable works (Ringwald, 2009). The subtitles of several authors’ books provide a glimpse into several of the themes they see as key to celebrating Sabbath: “ceasing, resting, embracing, and feasting” (Dawn, 1999); “rest, renewal,
and delight” (Muller, 2000); “rhythms of rest” (Baab, 2005); “restoring your soul” (Buchanan, 2006); and “saying no to the culture of now” (Brueggemann, 2014).

Brueggemann (2014) submits that Sabbath is not just a time for rest but a time to reimagine public life free from oppression and competition and an opportunity for “compassionate solidarity” (p. 45) for the most vulnerable in society. So for Brueggemann, “Sabbath is not simply the pause that refreshes. It is the pause that transforms” (p. 45). Chittister (2006), Gottlieb (1995), Heschel (1951/2005), Keeley (2007), Taylor (2005), and Wirzba (2006), who all write theoretically from a spiritual or cultural perspective, speak to the transformative power of Sabbath as well. It is this concept of transformation in which I am particularly interested.

I do not have grand illusions that more of us celebrating a Sabbath will transform all social ills. I believe an important beginning, however, is promoting more personal peace and well-being that can then be a foundation on which to work for a more humane and just world. As Williamson (1994) writes: “Personal transformation can and does have global effects. As we go, so goes the world, for the world is us. The revolution that will save the world is ultimately a personal one” (p. 7).

While Sabbath-keeping is an ancient tradition, I found only seven research studies that focus on the experience of Sabbath-keeping (Boyd, 1999; Carter, 2013; Dein & Loewenthal, 2013; Frank et al., 1997; Lee et al., 2009; Superville, Pargament, & Lee, 2014; White, Blackburn, & Plisco, 2015). These studies focus primarily on Orthodox Jews and Seventh-day Adventists (Boyd, 1999; Carter, 2013; Dein & Loewenthal, 2013; Frank et al., 1997; Lee et al., 2009; Superville et al., 2014) where there is strong community support for Sabbath-keeping. Many authors write about the transformative potential of Sabbath-keeping, yet I have found no
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research studies that speak directly to the concept of transformation. The research speaks rather to the benefits of Sabbath-keeping, which one can argue need to be present for transformation to take place.

For the remainder of this thesis, I explore the concept of a “sanctuary in time,” (Muller, 2000, p. 26) and learn from individuals who celebrate a Sabbath who do not have substantial community support for doing so. The purpose of this research is to describe in what ways celebrating a weekly Sabbath promotes transformation for those who are not a part of strong Sabbath-keeping communities.

In the following chapters, I review literature relevant to benefits, challenges, and the transformative potential of Sabbath-keeping. I outline the methods used in this research project, discuss the lenses I bring as an author, describe the results of this research, and conclude with an analysis and discussion of the research findings.
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Literature Review

The practice of . . . Sabbath . . . is designed . . . to restore us, a gift of time in which we allow the cares and concerns of the marketplace to fall away. We set aside time to delight in being alive, to savor the gifts of creation, and to give thanks for the blessings we may have missed in our necessary preoccupation with our work. Ancient texts suggest we light candles, sing songs, pray, tell stories, worship, eat, nap, and make love. It is a day of delight, a sanctuary in time.

(Muller, 2000, p. 26)

The purpose of this chapter is to review literature relevant to benefits and challenges of keeping a weekly Sabbath and the transformative potential of a Sabbath. I discuss benefits noted by researchers and many potential benefits about which others write. I then discuss challenges of Sabbath-keeping in order to provide a more complete picture of the experience of Sabbath-keepers. Finally, I identify gaps in the research and outline my research purpose.

I include four types of material in this literature review: research studies that directly address the topic of Sabbath-keeping; research that addresses an element of Sabbath-keeping that may be related; theoretical and philosophical material from theologians, sociologists, mental health practitioners, and other thinkers who have written about the potential of Sabbath; and material from authors who have shared their story of incorporating a Sabbath into their lives. I include this additional material because the research literature that focuses directly on Sabbath-keeping is limited.

Benefits of Sabbath-Keeping

Superville, Pargament, and Lee (2014) write that while several studies suggest that the practice of religion, in general, is beneficial to one’s health, little research exists that explores the health benefits of particular religious practices such as Sabbath-keeping. The Sabbath is meant to be a reward in itself (Brueggemann, 2014; Dawn, 1999; Heschel, 1951/2005). It appears, however, to have other advantages as well. In the next sections, I address Sabbath-keeping or
related topics regarding seven dimensions of well-being: spiritual health, cultural health, psychological health, social health, physical health, cognitive health, and environmental health.

**Spiritual health benefits of celebrating a Sabbath.** Many authors speak to the spiritual benefits of Sabbath-keeping (Allender, 2009; Baab, 2005; Barton, 2006; Bass, 2005; Brueggemann, 2014; Bryan, 2009; Buchanan, 2006; Carter, 2013; Chittister, 2006; Dana, 2012; Dawn, 1999; Dein & Loewenthal, 2013; Heschel, 1951/2005; Hickman, 1999; Jantos, 2007; Keating, 1992; Kent, 2009; Leport, 2015; Lieberman & Klinghoffer, 2012; Lowery, 2000; Muller, 2000; O'Flaherty, Petersen, & Norton, 2010; Ray, 2000; Ringwald, 2009; Shirer, 2014; Shulevitz, 2011; Taylor, 2005; Wilks, 2010; Winner, 2007; Wirzba, 2006). A Sabbath provides unrushed time for communion with all that is sacred (Dawn, 1999; Dein & Loewenthal, 2013; Heschel, 1951/2005; Muller, 2000; Ringwald, 2009). Observing a regular Sabbath offers a means to turn away from materialism (Brueggemann, 2014; Dawn, 1999; Guptara, 2009; Heschel, 1951/2005; Muller, 2000). Guptara (2009) declares: “I could work. I could be productive on this day, but I deliberately choose not to . . . so that I can orient myself to something other than what is material” (para. 25). The Sabbath is meant to be a day of harmony and unity (Dawn, 1999; Golner, 1982; Heschel, 1951/2005; Keating, 1992; Muller, 2000). Sabbath can engender the quality of gratitude as well (Carter, 2013; Dein & Loewenthal, 2013; Muller, 2000; Taylor, 1999).

Sabbath-keeping also bestows us with time for serving others, and in doing so, serving God as well (Brueggemann, 2014; Jantos, 2007; Nickels, n.d.; Ringwald, 2009). Honoring the Sabbath promotes right relationships, not only with other human beings in our lives but also with all of God’s creation including animals and the natural world (Brueggemann, 2014; Gottlieb, 1995; Heschel, 1951/2005; Wirzba, 2006). Brueggemann (2014) stresses that Sabbath connects
love of God and love of neighbor. Chittister (2006) refers to the “Sabbath-heart” (p. 43) that prompts us to create a more just world. Taylor (2005) states, “To remember the Sabbath is to remember what it means to be made in God’s image and, when the Sabbath ends, to join God in the holy work of mending the world” (p. 35). This mending of the world happens not only on a spiritual level but a cultural level as well. Working to bring about a world that recognizes the dignity of all also impacts the broader culture and political world in which we live.

**Cultural health benefits of celebrating a Sabbath.** Brueggemann (2014) and Keeley (2007) argue that Sabbath-keeping can be a subversive act. Brueggemann states that “Sabbath is a practical divestment so that neighborly engagement, rather than production and consumption, defines our lives” (p. 18). Keeley asserts that the intentional practice of Sabbath reminds us to remember God, our place in the world, our environment, and other people. Keeley states that Sabbath-keeping is an effective way to resist consumerism and not only resists what we do not want, but also promotes what we do want—mindfulness, community, humility, service, and rest for everyone [emphasis added].

Taylor (2005) also speaks of Sabbath as a form of resistance when celebrated as a community. Taylor reminds us that the command to honor the Sabbath is not only for ourselves but also to limit the exploitation of others, stating:

*By interrupting our economically sanctioned social order every week, Sabbath suspends our subtle and not so subtle ways of dominating one another. . . . The lion is restrained from making a profit on the lamb, who may still choose to lie down for a Sabbath nap alone but is free from the fear of waking up as lamb chops on this one day at least.* (p. 35)
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Brueggemann (2014), Gottlieb (1995), Keeley (2007), and Heschel (1951/2005) concur; while not a cure-all, Sabbath-keeping can be a practice that resists the commodification of life and promotes a more just, humane world. The cultural aspects of Sabbath often encourage us to focus on others. Sabbath-keeping can also encourage personal reflection, rest, and renewal; and, therefore, can also contribute positively to psychological health.

**Psychological benefits of celebrating a Sabbath.** Superville, et al. (2014), Dein and Loewenthal (2013), Smith-Gabai and Ludwig (2011), Marks (2004), Goldberg (1986a), Goldberg (1986b), and Golner (1982) all speak to mental health benefits of Sabbath-keeping. Goldberg (1986a) suggests, and Marks’ research confirms, that a weekly Sabbath promotes a natural rhythm in the cycle of life. Goldberg (1986b) states that observing a regular Sabbath serves to counteract the effects of emotional anxiety and isolation from overwork. Sabbath-keeping can foster a person’s sense of personal empowerment and ability to control their lives (Goldberg, 1986a; Goldberg, 1986b). Sabbath time enriches individuals with opportunities to return to an intimate gathering of family and friends and to deepen relationships (Goldberg, 1986a). This gathering, Goldberg (1986a) argues, promotes security similar to that of a therapeutic setting in which people can realize that they matter to others and where they can discuss important issues and emotions.

In a study of benefits and costs to one’s mental health among Orthodox Jews who observe Shabbat, Dein and Loewenthal (2013) found that Shabbat had an elevating effect and contributed to an improved frame of mind. Participants in this study also commented on the value of relaxing and taking a break from everyday concerns. The authors found that participants also benefited from having time to reflect on important life issues and spiritual matters and to keep life in perspective.
In a mediational analysis, Superville et al. (2014) found that keeping a regular Sabbath was significantly correlated with mental health. They suggest, however, that there may be other dynamics that also contribute to this relationship. Factors such as self-concept and positive emotions like happiness and peace, which they did not study, might also contribute to the relationship between Sabbath-keeping and positive mental health. While observing a regular Sabbath may be beneficial to one’s health, it could also be that healthy individuals are attracted to Sabbath-keeping (Superville et al., 2014). When we possess strong mental health, which Sabbath tends to nourish, our social health can be enhanced as well.

**Social health benefits of celebrating a Sabbath.** Sabbath-keeping gifts us with time to strengthen relationships in our lives by offering weekly opportunities to socialize and connect on a deeper level in an unhurried manner with family, friends, and neighbors (Dein & Loewenthal, 2013; Frank et al., 1997; Goldberg, 1986a). Dein and Loewenthal’s (2013) study of Orthodox Jews who observe Shabbat found participants had more time for uninterrupted communication when they took a break from technology.

Jewish marriages, in the past, tended to be more stable than most other marriages, but as Jewish families have become more secular, this is no longer the case (Tippett, 2005). Sabbath-keeping, according to Dorff (2005), is one of the most significant ways to revitalize family life. Married couples that kept a regular Sabbath for its inherent value experienced greater intimacy than those who observed a Sabbath for extrinsic reasons according to research Boyd (1999) conducted with Seventh-day Adventists. Boyd suggests that a Sabbath may be a vehicle for spiritual and physical renewal as well as a way to enhance marriages when couples agree on ways to observe Sabbath and see it as an opportunity to enrich their marital relationship and
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spiritual lives. While Sabbath-keeping seems to support social health, studies connecting Sabbath-keeping and physical health benefits are limited.

**Physical health benefits of celebrating a Sabbath.** Positive attitudes about Sabbath-keeping correlate with better physical health and improved sleep, according to Lee, Morton, and Adesina (2008) and Lee, Morton, Walters, Mahoney and Veluz (2006). White, Blackburn, and Plisco (2015) surveyed mental health workers and students from Judeo-Christian backgrounds seeking to work in a mental health area. Participants who considered themselves Sabbath-keepers “were significantly more satisfied with the quantity and quality of their rest than those who did not identify as Sabbath-keepers” (White et al., 2015, p. 113). Sabbath-keeping is also a measure that Lee et al. (2009) explore as an aspect of how specific religious behaviors affect the health and well-being of those in a larger extensive study of Seventh-day Adventists.

Because of the limited research specific to Sabbath-keeping and physical well-being, I now discuss research that shows possible relationships that exist between physical health and components of Sabbath-keeping. For example, one study explored whether or not family rituals might be helpful for children with asthma triggered by anxiety; they concluded that family rituals might help lessen anxiety (Markson & Fiese, 2000). This study did not look at any particular ritual though, so we cannot draw any conclusions about physical benefits of a regular Sabbath from the study.

Individuals who scored higher on a *Jewish Observance Scale* rated themselves as having better health and no health conditions that limited their activities (Levin, 2011). While observant Jews may feel better, we cannot tell to what degree observing a Sabbath may have on one’s health given the scale looks at several factors and lighting Sabbath candles on Friday night was the only item on the scale related to Sabbath-keeping.
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Another study of Seventh-day Adventists in California concluded that they tend to live four to ten years more than average Californians (Fraser & Shavlik, 2001). Most Seventh-day Adventists keep a weekly Sabbath. Researchers did not consider this factor in this study, however. Seventh-day Adventists also tend to attend church regularly, follow a vegetarian diet, exercise frequently, avoid smoking and alcohol consumption, and are generally community-oriented (Buettner, 2012), so we do not know if a regular Sabbath might contribute to this longevity or not. Buettner’s (2012) interviews with several Seventh-day Adventists, however, indicate that observing a weekly Sabbath may be a significant factor in promoting their longevity.

The need for rest is also an important aspect of Sabbath (Bell, 2009; Goldberg, 1986b; Masiane, 2011; Reed & Wallace, 2007). Reed and Wallace (2007) state that our hearts rest after every beat to both recover and refill to pump more blood through our bodies. They believe refraining from activity and replenishing ourselves mentally and spiritually for a period after work is as critical to our well-being as our need for healthy nutrition and exercise. Seventy-year-old individuals who have kept the Sabbath have enjoyed ten full years of Sabbaths (Masiane, 2011). Masiane (2011) states that it is not surprising most Sabbath-keepers appear younger and more energetic than non-Sabbath-keepers. Ringwald (2009) argues that this may not apply to many Jewish women who do most of the preparation for Sabbath and many other holy days. It is often the labor of women that enables men to keep a Sabbath, Ringwald declares.

Taking time for rest and rejuvenation may also be good for our physical health. The Framingham Heart Study followed a group of men and women for several years. One predicting factor of heart disease for the 749 women in the study was not taking regular vacations (Eaker, Pinsky, & Castelli, 1992). In another nine-year study of men at high risk for heart disease, the
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greater frequency with which these men took yearly vacations was associated with a reduced risk of death and heart disease (Gump & Matthews, 2000). Beyond vacations, Reed and Wallace (2007) discuss the restorative power of personal retreats and suggest that when we are well-rested, we can think more clearly and more imaginatively.

**Cognitive health benefits of celebrating a Sabbath.** Observing a weekly Sabbath can support us with needed rest and rejuvenation that can engage our imaginations (Kwall, 2012). While their habits regarding the observance of a faith-based Sabbath may be unknown, individuals such as Albert Einstein, Charles Darwin, and Arthur Conan Doyle were known for taking time without distractions just to think (Honoré, 2004). Warren Buffet and Bill Gates are also known for spending time thinking without the aid of computers (Hallowell, 2006). Sabbath time can provide a useful incubator for creativity (Kwall, 2012). Just as time and space to think can add to our creativity, time in nature can rejuvenate us as well.

**Environmental health benefits of celebrating a Sabbath.** Observing a regular Sabbath provides an opportunity to connect with nature on an on-going basis when Sabbath-keepers have more time to spend outdoors with fewer distractions (Goldberg, 1986a). Honoring the Sabbath may also contribute to caring for the environment (Conroy, 2010; Gottlieb, 1995; Hartman, 2011; Keeley, 2007; Wirzba, 2006). Living at a simpler, slower pace of life can reduce the use of natural resources (Hartman, 2011). According to Hartman (2011) many of our daily routines of getting to work tend to harm our natural surroundings; observing a day of rest can cut down on the effects of transportation and some of the resulting air pollution. Conroy (2010) writes that even what we do in our spare time or during our Sabbaths can have harmful effects if we are not mindful, and cautions against “self-centered pleasure-seeking activities, which ignore the human impact on others and on the environment at large” (p. 169). The concept of Sabbath is not just for
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humans but extends to animals and all of creation as well (Gottlieb, 1995; Heschel, 2005/1951; Keeley, 2007; Wirzba, 2006).

Wirzba (2006) argues that a profound understanding of the connection between Sabbath-keeping and creation is one of its most neglected aspects:

We assume that whatever we need we can invent ourselves or purchase at the store. The result is that we live in a world mostly of our own rather than God’s making. We have, as our living suggests, ceased to think of ourselves as creatures and have proclaimed ourselves to be gods. . . . Creation does not figure into our thinking about the Sabbath because it does not factor much into our thinking about us. (p. 143)

Wirzba stresses that Sabbath rest is for humans, animals, and the land and that the well-being of the land and animals affects our well-being and vice versa. Wirzba suggests that Sabbath-keeping ought to lead us to tend and nurture the earth and mentions three specific activities to consider: that we learn more about how our consumer lifestyles impact creation; that we radically limit consumption of the earth’s resources; and that we provide Sabbaths for natural habitats to allow these habitats to heal and regenerate. As Wirzba suggests, it is not just the environment and animals that will profit, but human beings will as well.

In summary, researchers and scholars have outlined identified and potential benefits of a weekly Sabbath. Several authors suggest that Sabbath-keeping can contribute to the well-being of all creation—the earth, animals, and human beings. In addition to renewing creation, celebrating a Sabbath can strengthen our spiritual, psychological, cultural, social, physical, and cognitive well-being.
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Challenges of Sabbath-Keeping

While there are many benefits of Sabbath-keeping, like anything worthwhile, Sabbath-keeping can present challenges as well. I examine challenges that may accompany benefits of Sabbath-keeping to provide a more balanced picture of reality for Sabbath-keepers recognizing that the benefits, or potential benefits, of Sabbath-keeping, do not exist in a vacuum.

In this section, I focus on several challenges of Sabbath-keeping. I discuss challenges of past Sabbaths, address challenges for those who celebrate a Sabbath due to social pressure, outline challenges for anyone celebrating a Sabbath, note challenges for new Sabbath-keepers, consider challenges for families and those with jobs that require them to work during their Sabbaths, and mention challenges related to where one lives.

Ringwald (2009) and Buchanan (2006) point out that Sabbath-keeping has not always been a celebration for many, whether it be due to rigid views of what families or different faiths saw as acceptable or not on a Sabbath, condemnation of those who had different beliefs, or the effect of various blue laws related to Sabbath. These blue laws did not allow certain activities such as shopping or certain forms of entertainment on Sundays (Oxford English Dictionary, blue laws, 2016). As Buchanan notes, many religious leaders saw Jesus as a Sabbath-breaker rather than a Sabbath-keeper in his time and what was supposed to be a gift was eventually seen as a punishment for many. Ringwald (2009) provides a helpful reminder of our tendencies as a society:

We see a common religious cycle: a joy becomes a burden that is then rejected and, finally, either neglected or rediscovered. . . . Sabbath . . . was first . . . a day of joy, a gift that expressed the original insight: God created and sustains us. Then the day became loaded with rules and regulations. After all, we want to do it right.
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In the third stage, believers rejected the rules and even the Sabbath altogether. . . .

Finally, we forget the Sabbath, recalling it only in dim regret. Or we realize what has been lost and renew its practice with the original intent and, perhaps, modern modifications. (p. 140)

So, inflexible views of how a Sabbath ought to be kept and prevailing attitudes about Sabbath-keeping can influence whether Sabbath is seen as a gift or burden.

Researchers indicate that an individual’s feelings and attitudes about the Sabbath can impact how one is affected by Sabbath-keeping (Boyd, 1999; Lee et al., 2006; Lee et al., 2008; Superville et al., 2014). Lee et al. (2006) found that for those who keep a Sabbath due to feelings of guilt or obligation, Sabbath-keeping is related to poorer physical well-being. Sabbath-keeping for those who were motivated to do so to please others was also “associated with poor mental health” (Lee et al., 2006, p. 6). Feelings of guilt or obligation, therefore, can negate the potential benefits of Sabbath-keeping.

It is not just those more externally motivated to observe a Sabbath that face challenges; most Sabbath-keepers encounter obstacles as well. Observing a Sabbath of any definition requires considerable planning and work to be able to leave an entire 24-hour period solely for Sabbath activities (Carter, 2013; Frank et al., 1997; Marks, 2004; Shulevitz, 2003). Marks (2004) notes that when we are busiest, Sabbath is most difficult to keep. Yet, as Marks and Bass (2000) point out, this is when Sabbath is needed most. Dein and Loewenthal and Dana (2012) indicate Sabbath-keepers can find it difficult to talk about Sabbath-keeping with those who do not also celebrate a Sabbath. How Sabbath-keepers approach their Sabbaths can also present challenges. Diddams, Surdyk, and Daniels (2004) and Dein and Loewenthal (2013) both mention Sabbath-keepers taking a physical break but not a mental one and worrying more when they have few
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distractions. Diddams et al. finds that some keep a Sabbath for their own purposes rather than an end in itself or add more rules to their lives because they think they should.

Shulevitz (2003) outlines two challenges for those new to celebrating Sabbath: first, not feeling like their efforts measure up to those who have fully incorporated Sabbath in their lives, and second, secular friends and family perceiving them as fanatical. Those who celebrate a Sabbath do not just face a lack of understanding from those who do not share their same spiritual beliefs; sometimes non-Sabbath-keeping members in their own religious communities question them as well (Diddams et al., 2004).

Marks’ (2004) research indicates that families encounter obstacles in celebrating a weekly Sabbath as there are more schedules to accommodate and children to convince of the importance of Sabbath-keeping. Prejudice from others with different beliefs and clashes between common social norms and religious values are two other challenges families face (Marks, 2004). Schools often schedule dances, sporting events, and other extra-curricular activities during family Sabbath time which can be a major obstacle (Marks, 2004). If a family does not equitably distribute household chores, preparing for the Sabbath and cleaning up after a family meal can mean additional work for women (Nickels, n.d.; Ringwald, 2009).

People that have a more difficult time keeping a typical Sabbath include clergy (Carter, 2013), police, firefighters, and others required to work during their Sabbaths, along with individuals who care for elders and the sick (Keeley, 2007). While both Jewish and Christian Scriptures approve of work that helps ease another’s suffering (Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2016), rest and rejuvenation is more difficult for those required to work during their Sabbath (Dawn, 1999). Carter’s (2013) research found preparation during the rest of the week and having clear boundaries about what clergy will and will not do on a Sabbath is essential for clergy to
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experience a sense of Sabbath. Dawn (1999) mentions the possibility of taking a different day of rest when workplaces require workers to work during their Sabbaths. Ringwald (2009), however, argues that rest is more difficult when surrounded by others who are not also resting. Because society does not sanction a Sabbath, another potential challenge arises where immigrants and the working poor are not protected from bosses who require continued work with little rest or demanding schedules (Ringwald, 2009).

According to Ringwald (2009), even where we live can present challenges to Sabbath-keeping. With many people now living in suburbs, walking to faith communities or gathering with others may be more difficult. Ringwald provides a vision and challenge: if suburban members of faith communities were to return to traditional Sabbath-keeping practices and moved within walking distance of their congregations in core cities, it could help transform neighborhoods. For those who observe a Jewish Sabbath, it is difficult to be home before sunset on a Friday in the winter in many parts of the United States (Dein & Loewenthal, 2013).

Despite the challenges Sabbath-keepers encounter, most indicate the benefits of doing so outweigh the costs (Carter, 2013; Frank et al., 1997; Kotzsch, 1993; Marks, 2004; Reed, 2008; Ringwald, 2009; Shulevitz, 2003; Taylor, 1999). As Muller (2000) states:

Sabbath time can be a revolutionary challenge to the violence of overwork, mindless accumulation, and the endless multiplication of desires, responsibilities, and accomplishments. Sabbath is a way of being in time where we remember who we are, remember what we know, and taste the gifts of spirit and eternity. (pp. 6-7) Sabbath helps us come back to center and focus on what is most important in life (Muller, 2000).
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Gaps in the Existing Research

Sabbath-keeping has an extensive, rich history, and much has been written on the topic regarding potential benefits, and in some cases, the challenges of Sabbath-keeping. I found, however, just seven research studies that explore this topic systematically (Boyd, 1999; Carter, 2013; Dein & Loewenthal, 2013; Frank et al., 1997; Lee et al., 2009; Superville et al., 2014; White et al., 2015). All but one of these studies (Boyd, 2009; Carter, 2013; Dein & Loewenthal, 2013; Frank et al., 1997; Lee et al., 2009; Superville et al., 2014) focus on either Orthodox Jews or Seventh-day Adventists where individuals have strong community support for Sabbath-keeping. Sabbath-keeping is key to the identity of Orthodox Jews (Heschel, 1951/2005; Millgram, 1944) and there is a strong communal aspect in observing a traditional Shabbat (Dorff, 2005; Ringwald, 2009) and in Judaism (Diamant & Cooper, 2007). Seventh-day Adventists are also known for being community-oriented (Buettner, 2012). In the one research study not focused on Orthodox Jews or Seventh-day Adventists by White et al. (2015), 82% of the survey participants were, or had been, students in a Christian graduate program in mental health. White et al. provide few details about the project’s research participants other than that they held Judeo-Christian worldviews. One might assume, however, that there is at least a measure of community among students in the same Christian graduate program.

There are memoirs extolling the gift of a weekly Sabbath (Lieberman & Klinghoffer, 2012; Shakes, 2015) and anecdotal accounts of individuals or families (mostly pastors and others in some form of formal ministry) incorporating a Sabbath into their lives (Allender, 2009; Dana, 2012; Kent, 2009; Leport, 2015; Shepherd, 2007; Shulevitz, 2011). Shirer (2014) has also produced a study guide and video to help people incorporate a Sabbath in their lives. I have not found any research studies, however, on those who incorporate a weekly Sabbath, or day of rest,
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when they do not belong to faith communities where Sabbath-keeping is the norm. Nor have I found any research studies that explicitly address transformative effects of Sabbath-keeping—if, or how, people change as a result of celebrating a weekly Sabbath.

Summary and Research Purpose

Researchers have outlined benefits of a weekly Sabbath related to spiritual, psychological, social, and physical well-being. Others have noted potential spiritual, psychological, cultural, social, physical, cognitive, and environmental health benefits. Several authors suggest that these benefits may lead to transformation in Sabbath-keepers’ lives. Sabbath-keeping, however, is not without its challenges. Sabbath-keepers can hold rigid views of what it means to honor the Sabbath; a Sabbath is most difficult to keep when it is most needed; Sabbath-keepers may find it difficult to explain to others why they are not available on their Sabbath; and Sabbath-keepers can rest physically but not mentally. New Sabbath-keepers; families; those required to work on their Sabbaths; those who live far from faith communities, family, and friends; and those who observe a Sabbath out of guilt or social pressure face additional challenges.

Most research related to Sabbath-keeping has been conducted with Orthodox Jews or Seventh-Day Adventists where there is strong community support for observing a regular Sabbath. I have not identified any research about those who incorporate a weekly Sabbath, or day of rest, when they do not have significant community encouragement for doing so; nor have I found research on Sabbath-keeping and transformation. The purpose of this research, therefore, is to describe in what ways celebrating a weekly Sabbath promotes transformation for individuals or families who are not part of strong Sabbath-keeping communities. The research
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question of this project is: “How might celebrating a weekly Sabbath, or day of rest, promote transformation for individuals or families?”

In the following chapters I describe the methods I used, share the lenses I have as an author, explain the results of the research, and analyze and discuss the results.
Method

Research and scholarly works that inspire, delight, and prod us to insight and action are often as valuable to our disciplinary efforts as the more technical inquirers that may follow.

(Anderson & Braud, 2011, p. 295)

The aim of this chapter is to explain the paradigm, culture of inquiry, and methodology used to design and carry out this research project. I first discuss the constructivist research paradigm and organic culture of inquiry I employed. I then explain the research methods I used and rationale for choosing those methods. I address issues regarding sampling, instrumentation, protection of human subjects, data collection, data analysis, reliability and validity, and finally, strengths and limitations of this research design.

Research Paradigm and Culture of Inquiry

I come from a constructivist research paradigm. This paradigm is based on the notion that research is value-laden and both the researcher’s and research participants’ beliefs, life experiences, and knowledge influence the research (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). A constructivist point of view says that reality is all about context and is generated rather than revealed (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Mertens, 2009). Working with research participants collaboratively to construct meaning and knowledge is an essential aspect of a constructivist paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). According to Lincoln and Guba (2013), methodologies operating in constructivism ought to be ones that seek to understand the thinking of research participants deeply and this is accomplished most effectively by viewing research participants as equals. Organic inquiry aligns well with this paradigm.

I employed organic inquiry as my research culture of inquiry. Organic inquiry is a newer form of research that is particularly relevant to research regarding psychological and spiritual growth (Clements, 2011). Organic inquiry sees the research process as one that can change
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(Clements, 2011). Organic inquiry emphasizes the sacred and our interconnectedness and takes a whole person view of researchers and study participants (Clements, 2011; Curry & Wells, 2006). Organic inquiry often focuses on transformation—of the researcher, the research participants, and the readers (Braud, 2010; Clements, 2011; Curry & Wells, 2006).

Clements (2011) emphasizes that transformation involves a conversion of mind and heart. In describing transformation in organic inquiry, Curry and Wells (2006) suggest that transformation may be fleeting or long-term and can involve a change in an individual’s assumptions, condition, or nature. Anderson and Braud (2011) write that transformation can involve a change in perspective, a change in relationships, or a change in how one acts or knows something. For purposes of this research study, I have adapted the descriptions of transformation by Anderson and Braud, Clements, and Curry and Wells and am defining transformation as a shift in one’s thinking, feeling, behavior, well-being, or relationships that may be gradual, subtle, or dramatic.

Organic inquiry sees research participants as co-researchers and not just subjects to be studied (Braud, 2011; Curry & Wells, 2006); therefore, I refer to those I interviewed as co-researchers going forward. My goal as a researcher is to understand my research question through the experience of my co-researchers rather than fitting their experience into pre-conceived notions and categories.

Rationale for Selected Method

The research culture of organic inquiry often employs its own methodology, also called organic inquiry. Organic inquiry is often used when there is a desire to learn about a topic in detail and researchers value storytelling (Curry & Wells, 2006). A typical question in organic inquiry focuses on participants’ experience and transformation or how that experience affects
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them (Curry & Wells, 2006). Organic inquiry was particularly suited to this topic given two aims of the study: first, to describe how celebrating a weekly Sabbath, or day of rest, may promote transformation for individuals or families, and second, to learn how I can more effectively incorporate Sabbath-keeping in my life. Organic inquiry recognizes the researcher and co-researchers from a holistic perspective—particularly fitting for research regarding holistic health.

I employed this organic research methodology along with semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Organic inquiry emphasizes stories and seeks a rich, detailed understanding of a subject (Curry & Wells, 2006). Interviews allow for examining topics in depth and help the researcher understand deeply from the perspective of the research participants (Gubrium, Holstein, Marvasti, & McKinney, 2012). Interviews are also a helpful tool to explore complexity and nuance (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In-depth interviews are especially suited as a method for eliciting stories (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015): “Narratives are the only means by which people can communicate what goes on inside them and what links them to others” (Josselson, 2013, p. 3).

Three steps undergird all methods in an organic inquiry: 1) preparation in which a researcher focuses on a question, adopts an attitude of curiosity and mutuality, and is open to the sacred, 2) inspiration in which researchers visit the liminal sphere, and 3) integration in which researchers explore the material and its meaning (Clements, 2011). These steps are particularly relevant for a topic focusing on a spiritual practice and when seeking to deeply understand the perspectives and experiences of the co-researchers.

Sampling

It was not easy to identify individuals and families who observe a weekly Sabbath, or day of rest, who were not part of faith communities where Sabbath-keeping is the norm. Therefore, I
used non-probability sampling employing a purposive sample (Vogt, Gardner, & Haeffele, 2012). In purposive sampling, researchers select participants with experience that can help answer their research questions (Braud, 2011).

To identify possible research participants, I put up flyers (see Appendix A) in several local libraries and local food co-ops as I was seeking places that might attract individuals who are intentional about how they live. I went to a variety of neighborhoods hoping for a diverse group of interviewees. I put up a flyer on Facebook and posted a notice on St. Catherine University’s Holistic Health Studies Facebook group. I also sent an email to a few personal contacts who I thought might know someone who regularly celebrates a Sabbath or day of rest and asked them to forward the information. I wanted to learn more about a holistic practice that can be used by anyone. I was, therefore, interested in talking to individuals who keep a Sabbath or day of rest without a focus on spirituality. My materials to recruit co-researchers, therefore, referred to a Sabbath or day of rest.

I was hoping to interview six to eight individuals. I responded to 16 inquiries via email or phone from one man and 15 women with more details and sent the consent form to the first 12 individuals who contacted me. Of the 12, all but the man replied and expressed a desire to participate in the research study. Of the 11 who expressed further interest, I confirmed that they were over 18. I then asked how long they had been celebrating a Sabbath, if they were part of a faith community where Sabbath-keeping was the norm, and if they had any questions. Due to the limited time frame for data collection, and my limits as a sole researcher, I chose to limit interviews to the first 11 individuals who contacted me after receiving additional information about the research project.
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Instrumentation

I used four instruments: an interview schedule, journals, field notes, and myself, the researcher.

Interview schedule. I used semi-structured, in-depth interviews as a primary instrument for this project. Semi-structured interviews allow for follow-up questions and allow co-researchers to bring up issues that a researcher has not raised (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

After checking the Health and Psychosocial Instruments database for a relevant instrument and not finding one, I created an interview guide based on suggestions in the literature (see Appendix B). I followed the recommendation of Brinkman and Kvale (2015) and Josselson (2013) to determine what I wanted to learn from the research project and then developed specific questions that would help me answer my broader question. In addition to five demographic questions, I outlined twenty-one open-ended questions designed to answer my overall research question: “How might celebrating a weekly Sabbath or day of rest promote transformation for individuals or families?” Within this broad question, I wanted to learn: what contributes to starting a Sabbath practice; how individuals keep a Sabbath or day of rest; what supports them in maintaining a Sabbath; what challenges and dilemmas individuals and families face; and the cost and benefits of observing a Sabbath or day of rest. I also wanted to hear participants’ stories of and insights about transformation. Specific questions in the interview guide flow from these objectives.

I ordered questions by grouping those addressing similar topics together and so that the initial questions would be easier for research participants to answer (Josselson, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I also avoided asking questions starting with “why” as research participants tend to find it harder to respond to them (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; VanderStoep & Johnston, 2009). I
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started with a more general question to give research participants a chance to share what they felt was most important first before asking other more detailed questions (Clements, 2011). I answered my own questions as a way of testing them (Josselson, 2013) and pre-tested my interview schedule with four colleagues and made a few changes based on feedback such as changing the order of questions, combining or eliminating similar questions, and rewording questions for clarity. Pre-testing an interview guide can enhance the reliability of research (Roberts & Priest, 2010).

Journals. In order to provide co-researchers the opportunity to reflect on their Sabbath practices and any transformation they may have experienced, I encouraged co-researchers to use a journal prior to our interviews. As with many spiritual or holistic practices, change can be subtle or take place over a period of time so I thought it would be helpful to co-researchers to have time to think about some questions prior to our interviews. Co-researchers’ journal reflections were also another means of collecting data (Clandinin, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Collecting different types of data can increase the reliability of research (Roberts & Priest, 2010).

I looked at my interview schedule and chose a few questions that would be most difficult to answer without time to reflect. I asked co-researchers to reflect on these questions in any way that made sense to them—using words, stories, drawings, art, poetry, pictures, or quotes (see Appendix C). I offered the journal and questions as an option to aid in reflection, not as a requirement, as I wanted to respect co-researchers’ time. Co-researchers were free to show me their journals or not.

I kept a journal of my attempts to incorporate a Sabbath in my life which provided data as well (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I used this journal to record my thoughts and feelings
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regarding my efforts to establish Sabbath-keeping as a weekly practice. I then reflected on my journal entries when writing about change I encountered during this project.

**Field notes.** I took a few notes during interviews with co-researchers of key points. I took field notes in a notebook immediately after each interview about observations, thoughts, feelings, and questions I had about the interview itself, my role as the researcher, the topics we discussed, and the general themes I heard co-researchers articulate. I also noted thoughts or questions that arose for me during recruitment through data analysis which was also a form of data collection (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Etherington, 2004; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Field notes also provided an avenue to reflect on biases I might be bringing to the process so that I continued to strive for neutrality while interviewing co-researchers and analyzing their data. Neutrality adds to reliability and validity of a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Roberts & Priest, 2010).

**Researcher as instrument.** As a researcher, I, too, was an instrument (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) as were my co-researchers (Curry & Wells, 2006). As Lave and Kvale (1995) state, the instrument most capable of understanding human life is other humans. In organic inquiry, the researcher’s story or passion for a topic is also relevant and often a starting point for the research (Curry & Wells, 2006). I prepared myself as a researcher by reflecting on and writing about my paradigm and the lenses through which I see the world and how those affected this research project. I also acknowledged the theoretical lenses that undergird this research and analysis of my data. I consulted several textbooks and articles on research methods, effective interviewing strategies, and data analysis. I was systematic in my communications with co-researchers and used an interview guide and scripts for other communication with co-researchers. Finally, I reflected and kept a journal to be reflexive through the research process to add to the reliability and validity of this research (Etherington,
Protection of Human Subjects

I considered ethical issues throughout this research project. I submitted a detailed research proposal to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of St. Catherine University and received approval before recruiting participants. The IRB application addressed: research methods and questions, expectations of participants, recruitment of research participants, risks and benefits for participants, confidentiality of data, and informed consent of research participants. I contacted all individuals who expressed interest in this research project via phone or email and provided detailed information about the project. I went over the consent form with all co-researchers (see Appendix D) before conducting any research. Two of the most important aspects of the consent form included an emphasis on the voluntary nature of the research study and steps I took to keep data confidential.

I started each interview by reminding participants that they could choose not to answer any question I asked and did not need to complete a question, or the interview, if they felt uncomfortable for any reason and that there would be no consequences for doing so. I did not expect that the interview would raise sensitive issues for co-researchers. Nonetheless, I had information about 211, a referral resource for various counseling and other services, if it appeared that someone might benefit from talking with a counselor or needed other assistance after our interview (see Appendix E).

I took several steps to maintain confidentiality of the data I collected. I kept all research data in password-protected files on a password-protected computer or in a locked file cabinet. I destroyed all identifiable data on June 30, 2016. Organic inquiry, contrary to most other methods, suggests researchers not automatically assume a research participant will want to
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remain anonymous (Curry & Wells, 2006). Curry and Wells (2006) acknowledge potential concerns with this approach, however, and suggest researchers give participants additional chances to change their minds if they initially choose to use their real first names. The consent form mentioned pseudonyms as an option and that a participant could decide to use a pseudonym later even if initially choosing to use a real first name. I offered each research participant the opportunity to choose a pseudonym when I interviewed them and again when I sent thank you notes following our interviews. I offered the chance to use a pseudonym a third time when I sent a copy of their stories to check to see if they were accurate and co-researchers felt the stories represented them well. Co-researchers expressed pride in what they are doing and, in some cases, indicated that telling their story is part of being authentic and an opportunity to share about a practice that could benefit others. In organic inquiry, if participants share stories about family members, friends, colleagues, or others, researchers use pseudonyms for them even if a co-researcher chooses to use her or his real name (Curry & Wells, 2006).

I also eliminated or changed details in co-researchers’ stories unless a co-researcher preferred to include details that might be identifiable. I asked participants if there was anything they shared with me that they did not want in any published results. When a participant indicated there was something they did not want shared, I documented this and deleted the specific material from the data. I sent a copy to each co-researcher of their story and asked if there was anything they felt was not accurate or that they wanted to change in any way.

Data Collection

My sample size was initially 11. I spoke with each participant via phone or email to confirm their participation and explained the research process in general, answered any questions, explained the purpose of the journal and questions that I would be sending, and where
and when we would meet for the interview. Depending on co-researchers’ availability, we
scheduled interviews for 60-90 minutes. I asked co-researchers to be mindful of their Sabbath
practice in January 2016 and sent a journal and instructions to them as soon as they agreed to be
part of the research project.

We met at sites convenient for research participants—coffee shops, a public library,
worksites. I interviewed three out-of-town co-researchers via Google Hangout or FaceTime. At
the beginning of all interviews, I reviewed the consent form again and went over any questions. I
reiterated that participation was entirely voluntary and that participants could refuse to answer
any questions without consequence. I asked permission to audio record interviews and all co-
researchers granted permission to do so. I used a recording program on my computer and a
recording application on an iPad as a backup. I used the interview schedule and asked follow-up
questions in several cases asking for more detail or clarity. In four instances, co-researchers
chose to talk longer than we planned, so actual interviews ranged from one to two hours.

I wrote field notes (Anderson & Braud, 2011, Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Etherington,
2004; Marshall & Rossman, 2006) after each interview, recognizing that much of
communication—silence for example—is a part of someone’s story as are the words they use
(Clandinin, 2013). I transcribed three audio recordings of interviews and hired a transcriptionist
to transcribe the others. Before hiring a transcriptionist, I required a signed confidentiality
agreement (see Appendix F). We used a password protected Dropbox to transfer files. I checked
the transcripts completed by the transcriptionist for accuracy. I used these field notes during data
analysis.

One individual I interviewed did not meet the primary requirement for the project. When
she first contacted me, I asked how long she had been celebrating a regular Sabbath or day of
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rest; she responded, “about a year.” She provided vague answers to the interview questions. After transcribing her interview and checking my field notes in which I had wondered about her practice at the time of the interview, I called to confirm my understanding that while she is very interested in establishing a regular day of rest in her life, she has not found a way to do so. I, therefore, have not included the results of her interview as she has thought about a day of rest rather than actually implemented one—which does not meet my criteria for inclusion—so I ended with a sample size of 10.

Data Analysis

In organic inquiry, data analysis includes three processes: harvesting stories of co-researchers, creating a collective description that takes all co-researchers into account, and sharing accounts of transformation (Clements, 2011). I used the interviews, transcriptions of the interviews, journals, and my field notes during data analysis.

I first focused on the stories of my co-researchers. I used coding (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Patton, 2015; Saldaña, 2013) and content analysis (Patton, 2015) from an organic inquiry perspective (Clements, 2011) to analyze data. Clements (2011) suggests analyzing data at least four times to note what stands out regarding thoughts, feelings, intuitions, and physical sensations. I did this by listening to the interviews or reading the transcripts, and journal entries for co-researchers that shared them, and read my field notes on four separate occasions. I coded data related to co-researchers’ thoughts, feelings, and what they may have been communicating but did not say directly. Finally, I noted points in the interviews that focused on physical sensations such as laughter, tears, and fluctuations in their tone of voice. I analyzed individual interviews by highlighting key words and phrases in the transcripts (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Patton, 2015) and identifying major themes of each co-researcher’s interview (Brinkmann &
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Kvale, 2015). I then wrote co-researchers’ stories based on a systematic review of the data for each co-researcher including the most salient aspects of the interview and their journal reflections.

After writing stories for each co-researcher, I identified patterns (Patton, 2015; Saldaña, 2013) common to a majority of co-researchers and found six themes that were common to all co-researchers. I used qualitative inductive analysis (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Patton, 2015) by examining the data from the stories of co-researchers and the transcribed interviews several times and employed content analysis to look for patterns and similarities in: language used, outcomes, answers to interview questions, what a typical Sabbath looks like, and overarching themes between the ten stories (Patton, 2015). I then used qualitative deductive analysis (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Patton, 2015) by re-reading co-researchers’ stories using content analysis to identify language and themes in which co-researchers’ experiences aligned with the theories that frame this project and coincide or not with the current literature on this topic.

Finally, one of the key components of organic inquiry is transformation of the researcher (Braud, 2010; Clements, 2011; Curry & Wells, 2006). As Clements (2011) states, primary researchers are likely to experience more transformation than co-researchers due to their level of involvement in a research project. I examined the change I encountered as a result of this research project and my experiments with integrating a weekly Sabbath in my life. I read my journal entries and reflected on changes I experienced in the past several months in my account of transformation.

As a result of data analysis, I wrote 10 co-researcher stories, identified six themes common to all co-researchers and additional themes common to over half the co-researchers, and reflected upon my transformation as the primary researcher during this process.
Reliability and Validity

Reliability is about achieving consistent results when a research project is repeated (Anderson & Braud, 2011) and consistency in data coding (Vogt et al., 2012). Reliability is required to achieve validity (Anderson & Braud, 2011; Vogt et al., 2012). A disadvantage of being a sole researcher is that it is possible that I may have missed a theme or may not have considered a possible explanation when analyzing data that another researcher might have seen. Recording and transcribing my interviews helped me not to have to rely on memory to know exactly what a co-researcher said. Going back to original data of interviews and transcripts at least four times helped improve reliability (Roberts & Priest, 2010). Using multiple forms of data analysis also contributes to validity (Anderson & Braud, 2011). I used coding and content analysis from an organic inquiry perspective going through the data at least four times and qualitative inductive analysis and qualitative deductive analysis.

Validity assesses whether the research accurately answers the research question (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013). Anderson and Braud (2011) focus on two forms of validity: researcher validation and research participant validation. They suggest the following steps to enhance validity, which I followed: spending adequate time with research participants, gathering feedback from peer researchers and research participants, and documenting one’s research process. To ensure my research was valid, I conducted member checks (Anderson & Braud, 2011; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Roberts & Priest, 2010; Willis et al., 2007). I contacted each co-researcher with a copy of their story to be sure it was accurate, complete, and represented their experience well and invited any comments or additions. Most said their stories were fine as is. One co-researcher requested that I add a minor detail that would help with clarity; another asked to remove a couple of “likes” and “ums” that I originally left in as they seemed natural in
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the conversation. One co-researcher who wanted to use a pseudonym after her interview changed her mind and asked that I use her real first name. Four co-researchers indicated some change in their Sabbath practices since their interviews in January. I also kept a research journal in which I recorded my steps while collecting and interpreting data (Willis et al., 2007) and reflected on the research process and my role in it, which can add to validity (Etherington, 2004; Roberts & Priest, 2010).

According to Clements (2011), research has transformative validity when “it succeeds in affecting the individual reader through identification with and change of her or his prevailing story, as witnessed in the arenas of self, Spirit, and service” (p. 157). One initial reader of a draft of the results chapter indicated that co-researcher stories touched her deeply and made her rethink her ideas about a Sabbath. Another reader was inspired to establish a Sabbath in her family and has reported that their son chooses to spend Sabbath time with his family over time with friends. Another reader asked about a secular equivalent of a Sabbath as she is an atheist. She feels bad when she is not productive all the time, but often gets burned out. She is now talking about intentionally scheduling time and giving herself permission to relax and take a break.

Organic inquiry uses four types of experience throughout the research process—“thinking, feeling, intuition, and sensation,” to provide a balanced assessment (Clements, 2011, p. 142). Curry and Wells (2006) state that organic inquiry is a model that asks researchers and participants to bring their entire selves to the research process and that topics studied, therefore, have greater validity because of this holistic approach. Anderson and Braud (2011) argue that primary researchers have the greatest accountability for judging the validity of any research. My reflexivity throughout this project, attention to detail, the consistency of themes between co-
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researcher experiences, and co-researchers’ approval of their stories lead me to believe these results are valid.

**Design-Specific Strengths and Limitations**

All research methods, no matter how well suited to a particular situation, still have inherent strengths and limitations. Below I outline advantages and disadvantages of my research design and method.

Organic inquiry provides flexibility, takes a holistic approach to research, and understands that everything is connected (Curry & Wells, 2006) which can be a great strength—especially in areas that value a holistic framework. Seeing everything as connected can also contribute to a researcher losing focus and including more information than is necessary (Curry & Wells, 2006). Organic inquiry allows room for creativity and change based on current needs of a situation (Clements, 2011; Curry & Wells, 2006). Because it is relatively new, there are limited resources available about this method. While organic inquiry promotes receptiveness to the sacred, both researchers and readers must be open to spiritual experiences and to engage on a level beyond just an intellectual one if they are likely to experience transformation according to Clements (2011). Organic inquiry focuses on story-telling allowing readers to get a more holistic sense of co-researchers and sees co-researcher perspectives as key rather than relying mainly on the view of the primary researcher (Clements, 2011; Curry & Wells, 2006).

Interviews allowed for a more in-depth picture of co-researchers (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Strengths of semi-structured interviews include allowing for follow-up questions based on answers co-researchers provide (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Using semi-structured interviews also allows co-researchers to raise issues a researcher has not included (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Interviews, however, have limitations as well.
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Interviews are subjective by nature and require strong skills of the researcher (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Gubrium et al., 2012; Josselson, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Interviews require the collaboration of research participants, are hard to duplicate, and rely on the candidness and honesty of participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). My various professional positions have provided an opportunity to develop skills helpful in establishing rapport to create comfortable environments for co-researchers. I believe my attempts to establish a weekly Sabbath enhanced rapport with co-researchers as well. Interviews often focus on the individual rather than the larger social context (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). As a sole researcher, it is also possible that I missed something another researcher might have seen. Another researcher may have followed up on and explored areas I did not in the interviews or brought additional perspectives when analyzing data or addressing potential implications.

The methods I used in this research project provide for a rich, in-depth look at one aspect of the lives of 10 individuals at one point in time. Due to the confines of a course-based research project and just a few weeks to gather data as a sole researcher, the number of participants I could interview was limited. While there was some diversity within the backgrounds of the 10 co-researchers, only women expressed an interest in being interviewed. There were no families with younger children in this study either. Nine out of 10 co-researchers live in the Midwest, and nine out of 10 live in large metropolitan areas. My findings, therefore, cannot be generalized to a broader population.

As a sole researcher, I also acknowledge that I came into the research with biases, as do all researchers. Researchers must be self-aware to be effective and to be as transparent as possible when sharing their preconceptions (Anderson & Braud, 2011; Brinkmann & Kvale,
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2015; Etherington, 2004; Josselson, 2013). My hope is to acknowledge those biases up front by sharing these lenses and how they have affected this research project.
Research Lenses

The point of the sabbath is to honor our need for a sane rhythm of work and rest. It is to honor the body’s need for rest, the spirit’s need for replenishment and the soul’s need to delight itself in God for God’s own sake. It begins with a willingness to acknowledge the limits of our humanness and take steps to live more graciously with the order of things.

(Barton, 2006, p. 137)

The purpose of this chapter is to articulate the theoretical, personal, and professional lenses that have influenced the development of this research study. While not all researchers address this topic, I recognize that my various lenses have impacted this research. When not addressed, readers can only guess about how a researcher’s experiences, philosophies, and assumptions affect an author’s view of the nature of reality or what one knows or values.

I begin with the theoretical lenses guiding this study and how they influenced this research. Next, I describe relevant professional and personal lenses and how they have impacted this project.

Theoretical Lenses

Two theories that have shaped this project include the theory of holism and principles of Catholic social teaching. Micozzi (2010) refers to holism in which everything is interdependent and all things impact one another. Our well-being depends on the interplay of our physical, biological, psychological, intellectual, spiritual, nutritional, and ecological health (Micozzi, 2010; Seaward, 2012). I believe that the concept of holism not only applies to individuals, but to the world community and our environment as well—what we do as individuals impacts all others and our environment. When I am not well or at peace, I can negatively affect others around me. When I am in a state of well-being, I am more apt to impact others positively. Celebrating a weekly Sabbath helps promote inner peace and well-being in my life. I believe a weekly Sabbath
can do the same for others as well. This concept of holism is related to another influence in my life—principles of Catholic social teaching.

Principles of Catholic social teaching (see Himes, 2013 for a thorough discussion of Catholic social thinking) have been a large influence in my life. The dignity of all life is at the core of Catholic social teaching. Catholic social teaching calls us to live in right relationship—with ourselves, others near and far, and the natural world (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005). Catholic social teaching recognizes the dignity and connectedness of all life, our human rights and responsibilities to work for the common good, the dignity of work and rights of workers, the need to evaluate policies by how they affect those who are most vulnerable, and the need to be stewards of creation (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005). I believe it is not enough to be concerned about how I am faring, but that I am called to care about the welfare of all human beings and the rest of creation. Celebrating a weekly Sabbath provides the space to remind me of these values on a regular basis. Catholic social thought also has influenced me to consider social justice aspects of Sabbath-keeping and how Sabbath-keeping can be a vehicle for promoting justice for all.

**Professional and Personal Lenses**

I have several professional and personal experiences related to this project. I describe these experiences below and how I think they may have influenced this research.

I work as a Health and Wellness Coach for a company whose mission is to help people be healthy through coaching related to lifestyle choices such as nutrition, physical activity, stress management, sleep, and work-life-balance. I have seen that stress often underlies other issues and the importance of people finding effective ways to manage stress in their lives. I believe celebrating a Sabbath is one effective way to do so.
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I worked for several years as a Pastoral Associate for Social Justice in a large Catholic Parish. This work not only impacted my spirituality; it has also made me more aware of many situations of injustice and prompted me to think about what I can do to help in some small way to be a part of working for a more just world. I believe Sabbath-keeping can help us see beyond our needs and gives us the space to imagine and work for a more humane world.

Pursuing a degree in Holistic Health Studies has also largely influenced me in pursuing this research topic. Due to my interest in social justice issues, I have been especially interested in holistic approaches to health that are accessible to all, regardless of income. While there are many effective holistic modalities, they are often not covered by insurance and are therefore frequently not available to those with limited incomes. Celebrating a weekly Sabbath can be a no- or low-cost holistic practice with no special equipment or long training periods required.

I have studied and been interested in the topic of voluntary simplicity for many years and have sought to live a simpler lifestyle. I have met people in and beyond the United States without the means to feed and clothe themselves adequately. Living a simpler lifestyle and using resources judiciously also uses fewer of the earth’s resources and is a part of caring for creation, in my view, and allows me to support causes in which I believe. Celebrating a Sabbath is one aspect of living more simply and lessening negative impacts on the natural world.

I completed a degree in International Peace Studies where I had the privilege of studying with other students from around the world. I also have had the opportunity to work with organizations working for global peace. Promoting world peace without personal peace will usually be fruitless. Professors taught this lesson and I saw it reinforced in my work with various organizations. Sabbath is a practice that can promote personal and family peace.
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I can think of several ways personal experiences have impacted me as a researcher in this project. A significant influence is that I grew up in the Catholic Church. While often critical of the institutional church, I have chosen to remain a member due to my many positive experiences within the church and the depth of spirituality I have witnessed at times. In grade school, I learned about the commandment to “honor the Lord’s Day” in religious education class, although I do not remember any details other than talking about attending weekly mass. This class likely piqued my interest in learning more about this topic. Having been steeped in Catholic, Christian theology and teaching all of my life, I value a faith that promotes peace and joy in our lives and emphasizes caring for one another and God’s creation. I believe celebrating a Sabbath can contribute to these aspects.

I am of German, Irish, African American, Haudenosaunee (commonly referred to as Iroquois), and Scottish heritage. I suspect my dad’s German influence has affected me and remember my dad saying “work first, play later” many times. I am a twin and grew up with nine siblings. Being the oldest daughters, my parents expected us to help with my younger brothers and sisters and cooking and household chores when my mom went back to paid employment. As I liked school and my parents expected us to get good grades, it often seemed that there was plenty of time for work, but little time for play. My African American and Haudenosaunee roots have made me more aware of issues of equity and privilege. My Haudenosaunee heritage has likely influenced my appreciation of nature and the need to be good stewards of the Earth and our natural resources and the value of living a simpler lifestyle. Promoting a Sabbath can also mean we lessen our impact on the earth by limiting driving and having more time to appreciate nature.
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Growing up in a family with little for extras meant I worked from an early age to pay for most of my clothes, activities with friends, and extracurricular activities. Taking an entire day off once I was in junior high school was a rarity. When I did have a day off, I often caught up on sleep. As I worked during college to pay for expenses, I never considered the possibility of taking an entire day off. Nor did I know anyone who celebrated a Sabbath.

As I moved into the work world, I had several positions where I worked with students and volunteers. In addition to daytime work hours, I needed to be available when students or volunteers were available—at night and on weekends, making it difficult to take an entire day off. I worked for a church for 11 years where my charge was to educate and engage others in responding to issues of injustice from a faith perspective. As a result, I rarely felt finished with my work. It was especially difficult not to respond to many compelling needs, particularly when they were local issues, and it seemed that if we did not provide a response, no one would. I remember thinking I could benefit from a Sabbath, but could not figure out how to incorporate one in my life, which has likely made me want to consider how to help others do so.

Whether my jobs came with benefits or not also affected my ability to take time off. I worked in positions where I had no benefits, no sick time, or paid vacation, making it difficult to choose to take time off even knowing I would benefit from doing so. I have also had the privilege of positions with generous benefits with over a month of paid vacation and plenty of sick time if needed. While not necessarily providing built-in weekly rest, these benefits provided opportunities to take at least occasional breaks from work. Not always having generous benefits has made me more aware of the privilege of keeping a Sabbath in my life.

Work, as for so many other parents, did not end when the workday ended, especially as a single parent of an adopted daughter who grew up with too much trauma in her life. While I
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encouraged a day off for both of us on the day that worked well for me, my daughter created a
day of rest when it worked for her, where she, in essence, refused to do anything that felt like
work to her unless she had no other choice. I witnessed how taking a day off was critical to her
mental health. From a holistic health perspective, this experience has reinforced my belief that
celebrating a weekly Sabbath, or day of rest, can be a useful means to aid in healing and for
maintaining one’s well-being. It has also likely made me particularly attuned to benefits that
contribute to positive mental health.

The first time I thought much about the concept of Sabbath, as an adult, I was initially
less impressed. I had moved to North Carolina from Minnesota in 1989 and was annoyed; “What
do you mean stores aren’t open on Sundays?” In addition to time for church, I saw Sundays as a
time for shopping and errands left over from Saturdays. I came to realize, however, that
businesses closing meant people could celebrate Sunday as a day of rest. It did not take me long
to appreciate the gift of more time to gather with friends for leisurely meals, activities, and the
chance to enjoy nature on Sundays. It made me think about the commandment I learned growing
up to “honor the Lord’s Day.” Within a few years, many stores began opening on Sundays. I
remember thinking at the time, “Stop, don’t give up this day of sanity in which we can focus on
people and rest rather than another day devoted to consumerism.” Exposure to elements of a
Sabbath in the past created a desire to experience Sabbath more deeply. My experience in North
Carolina also contributed to a vision for ways others might benefit as well.

Since living in North Carolina, I have typically avoided shopping and running errands on
Sundays. It has been harder to avoid work of any kind, particularly when I worked for a church. I
have also been in graduate school while working full-time, making it difficult to take an entire
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day off. Because I knew no one personally who celebrated a Sabbath of any kind, I have had little support for doing so.

I have challenged myself, while working on this research project, to keep a weekly Sabbath. As I am not in a faith community where this is the norm, I have reflected on what my ideal Sabbath ought to include and exclude. These experiments in creating a Sabbath in my life and my personal and professional experiences have given me a first-hand view of both the benefits and dilemmas of celebrating a Sabbath as well as convinced me of the larger impact Sabbath-keeping could have if it became a more widespread practice. My desire to incorporate a weekly Sabbath in my life has no doubt influenced the questions I chose to explore with my co-researchers. In addition to seeking more information about a practice that might benefit others from a holistic perspective, I wanted to learn from others about their practices and challenges to enrich my own Sabbath practice.
Results

Our hearts rest after each beat. Our lungs rest for . . . a moment between each breath. After six days of work, we need rest . . . . Sabbath is central to the rhythm of creation. It isn’t that rest is more “spiritual” than work. Rather, Sabbath, well practiced, makes every day . . . sacred . . ., and the six days of work give shape and meaning to Sabbath.

(Bell, 2009, p. 28)

The purpose of this chapter is to explain in detail the results of this research project describing how celebrating a weekly Sabbath promotes transformation. In this chapter, I describe the co-researchers, share observational data, outline co-researchers’ stories and transformation, identify group themes, and describe my transformation as the primary researcher. For this research project, I am defining transformation as a shift in one’s thinking, feeling, behavior, well-being, or relationships that may be gradual, subtle, or dramatic (Braud, 2011; Clements, 2011; Curry & Wells, 2006).

Description of Co-Researchers

I report results here for interviews of 10 women, ages 20 to 63 years old. Except one co-researcher, all live in or close to large metropolitan cities in the Midwest and the Northeast. The 10th co-researcher lives in a small Midwestern town. Five of the ten co-researchers grew up in families that observed a Sabbath. Co-researchers have been celebrating a Sabbath ranging from one year to all of their lives. While several co-researchers have people in their lives who are supportive of their efforts to keep a weekly Sabbath, none of them belong to larger communities where Sabbath-keeping is the norm. All of the co-researchers were part of a household. Some are married or live with a partner. Others live with their family of origin, with extended family, or with roommates. One person has a teenage son, another a daughter in college, and others have grown children. Only one married couple observes a Sabbath together. Two co-researchers are Jewish, one is an eclectic pagan, the others are Christian—non-denominational, Anglican,
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Catholic, Lutheran, and unaffiliated. Spirituality was important for all of the co-researchers and they all resonated with the term Sabbath. I, therefore, focus on a spiritually-based Sabbath in the remainder of this thesis.

Observational Data

Interviews lasted from one to two hours. I conducted three interviews via Google Hangout or FaceTime with out-of-town co-researchers. I found it hard to hear in two of the interviews due to background noise. One of those interviews was in a coffee shop, and one was an interview via FaceTime where the co-researcher was in a coffee shop. In both of these cases, the background noise may have led to shorter answers at times and some missed opportunities for follow-up questions. All co-researchers appeared enthusiastic about Sabbath-keeping and sharing their experiences. In four cases, co-researchers chose to continue beyond the time upon which we agreed, so interviews went about a half-hour longer than planned. I assured everyone I was seeking honest reality, not perfection, and co-researchers were forthcoming as they shared challenges they encountered to keep a consistent, ideal Sabbath. Co-researchers appeared comfortable, and I was surprised at the level of personal sharing. Laughter was a part of most interviews as well as tears in a couple of cases. Three of the co-researchers shared what they wrote or drew in their journals.

There were several commonalities in how most co-researchers celebrate their Sabbaths despite their different backgrounds. All co-researchers mentioned that they find it beneficial to get out in nature during their Sabbaths. All but one co-researcher specifically mentioned prayer as a part of their Sabbath and that co-researcher is seeking a stronger spiritual component in her Sabbath and has a strong mindfulness meditation practice. Almost all co-researchers contacted out-of-town family members or involved family members in some way during their Sabbaths.
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Nearly all co-researchers stated that spending time in solitude for a period was a part of their Sabbaths. Most co-researchers said that they like to get out for a walk or to be physically active during their Sabbaths. Several co-researchers saw their Sabbath time as a time for reflection on serious topics. Reading was another activity several women mentioned. Most co-researchers mentioned napping or physical rest as a part of their Sabbaths. I did not ask specifically about the role of music in their Sabbaths, yet the majority of co-researchers specifically talked about music being an important part of their Sabbath. More than half of the co-researchers also said they take time for other creative arts such as writing poetry, art, and painting. Several co-researchers specifically said that gratitude was a quality they sought to cultivate during their Sabbaths.

Even though I did not ask a question about a Sabbath for the larger culture, each co-researcher mentioned in some way that our broader society would benefit by celebrating a regular Sabbath or day of rest. Several co-researchers commented as well about how the constant connection to social media and cell phones often gets in the way of rest and renewal. Most of the women made a conscious effort to avoid or limit social media and the use of computers and phones.

Most co-researchers talked little about their Sabbath-keeping with others—sometimes keeping it even from family. In some cases, co-researchers thought others would not understand. A few women expressed concerns about sounding judgmental when talking to others that do not keep a Sabbath. Some co-researchers expressed concerns that others might assume their friendships were not valued if they chose their Sabbath over another invitation.

All co-researchers encountered some difficulties in celebrating an on-going Sabbath. Some of the women gave up the opportunity to work and earn money to incorporate a day of rest and one health care worker has a job that requires her to work weekends. Everyone dealt with
invitations for special events and inevitable work, school, or family obligations that are difficult to reschedule.

Completing all obligations without taking some time on the Sabbath was another challenge for a few co-researchers. Being able to let go of worry was another problem that a couple of women mentioned. One co-researcher spoke of the difficulty of keeping a family Sabbath with adolescents that had events frequently scheduled during their Sabbath. Finally, living far from a spiritual community with which they resonate was a particular challenge for two co-researchers. Almost all of the women also expressed an interest in learning more about how others celebrate their Sabbaths and how they deal with typical challenges in incorporating a weekly Sabbath in their lives.

Co-Researchers’ Context and Transformation

Because context and storytelling are key components of organic inquiry (Clements, 2011; Curry & Wells, 2006), I provide some basic information about the co-researchers. As the co-researchers have different philosophies and practices, a glimpse into the various ways that they celebrate their Sabbaths and reasons for doing so also provides important context before describing their transformation. To respect co-researchers’ practices and traditions and to reflect their various practices and philosophies of celebrating a Sabbath, I typically use their language as much as possible. I do not include all the “ums,” “likes,” “you knows,” or incomplete thoughts that are common in spoken language as they can be distracting from the themes themselves; hence you will see many ellipses in the quotes. I also shortened some quotes in the interest of brevity. Words in italics are co-researchers’ direct phrases.

Artika. Artika is in her 30s and is of African American heritage. She has honored or celebrated a Sabbath most of her life. She grew up in a family in which relatives disagreed about
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the timing of Sabbath, so they honored a Sabbath all weekend. Sabbath was a time of reverence, a time to nurture faith, and a time to honor their religious heritage. Artika’s uncle, a Pentecostal minister, was a friend of a rabbi, so she learned about Sabbath and her faith as a young person when she attended Hebrew school on Saturdays. Artika did not always reverence a Sabbath while in college or graduate school, but otherwise, has been consistent in her practice.

Artika recognizes the Sabbath as being sundown on Saturday evening to sundown Sunday evening. She attended ministry school and is often called upon to give a sermon on Sundays. A common way to begin her Sabbath is studying, reflecting, and preparing sermon notes should she be asked to provide a reflection. An important part of her Sabbath includes journaling whereby Artika writes about matters she wouldn’t talk about with others and reflects on her progress and thought process over the years.

Sunday morning, she attends Sunday school and serves as an usher at a nondenominational Christian church. Afterward, she frequently shops for groceries for a soul food dinner that she cooks with her mom and sister for extended family, friends, and other guests who could use some support. Celebrating her entire family coming together in a loving environment to support one another, to share about their lives, to laugh together, and to learn about their family and cultural heritage is another Sabbath tradition. In the summer, Artika’s family gardens together which helps them connect to nature and be more aware of the source of their sustenance.

Artika does not watch TV and avoids work-related activities during her Sabbath. She also naps some Sunday afternoons and often spends time in nature and expressed an interest in participating in community service activities.
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While it is challenging to turn down invitations from friends for Saturday evening get-togethers, Artika finds the spiritual clarity of Sabbath has become more beneficial to her than even her best vacations:

*I would put my Sabbath even on top of the best vacation I’ve had. And I’ve traveled all over the world. But to be able to sit down, reflect, to hear from God with some clarity and not hear somebody else’s opinion, to get clarity on what I’m supposed to do, what direction I’m supposed to go, that’s when I’ve been the most productive, the most satisfied, the most successful.*

Artika has found her Sabbath provides an opportunity to be more deliberate and to consider how to integrate her many different roles as attorney, author, advocate, speaker, educator, administrator, and person of faith. Honoring a regular Sabbath has also helped Artika find her authentic voice:

*Setting aside time has helped me to find my authentic voice of . . . who I am and what am I called to do. I don’t think I answered those questions until I started . . . setting aside the time for . . . the Sabbath. I was just whoever everyone else wanted me to be.*

Artika often takes time to consider her relationships during her Sabbath and reported that she is now more intentional about how she interacts with others and is more patient and giving:

*Over the past couple months, I realized it wasn’t just going to the grocery store. It’s also the essence of who I interact with and how. Like simple things. . . . There’s an Aldi right by my church, so whether it’s giving someone an extra reusable bag—I know it’s small and minor but I’m like “Oh no, don’t buy the bag, I’ll give you my extra bag”—or just interacting with people on a daily basis—a smile, [or] short conversation.*

Artika shared an incident of someone hitting her car in the parking lot at the grocery store and working to be peaceful because it was Sunday. She then realized her faith is calling her to bring the same values she tries to live out during her Sabbath to the rest of her week.

Honoring Sabbath provides Artika space to think more deeply about the work she does. She gave an example of when she was struggling with her work for justice and how she was
inspired by the example of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). It came to her during her Sabbath time that when the SCLC articulated its mission, it was not just about integrating lunch counters or buses, but about a much larger vision “to save the soul of America.” Her time grappling alone with God during her Sabbath played a critical part in dealing with a time of deep questioning last year and has prompted a change in her thinking about the nature of justice and her role in working for greater equity and that it is about something bigger than the individual issues:

[We] challenge God and say how can that injustice exist? But I think . . . God works . . . through you and I . . . I look at justice differently because before I thought what was the point? . . . It’s like everywhere I turn there’s a new injustice or same problems. . . . But . . . I come at it in a . . . different way in saying that God is a God of justice and . . . is waiting for believers to stand up when they see injustice. . . . Sabbath has provided me those chances to think about what will I do in constructive ways.

Artika reports that honoring a regular Sabbath causes her to change her priorities at times:

It’s tempting to do everything that I want to do . . . and then it comes to Sabbath. . . . It causes me to think about where I put my time and energy. . . . What I hope to accomplish on each day and what God wants me to accomplish usually are like night and day.

Honoring a regular Sabbath has also given Artika a new way of thinking about productivity. Rather than doing more, she sees productivity as having the time and space to be strategic about how to effectively address challenges. Her Sabbath helps her do this.

Artika’s Sabbath continues to change but always positively impacts the rest of her week. She reports the remainder of her week would be more challenging without her Sabbath. Her Sabbath allows her to refocus and center herself. Artika’s Sabbath makes her more aware of her connection to nature, deepens her faith, changes the way she thinks about and approaches her work and purpose in life, and helps her be more authentic and deliberate in her relationships.
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Molly. Molly is 27 and is of Scottish, Irish, and unknown heritage as her mother was adopted and does not know much about her background. She was raised Catholic and loosely observed a Sabbath growing up but did not keep a Sabbath in high school or college. Molly found a second job to pay for legal fees after receiving a ticket for driving while intoxicated over three years ago but continued drinking pretty heavily. Molly felt like her only purpose was to work and thought she would never have the money she needed. After working 60-65 hours a week for approximately 20 days without a break, Molly was an emotional basket case and so burnt out that she knew she could not continue this way. She told her boss that she would no longer work Sundays and would give up that income and use that day instead to attend church, relax, recuperate, and prepare for the coming week. After church, Molly would watch Netflix, cook meals, and clean her apartment. Molly also began going to breakfast with her family. She used to run half-marathons and would take her long runs on her Sabbath day and used those runs for deep talks with God.

Molly has since heard about the idea of Sabbath as a time to rest, pray, and play, so she now incorporates activities for fun, her spiritual well-being, and physical rest. Because she has recently taken a new position in ministry within a church, she now holds space for a Sabbath on Fridays rather than Sundays. Her day off includes time in prayer, reading Scripture, listening to praise music, self-reflection, time in nature, and being physically active. Molly attends Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings and is also working on a Christian 12-step program. Molly loves running errands so also includes time for this on her day off. She considers her Sabbath as an investment in herself.

Molly attributes her Sabbath as giving her space to contemplate and change her identity, ultimately leading to her sobriety:
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That Sunday created this . . . sacred space where I can think about . . . what am I doing with my life? . . . what is my ultimate purpose? . . . I just thought all I have to do is work harder and do more and life will just figure itself out. And taking that time to rest . . . just opened a whole new realm to me . . . you know, maybe life isn’t just all about work. . . . Only after taking that Sabbath was I able to . . . have time to think about . . . bigger life questions. . . . So since I’ve started taking . . . my day off, I have gone through recovery.

What started out primarily as a day of rest for Molly has become a more spiritual practice and has nurtured her relationship with God and even changed her understanding of God:

I started taking a Sabbath and as a result . . . [I’ve learned] that God loves me not based on performance, but because he created me. . . . It has really changed my view of God . . . and why . . . I’m here. It’s informed my purpose in life.

Molly reports that her Sabbath has also allowed her to be more giving of her time when she might otherwise hesitate:

Taking a day of rest has allowed me to be generous with my time. . . . Like in AA for example, there’s this concept of sponsorship . . . so you work with someone who has less sobriety than you to . . . mentor them. . . . It’s a big time commitment. . . . so I’m more inclined to say like yeah, let’s meet up for coffee, let’s talk . . . let’s get together and be in relationship if I know that . . . I have a day where I’m not obligated to do that. . . . I think I’m more willing to . . . sacrifice that time or energy . . . if I know that there’s going to be time where I can rest.

Molly believes her Sabbath also helps her be more accepting of others and provides space to process things that happen during the week:

Having a sacred space and time to process through all the things . . . that . . . bump into my energy throughout the week . . . helps to shift those ideas and me being accepting when I’m . . . more rested. Then I’m in a better place where I’m not reacting where I can actually . . . think [things] through.

Finally, Molly notices that she is also physically healthier when she observes a Sabbath:

If I were to miss that day of rest it just feels like the next week lasts [an] eternity . . . I feel run down. I will often get sick, like I can tell . . . it takes about one cycle to miss . . . one day of rest and then not sleeping and that combination like I’m sick within three days.
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Molly’s Sabbath contributed significantly to her sobriety and promoted a new understanding of God and her purpose in life. Her Sabbath helps her be more generous in helping others, encourages her to be more accepting, and supports better physical health.

**Shira.** Shira is 24 and identifies as Caucasian. She was raised Catholic but was seeking something more and experimented with Islam and Hinduism and learned about other religions in high school. Shira developed her love of Shabbos in college when she found a recording of Jewish music that touched her soul. Understanding Shabbat as key to Judaism, she observed her first Shabbos. At the time, she only knew that Shabbat was a day to refrain from work.

Shira has kept a Sabbath for six years. After college, she converted to Judaism. She considers herself *traditionally egalitarian* as she follows Jewish law and recognizes the equality of women and LGBTQ individuals. Shira is now attending Rabbinical school in a large urban area and lives with two housemates. Even though she is in Rabbinical school, she has not found a synagogue that she feels is a good fit and does not have community support for keeping Shabbat.

Shira keeps an Orthodox Shabbos and follows the 39 traditional prohibitions—activities that Judaism does not allow in an Orthodox Shabbat. A significant aspect of Shira's Shabbos is that it is different from the other six days of the week. Shira thinks it is important that the best *part of you should get to come out* on Shabbat. Music, prayer, mindfulness, spending time in nature, and caring for the earth have been key components of Shabbos for Shira.

How Shira keeps Shabbat and how she feels about her Shabbos practice has changed over the years. In the first two years, Shira observed Shabbat with her sister Becky while they both attended the same Catholic college by taking the day off, making challah—the traditional braided bread, playing games, listening to music, taking walks, watching a movie, and drawing. After her sister graduated, Shira kept Shabbat alone. Music continued to be an important part of bringing
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in and ending Shira’s Shabbos and served as an imaginary community of sorts for her. She found herself watching movies or TV as a way to pass time and ease her loneliness. Shira explained that now that she knows more about a traditional Shabbat, she would not include television or movies as part of her Sabbath. She described having mixed feelings about Shabbos due to the power of the music and simultaneously feeling lonely when she had a difficult time filling the rest of Shabbat. After graduation, Shira moved back home where she lit candles on Friday nights but worked or used her computer and had a pretty limited Sabbath practice.

Shira’s Shabbat changed significantly when she officially converted to Judaism and studied at a Talmud Academy for a semester where she lived in an Orthodox community. She was never without a Shabbat invitation. During this time, her Sabbaths were very communal, filled with singing, rich conversation, and going to the Synagogue. It was here that Shira learned about a traditional Shabbat which involves not turning on lights, no driving, and other restrictions related to 39 prohibited activities. Her time at the Talmud Academy was a formative experience for Shira as it was the first Jewish community of which she was a part. Her experience of Shabbos brought a new sense of peace:

\[
I\text{ never slept as well as I would on Friday nights because . . . I would get . . . this feeling of . . . so much tranquility and peace.}
\]

Shira decided to move back home for a short while before attending Rabbinical School. During this time, she and her sister continued to bake challah and ate Shabbat dinner Friday night. Shira borrowed Jewish songbooks, and they included singing as well. On Saturdays, Shira would pray, eat lunch, talk to people, and read books. She was still struggling with how to fill her afternoons as she waited for Shabbat to end.

When Shira started Rabbinical School, her Sabbath practice changed again. She lives far from a Synagogue; her housemates do not observe a traditional Shabbos, and most of her
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classmates think a traditional Shabbat is *ridiculous*. Even though it is important to Shira, she has begun questioning how feasible it is to keep an Orthodox Shabbat without community support. Despite her feelings of isolation, she experiences many positive aspects of Shabbat.

When Shira is overwhelmed, keeping Shabbat revives her. Her drawing\(^1\) below exemplifies how she feels—nearly out of energy and exhausted. During Shabbat, she is re-energized again so she can finish all that tasks she did not get to on Friday:

Shira feels that power dynamics between people seem to change on Shabbat:

*I’ve gone to teachers’ houses before and . . . it doesn’t really feel like they’re my teacher anymore . . . we’re all equals on Shabbat . . . Same with . . . people that I don’t necessarily always get along with . . . if I spend Shabbat with them . . . We end up having very rich conversations . . . it’s almost like people become different people on Shabbat. There’s a beautiful Midrash about how people get . . . an extra soul on Shabbat . . . There is something that’s a little bit different . . . everybody’s kind of equal, there’s more friendship, there’s more peace.*

\(^1\) Used with permission
Shabbat provides more opportunities for prayer and intimacy with God. One of her most cherished times is watching the sunset, singing, and connecting with God just before the end of Shabbat. Shira has also seen a change in her spirituality. She describes her drawings\(^2\) below:

*The first picture shows the* practice that I had of listening to music... That feeling of like your heart just... flies out of your body and it’s just this feeling of... flying over the world.

*When I was [at the Talmud Academy] and... afterwards... there’s that feeling of... the law maker, the judge, like you will be judged if you do not follow the rules exactly... this feeling of... fear and strictness and constriction and perfection and... doing things the right way.*

*Where I’m at now [is] singing with just myself... that feeling of intimacy... One of the Psalms talks about it... the Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want... Lying by the stream and... a bed of roses. It’s like that feeling of being very... close and very intimate with something very sacred, and so that is the feeling that comes from that watching the sun go down, sort of... communing with God and sort of alone time, and that rest and serenity and peace... Now how to hang onto these feelings the whole day?*

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\(^2\) Used with permission
Shira finds that these faces of God change according to what she does, where she is, or who she is around. When she was at the Talmud academy, she said she challenged tradition and saw God as being open and accepting. After leaving that community, Shira felt a need to be a flag-bearer to hold onto the tradition of an Orthodox Shabbat so that it would not be lost. She has noticed, however, a shift in some of her tendencies to be a perfectionist and a rule follower after reflecting on her experience in the Orthodox community. Shira feels the rules sometimes became more important than the actual spirit of Shabbos—what she said some refer to as Jewish OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder). She now tries to focus on keeping a meaningful Shabbat rather than focusing on following all the rules perfectly.

Observing Shabbos has also given Shira a greater appreciation for the need to care for the Earth. Shira explained that the 39 labors prohibited in the Talmud were about changing the world in some way, and the point of Shabbat is to exist within the world without working to change it for a day. Not using electricity during Shabbat makes her more conscious of the electrical power she uses all week and she appreciates it more. Shira started by unplugging her computer on Shabbat; now she unplugs it anytime she is not using it and is vigilant about turning off lights when not in use. Shira likes to walk when possible as well rather than driving because of the harm driving can cause to the earth.

Shira feels that her Shabbat practice has cultivated other positive qualities such as planning skills and being more mindful. She has become more disciplined in planning ahead to have everything ready before Shabbat begins. Shabbat has helped Shira be more mindful. For example, she now appreciates the miracle of turning on a light for the first time after Shabbat ends or the ability to so easily drive from one location to another.
Spending two or three hours over a meal singing and sharing about each other’s weeks and talking about bigger questions has strengthened Shira’s relationship with her sister. While they had a strong connection before, Shira found that her Shabbos practice has significantly enhanced their relationship with no technology to hide behind or distract them.

For Shira, Shabbat helps her go from overwhelmed to energized. She feels a change in power dynamics during Shabbos. She feels closer to God and her image of God has changed through her Shabbos practice. How Shira keeps Shabbat has also changed; she now gives more attention to the meaning of Shabbos instead of concentrating on observing all the prohibitions flawlessly. She has strengthened her relationship with her sister through the Shabbats they have spent together. Shira believes she is a better planner and more mindful as a result of observing Shabbos. Finally, Shira’s Shabbats have contributed to her having a stronger appreciation for caring for the Earth and taking new actions to minimize her impact on the planet.

**Kah.** Kah is 41. She has a mixed cultural heritage and identifies as Hispanic. She lives with her son and partner. While she involves them in her day of rest, she spends a good part of the day in solitude. She was raised Lutheran and was very involved in church—to the point that others thought she would become a minister. She is now an *eclectic pagan*. Growing up, her family went to church and then to a big Sunday dinner at her grandparents with all her cousins. She became very intentional and consistent about her Sabbath when she moved across the country with a sick newborn baby and was newly divorced. Sunday is Kah’s day to *reground, repurpose, and reflect*.

Kah uses several terms to describe her current day of rest, but a favorite is *me time*. She honors herself, her family, and the day by resting, relaxing, and spending time with family. Kah starts her Sunday mornings with coffee, goes outside, pays attention to the birds, plays with her
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dog, and feels the earth to ground herself regardless of the temperature. She then cooks breakfast for her family, puts on Latin music from her Puerto Rican grandmother and sings. After breakfast, Kah reads, journals, works with her tarot cards, or begins an art project. Room for spontaneity is essential to Kah. From 11:00 AM until 3:00 or 4:00 PM is her time to do whatever nourishes her soul. Kah does walking meditations and talks to the Creator and her spirit guides, squirrels . . . frogs . . . birds . . . hawks . . . owls, during her Sabbath. After that, Kah spends intentional time with her son and partner.

Kah describes her Sabbath practice as a way to reconnect her spirit and provides an opportunity to cultivate mindfulness and solitude. She believes it is difficult to connect to yourself when you are simultaneously connecting with others via technology, so she avoids using her phone, computer, and electronic devices other than a turntable to play music. She also finds that observing a regular day of rest provides unrushed opportunities to do things she enjoys and cultivates an attitude of gratitude and joy. Cooking is therapy for Kah. She finds herself expressing gratitude to the chicken for donating eggs and to the pig for the bacon. Playing her grandmother’s music brings her joy as well.

Kah’s Sabbath also strengthens and helps her appreciate the gift of family—her immediate and extended family. She sees herself as her own family as well. Part of that family time with her partner and son often includes playing board games. Part of Sunday for Kah and her family is being grateful for time they have together as her son has a serious health condition and she finds that being really present to one another promotes open communication.

Kah finds her day of rest as an important time to reset her spirit:

*I try to be mindful of my spirit on a daily basis. I’m usually a pretty good failure at that, but on Sundays I’m not, and then I feel good. . . . It resets my spirit and my expectation of myself for the week, you know. It’s like hitting a reset button. . . . It’s a way to just reconnect with yourself and reflect, forgive, contemplate, laugh.*
Kah uses her Sundays to pray and meditate about things for which she is grateful and listens to shamanic drumming as part of that and says she sometimes goes into a dream state which allows her to communicate with things we cannot normally see.

Honoring a regular Sabbath has created a space for gratitude and forgiveness and a place to process her emotions. While Kah has been observing a Sabbath of some kind for most of her life, her focus on forgiveness did not come into play until five or six years ago:

*My Sunday is about trying... to forgive myself for... being hard on myself or for being harsh to somebody else. ... Forgiving others is just as important as forgiving yourself. ... It's not like I call up a friend who hurt my feelings and say I forgive you today... but... then I can let it go. I don't have to chew on it anymore.*

Kah also sees her Sundays as a time for laughter and lightness as well:

*It's so easy to take yourself super seriously. ... Sundays were kind of like that for me, taking things very seriously. ... You have to be well behaved and you have to wear your Sunday best and there's no shenanigans and there's no humor, no joy, no laughter... and I just say, “To hell with that!” That's not what my divinity looks like... my divinity is a wild woman, half-naked, screaming at the top of her lungs and laughing. That's what I like to see or what I like to think of.*

Kah believes observing a regular day of rest helps her preserve her sanity, fosters contentment, and prepares her for the week ahead:

*I feel great at the end of a day on a Sunday. I feel relaxed, I feel calm, I feel energized to face the week ahead. I feel like I'm in my happy place and you know... I can face anything that comes in my direction when I feel grounded and safe with myself. ... I don't think I'll ever stop having a day of rest. I will always insist on it.*

Kah’s appreciation for the importance of self-care and protecting her Sabbath has grown as she has celebrated a regular day of rest:

*I give... 24/6. I give and give and go and do. Now it's my turn, and the older I get, the more demanding I am of it. You know, you don't get to interfere with this, you don't get to try to take it away from me and you don't get to make me feel bad about it because I don't. ... A long time ago I probably would have. And I would*
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have been more accommodating and . . . pushed my own needs to the side . . . but I don’t do that anymore and I don’t feel bad about it . . . Having a day of rest is so important because at the core I know that I need that. It’s just an essential part of what I need to maintain any sanity.

Kah’s Sabbath provides a vehicle to reset her spirit each week. Her Sabbath cultivates greater gratitude, forgiveness, laughter, and calm in her life and is an important avenue for self-care, which she is no longer willing to give up. Her Sundays help her re-energize and promote more communication and time together as a family.

Tabita. Tabita is 42 and is Scandinavian. She is married with a daughter in college. Tabita observes a Sabbath on her own. She grew up in Sweden in a conservative Christian family where her dad served as a pastor. In her family, they did not shop or work on Sundays other than her mother cooking and her father leading services at church. Tabita found it annoying when they were not able to shop for something they wanted. As they were likely the only family on her block who observed a Sabbath, and she heard her parents make comments about neighbors mowing their grass on the Sabbath; Sabbath was mostly a rule-based judgy thing when she grew up.

When Tabita went to college, she considered Sunday as another day to get things done. She had a high-pressure corporate job after college for nearly 10 years and worked many Sundays. Tabita became interested in observing a Sabbath again when she learned about digital Sabbaths, voluntary simplicity, and the longevity of the Seventh-day Adventists who incorporate a regular Sabbath in their lives. What she learned encouraged her to include a Sabbath as a strategy to promote mental health in a book she wrote after her daughter struggled with depression. Practicing what she advocates for others then motivated her to be more consistent in observing a weekly Sabbath.
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Tabita’s day of rest is about taking a break from anything that feels like work. Unplugging—staying off electronics, devices, and staying offline—is an essential component of her Sabbath other than when she talks to her mom using her computer. Tabita sometimes goes to church and likes to play the piano and sing. She also spends time in nature. She avoids shopping or any financial transactions. She enjoys the feeling of a clean slate or creating space for spontaneity, getting together with friends, journaling, reading, making music, exploring new things, and naps. Mindfulness meditation is also a significant component of Tabita’s Sabbath time.

Creating space for a weekly day of rest has helped reduce stress in Tabita’s life:

*It’s just kind of reduced stress . . . and how I feel then on . . . Monday morning. I used to like not even want to get out of bed . . . not because I hated my job per se, but because . . . I was just exhausted . . . And so . . . knowing however crazy the week gets . . . knowing that that is coming . . . is nice . . . I can kind of look forward to that . . . I do think it’s improved my mental health . . . a lot . . . I mean not just that, but just the combination of things that I’ve done to help do self-care.*

Observing a regular Sabbath has also contributed to Tabita’s desire for slow living:

*I take . . . five minutes in the morning to do my meditation and I’ve found that just that five minutes is really helpful, like it helps with my digestion . . . It’s like I don’t want to rush through every day and I don’t think I would have started thinking about slow living . . . unless I had . . . been observing the Sabbath . . . The thought of moving more slowly through life is very counter to how I am . . . a very . . . type A perfectionist like 4.0 . . . kind of person.*

After reading *The Sabbath* by Heschel (1951/2005), Tabita’s philosophy of Sabbath changed, and she is careful even about what she thinks about on her Sabbath:

*I really like the concept of . . . not even thinking about work . . . That was really an eye opener for me . . . So I wake up on Sunday . . . one of the first things that might pop up into my mind might be something about work, not necessarily my paid job but maybe some other project I’m working on or something that needs to be done and then I have to remind myself . . . nope . . . no thinking about that stuff. And so I really try to . . . start my day off with . . . a little prayer just when I’m still in bed just to remember that the point of the day is really to be present*
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and . . . from a Christian perspective . . . to be with God. . . . Then I do a little mindfulness meditation.

Reading Heschel also helped Tabita to see that Sabbath is more about creating room for the most important things in her life—God, others, herself, and her dog—rather than about giving up something.

Tabita has found that observing a regular Sabbath makes her more available to and present with others:

I’m so busy I think sometimes people are a little bit hesitant to ask me to do things. . . . The other week I . . . made plans with my friend to go snowshoeing after church. . . . It was a really nice day and we’re kind of trudging along and trying to decide . . . how far to go and I’m like well, we can go as far as you want because it’s my day off. . . . And she kind of just . . . lightened up a little bit almost like . . . she doesn’t have to worry about . . . keeping me from something. . . . I thought that was kind of cool . . . that it kind of opens you up to be more available and spend time with people that you maybe wouldn’t otherwise have time to spend.

Tabita thinks that she may also be more aware of nuances especially during her Sabbath as she finds it is easier to be present with people when she is not rushing.

While there have not been major changes in Tabita’s family relationships, she thinks observing a regular day of rest helps her manage her stress and therefore enriches her relationships with her spouse and daughter. Tabita believes her Sabbath promotes greater self-awareness and provides a day to practice being more mindful:

I’m just a lot less stressed (laughs) which I think is helpful. . . . I am able to have better relationships with them because I mean, you just have better relationships I think when you’re not stressed out. . . . It’s been nice when [my daughter’s] been home now for Christmas break . . . chatting and making eye contact. You know, after so many years of kind of like talking from behind a computer . . . not really hearing. . . . I think . . . the Sabbath is almost like a practice day . . . for how to maybe be a little bit more [mindful] the rest of the time as well.

Tabita regularly considers return on investment in her work. While she has one less day a week to work, she believes her day of rest has been an excellent return on investment. Observing
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a regular day of rest has helped Tabita see the value of taking breaks during the week as well and contributes to her desire to practice slow living.

Tabita is more rested and less stressed as result of observing a Sabbath. She is more mindful and present as a result of her Sabbath and believes her relationships with others have been enhanced as well. She has changed her philosophy from seeing Sabbath as a period when she cannot do things to an opportunity for making time for what is most important in life. Her Sabbath practice has also encouraged her to slow down and take breaks during the week as well.

Marcia. Marcia is 59 and identifies as Caucasian. She is married with grown daughters. She refers to her Sabbath as My Audrey Monday as she spends every Monday with her granddaughter, Audrey. While her husband often takes part in her Audrey Mondays, Marcia sees this time as something she does for herself. Even though she reserves Sunday morning each week for church, she considers her Audrey Monday as more sacred than church.

Marcia has worked in retail for over 17 years. Her job required her to be available almost any day of the week except Sunday mornings. Mondays became her favorite day of the week when Marcia decided to forego some income and told her supervisor she would not be available for work then. Marcia had an entire day to focus on what she needed or wanted to do, and she could plan around a changing work schedule that sometimes she did not receive until the day before having to work. Marcia initially kept those days open for doctor and dentist appointments, haircuts, and a day to schedule time with friends.

When her granddaughter was born three years ago, Marcia chose to spend each Monday with her. She spends the entire day with Audrey reading stories, singing, coloring, spending time outside, and playing with her. Marcia’s Audrey Mondays provide an opportunity to be young in
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spirit again. Marcia’s day off also affords a chance to rest after a late night of work when Audrey is napping.

Marcia’s Sabbath creates an entire day each week in which she is in control:

*I think my Audrey Day is so important to me because I feel like I have control in my life on those days. Working in retail for those 17 plus years I’ve had to work weekends, holidays, [and] deal with difficult customers. My sacred day is mine. No one can touch me... I’m in control.*

Marcia’s Mondays revive her mentally and give her energy to get through the rest of her week:

*My Audrey Mondays recharge my soul and help me power through the rest of the week... Audrey’s usually waiting at the door to greet me. There’s nothing in the world that warms my heart like hearing her tiny, squeaky voice call me “Geenie.”... Sometimes in the deli as I’m slicing meat and you’re up to your elbows in potato salad and chicken grease and stuff... I just take a breath and think you know, four more days and I’m going to be hanging out with Audrey.*

Marcia’s Mondays enrich her relationships with family members:

*To be able to spend... time like that with my granddaughter is... sacred to me because... It’s such a bonding time... [Audrey’s Aunt] said “So Audrey, who’s your best friend?” And we just assumed she was going to say somebody from daycare, and she said, “Geenie.” I could have died right then. My life is complete. So I think it means a lot to Audrey too... We just have such a connection... And I’m closer to my daughter and my son-in-law... and it’s a cool day that my husband... and I have together too... I usually try to call Mom and Dad on Mondays too.*

Marcia’s Audrey Mondays provide an opportunity to appreciate nature in a way she has been unable to while working in a windowless store for years:

*We just sit on the porch and kind of watch the leaves blow... Some days we’ll just lay in the back yard and we’ll look up at the clouds... I love nature... and Audrey does too and I’m so excited that... she loves to play in the snow, she loves to crunch through the leaves... That disconnect I felt for 17 years in the middle of the mall was really hard... So... I do feel very connected to nature.*

Marcia’s Mondays cultivate a greater sense of gratitude and additional time for prayer and contemplation:
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I . . . pray on my way over there. . . . I’m just so thankful. . . . I have another day to live. . . . I . . . thank God for the . . . day off, that I get to see Audrey, Jane and Dick and George. . . . Then . . . I think of other people in my life that need prayers. . . . It gives you more time to think when you have a special day to notice everything.

Finally, Marcia has gained a new appreciation for the need for everyone to have a day off and time to decompress. She realizes that a Sabbath is a gift which everyone ought to be entitled.

Marcia’s Sabbath affords one day a week when she has complete control of her day. Her Audrey Mondays provide time to nurture important relationships in her life. Marcia’s Sabbaths help revive her mentally and give her the energy to get through her week. Her Sabbath time also cultivates gratitude, more time for prayer and reflection, an appreciation for nature, and a new understanding of how a day of rest is important for everyone.

Allie. Allie is 23, a recent college graduate, and identifies as Caucasian. She lives with roommates, but as a self-described strong introvert, typically observes her Sabbath by herself, and has designed her room to be a sanctuary. Her father is a minister, and she grew up in a very legalistic, conservative, southern Christian household. Growing up in her family, Sunday was a day they did little work, got together with family, and napped, even though Sabbath seemed like an outdated word to her, only relevant to biblical times.

Just over a year ago, Allie joined an Anglican Church. Here she learned about Sabbath as a spiritual discipline. As someone disposed to anxiety, wanting a lot of control, and always being busy, Allie resonated with the need for Sabbath in her life when she learned more about the concept and vision of Sabbath. Allie now observes her Sabbath on Mondays as she is in a full-time ministry position, so Sundays are not normally a day of rest for her.

On an ideal Sabbath, Allie likes to remove a focus on time so turns her clock around for the day. She sees her Sabbath as a time to listen to her body, to pray, to reflect on the past week,
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and to prepare her heart for the coming week. Allie avoids using her phone, texting, email, and social media. She spends time reading and journaling—checking in with how she is feeling. Allie likes to be creative, to draw, and to journal. She also likes to organize things that she would not normally do on a routine basis. Rest is part of her ideal Sabbath. Allie usually does not spend her Sabbath with other people. She has found a few individuals with whom she makes an exception, however, because she is comfortable with sharing how she feels and benefits from spiritual discussions with them.

An average Sabbath for Allie includes spending as much time as she needs in prayer, journaling, and reading. She finds that it can also be restful to plan meals for the week. While not necessarily relaxing, she finds it convenient to sometimes grocery shop and does laundry on her Sabbath when she is unable to fit it in elsewhere in her week. Allie also recently started seeing a counselor during her Sabbath, providing an avenue in which she can reflect on who she is and how she wants to relate to others in her life.

Allie’s Sabbath has enhanced her spirituality which has also impacted how she views and observes her Sabbath:

*I think that the reminder that . . . I’m not God and . . . I’m not omniscient or omnipotent or . . . I can’t do all things all the time . . . has been really good throughout the week to remind myself that . . . I’m not the one that’s in control . . . and that’s freed me.*

Allie sees how she can tend toward legalism and has worked to avoid being rigid about what her Sabbath must entail. She wants the circumstances of her life and God’s desire for her to shape her Sabbath. Allie sees her Sabbath as a safe space to try various spiritual disciplines such as fasting from technology or traditional fasting, confession, and repentance that are not daily practices.
Allie recognizes her tendency to value herself according to the work she accomplishes so she found that her first Sabbaths were about recovering from the previous week. Her perspective on the purpose of Sabbath has changed from recovery to resting in God’s presence:

*It was like a day of recovery . . . and so that often meant . . . literally doing nothing, like laying in bed all day and watching Netflix . . . which I found . . . wasn’t actually restful . . . It didn’t actually . . . prepare my heart and prepare my soul . . . for the upcoming week. And so I found that . . . I actually do need . . . to do some sort of work, but I think it looks very different then what I do on a day-to-day basis . . . Journal[ing] . . . draw[ing] . . . word pictures, or . . . doing different creative things has been . . . a good outlet for me . . . Sabbath isn’t a time to . . . recover. Sabbath is a time of . . . looking back on the work that God has done, seeing that [God’s] work is good and . . . finished and . . . because I’m not everything and God is, I can take time . . . to rest in the promise of who God is.*

While she loves being at home, Allie has also found that spending time in nature and appreciating God’s creation can also be a useful Sabbath activity for her.

Allie believes that observing a Sabbath has been helpful in dealing with a difficult family situation and has fostered greater awareness of self, others, and God:

*The strain in my relationship with my mom is [around] boundaries . . . and how do I . . . love others while still having the freedom to say no . . . Protecting my Sabbath has . . . been a great first step at learning how to do that . . . I’m learning that if I don’t call my mom, and she’s really like let down because of it . . . I’m not responsible for her response to my actions . . . even if she tries to project them onto me . . . I’ve learned . . . a clearer definition of . . . who I am, who others are, who God is.*

Allie’s Sabbath helps her to nourish her soul and to face the difficult healing work she needs that she would often avoid in the past:

*The easy thing for me to do is . . . to be on Facebook . . . but on my Sabbath I think it’s . . . really good to . . . step away from that and . . . to feed my soul in ways that it . . . needs to be nourished and not to be avoidant or to try and run away from . . . where my heart is at because when I . . . get on social media that’s often why. Or like when I watch Netflix that’s often why. . . . So . . . intentionally weeding some of . . . these things out of my life to put myself in a posture . . . to go there to dive deep and . . . to be open to . . . any healing work that needs to*
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happen, or you know, just to be in a posture of... being able to receive... because otherwise it's too tempting to... turn away from those things.

Allie sums up by saying, she feels more proactive and healthier as a result of observing a Sabbath:

Observing a Sabbath has helped me be more proactive. ... When I’m not observing Sabbath well I feel like... I’m in emergency mode... stressed out and panicky. ... Once I am doing a Sabbath ... I’m more proactive about... how I spend my time in the upcoming week and... more prepared for things... Emotionally, physically, spiritually, ... the wholeness of my being is just healthier when I Sabbath, then when I don’t.

Allie has found freedom in realizing that she is not God and does not have to worry about being in control. Allie’s thoughts about the goal of Sabbath have changed from recovering to resting in God. Her Sabbaths have changed from doing nothing to doing some form of creative work such as journaling or drawing to prepare her heart for the coming week. Allie believes her Sabbath has promoted greater self-awareness and helped her define boundaries in her relationships. She now uses her Sabbath as a time to create a healing space when needed rather than using Netflix or social media as an escape from issues that would otherwise be easy to avoid. Allie feels healthier, is less stressed, and more proactive and productive as a result of Sabbath-keeping.

Jodi. Jodi describes herself as 50ish and is of Caucasian heritage. She lives with a partner, but observes her Sabbath on Sundays mostly in solitude and has been doing so for a couple of years. Jodi was initially motivated to start her Sabbath observance after being really burnt out after many years of working for social justice.

Jodi has tendonitis, and due to her job requiring considerable computer use, she now associates the computer with pain. Jodi began observing a Sabbath by avoiding the computer, electronics (other than one TV show that she enjoys), and listening to the news. She does not use
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her phone except for calling out-of-town family. Sabbath is a time to be untethered. Jodi refrains from driving on her day of rest. She also avoids reflecting on serious topics on her Sabbath. *Does it bring me energy or contentment?* is the criteria Jodi uses to determine what she will or will not do as part of her day of rest. While observing a Sabbath has been useful for Jodi, she does not feel her Sabbath is as physically restful as she would like it to be and ideally, she would like a Sabbath weekend.

Jodi uses her Sabbath for physical activity such as biking or walking when weather permits. She may also do some yoga as well. Jodi tries to remain in the present, and her mindful meditation practice is an important part of her Sabbath observance. Jodi also reads things she finds inspirational. Jodi often cooks healthy food that she can have periodically through the week. Getting to bed early Sunday evening and reading things she enjoys is also something for which Jodi strives. She says she has a *really good Sabbath once a month* as she is not able to fit in everything such as laundry or grocery shopping outside of her Sabbath every week.

Jodi was active in a Lutheran faith community when she grew up, but not one that observed a Sabbath. Jodi feels that the spiritual component of her Sabbath could be stronger. Jodi has found a meditation community she likes, but they are farther away than she wants to drive, and she is seeking a community that is less doctrinaire than most churches.

Jodi reports that she consumes news much differently than she used to:

*I don’t listen to the news on the Sabbath. . . . It’s too depressing, and I’ve found that I consume news much differently than I used to . . . it gets me too angry, and I don’t want to be constantly angry all the time. . . . I wanted to retrench from thinking about just how awful everything is. I just wanted a break—and I just felt so hopeless on a social level of making change or anything. I had to focus on something else.*

Observing a regular Sabbath has cultivated a space for self-compassion and helped her be more thoughtful and kinder to others:
“Be Kind to Yourself.” I love that. . . . Somebody said that to me [when] I was going through a hard time . . . If you are not kind to yourself, you are generally not kind to anybody else. . . . I think there would be more compassion if you are kinder to yourself and didn't feel so overextended. It’s [Sabbath-keeping] a revolution . . . [laughter] because we’re going in the exact opposite direction.

Jodi values self-care more and her appreciation for Sabbath time has grown since she started observing a day of rest. Sabbath-keeping helps Jodi feel grounded and more content:

I have become more aware of doing it and, of having the Sabbath. So when I don't get time to have it, for whatever reason, I can tell, I just feel more . . . cranky. . . . I feel a grounded sense when I get . . . to do the Sabbath. . . . It's not being totally optimistic, but it's not being so pessimistic. . . . I try to find contentment. . . . That and another of my favorite words is ease . . . “may you move with ease.” I just love that phrase. . . . Ease just sounds so like relaxed, easy, it’s like don't get all uptight about stuff.

Finally, Jodi has recognized that being able to observe a Sabbath is a privilege and now has a greater appreciation for how everyone would benefit from a day of rest:

It’s kind of a luxury to [observe a Sabbath] . . . and just to be able to unplug from the everyday injustice of the world. . . . it’s a very big privilege. . . . I actually think it’s important for everybody to have some sort of day off, a day of rest.

So for Jodi, Sabbath provides an opportunity to unplug from electronics and avoid the news. She no longer consumes news in the same way she used to during the rest of the week as a result. Self-care is a higher priority including time for physical activity, cooking healthy meals, getting to bed early, and reading inspirational material. Her Sabbath provides space for mindful meditation and self-compassion that spills over to being kinder to strangers. These activities have helped her move from being really burnt out to feeling contented and grounded. She recognizes as well, what a privilege it is to be able observe a Sabbath and to unplug from . . . injustice for a day.

Diane. Diane is 63 years old and identifies as Italian. She observes a Jewish Shabbat along with her spouse. Diane started bringing Shabbos back into her life a few years ago. The
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Jewish context of her Shabbos is an essential aspect for her. Diane follows many of the 39 prohibitions in Judaism but has experimented with these prohibitions and says she has learned over time those that feed her and those that do not. Lighting the Shabbat candles and the Friday night Shabbos meal are particularly important to Diane. Ideally, she and her spouse like to celebrate Shabbat with Jewish friends as well. For Diane, the social aspect of Shabbat is essential. She often attends synagogue services, and likes to do crafts, paint, journal, listen to music, dance, watch movies, spend time in nature, and to nap with her spouse.

Diane tries to avoid email, social media, television, and news. She limits the use of her phone, although Diane makes an exception to talk with her aging parents who live out of town. She limits driving and avoids shopping and the consumer culture unless necessary. Diane is a Respiratory Therapist in a hospital and works some weekends, often impacting her Shabbos observance. Judaism makes it clear that healing the sick is not only permissible but also required regardless of needing to break any Shabbat rules. Because it is her job, however, Diane says it doesn’t feel much like Shabbos when she has to work on Friday or Saturday. She seeks out a quiet place to read, talk to people, or go to the hospital chapel on her breaks and avoids using her phone, checking emails, or social media to acknowledge Shabbat.

How Diane observes Shabbos has changed significantly over the years. She first observed Shabbat while in college with other young women where they met each Friday in a house with a large dining room. They would do the blessings, sing, and share a potluck meal, and talk about the Torah. The discussion would then evolve into a weekly check-in. On Saturdays, Diane would go to synagogue and join other single individuals for a meal and conversation after a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Afterward they would go to someone’s house and would talk until they took Shabbos
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naps wherever they were. They would eat leftovers when they woke up and finish Shabbat. In Diane’s movement, it is okay to drive to a Synagogue or to something Jewish.

As women in her group moved into new living situations, they no longer had a central place to meet. They started rotating where they met for Shabbat and met less frequently. As they partnered up and started families, they met once a month. Things became more formal with adults meeting in one room and one of them watching children in another room. While there was an extended family feeling, as more children came along, it was not as relaxed as the adults were concerned about children breaking something. Diane observed Shabbos on other non-group nights. She eventually stopped observing Shabbos due to her children’s high school activities making it really difficult to keep Shabbat.

The structure of Shabbat serves as an anchor for Diane and has helped her recognize how important ritual is in her life. Friday Shabbat dinner is a constant that brings her peace regardless of what else is happening or if she is unable to observe Shabbat in an ideal manner due to other obligations:

*It anchors me—I don't feel like I am floating loose in the world. . . . No matter what happens the other six days, I know I can count on that. . . . I like ritual. I like things that are the same. If things come around on a regular cycle, then I can count on it—because there is so little that we can count on right now—change is faster and faster. . . . I don't care what we're eating—just do the candles, the wine. It's not always challah; it's . . . a slice of bread, or hamburger bun maybe. It's fine, it's just the anchor, that ritual . . . because the ritual for me gives me some peace, even if it's just for an hour.*

Shabbat for Diane has helped reduce anxiety:

*It reduces anxiety when you know there's one day when you don't have to worry about things that you can't do anything about. Some people think, "Oh, I can't do anything about it" but I think, "Oh thank God, I can't do anything about it!" . . . It reduces the jangled nerves when I reduce my activities to just the ones that I enjoy.*

Shabbat also provides space to experience the healing power of nature:
I don’t find it against my version of Shabbat to get in the car and drive to a lake and walk around it and hang out and look at ducks—that also feeds me. It’s just something that I need and don’t get enough of. . . . During gardening season, it’s very nourishing to go out there and not even talk. You’re so frazzled from the week it’s just kinda nice to just pull weeds. You’re kinda pulling weeds in your head too. And pretty soon you get a little calmer, then you start, you know, watering them and smelling the herbs and whatever it is you are planting.

Diane has also gained an appreciation for the difference between Shabbos rest and being lazy:

*Just being lazy and hanging out all day . . . like . . . spend[ding] 4 hours on Facebook or whatever, it’s not a purposeful rest, it’s just a ”I don’t feel like doing anything” and that’s not nourishing, that’s just depressed. [Shabbat] is a whole different emotion then, I’m going to purposefully rest. . . . We may stay in our pajamas all day on Shabbat, but it’s because it’s Shabbat. . . . It’s not because we’re depressed and tired . . . it’s for a higher purpose.*

Finally, Diane has found that friends, as well as the broader culture, can impact how easy or difficult it is to observe a weekly Shabbat. Being in a minority where most of the country operates on a different schedule makes it difficult to always observe Shabbat:

*You need to pick your friends so that you have some Sabbath-observing friends. . . . It’s like, ”Oh God, Oh I forgot, you’re Jewish.” . . . It becomes kind of alienating, so you have to do this fine walk between picking friends that are supportive but not alienating the ones you love, that aren’t. . . . ”Hey, we’re getting together for so and so’s baby shower Saturday afternoon.” . . . And they’re always on Saturdays, so [laughter]. . . . You have to balance how important are these non-Sabbath people to your life and how often are you going to compromise what you really want to do in order to keep them in your life. Because if you keep saying no, you lose them.*

She longs for the situation she experienced in Israel which celebrated three Sabbaths. Muslims closed their businesses on Fridays but were open on Saturdays during the Jewish Shabbat. On Sundays, Christian businesses were closed, but everyone else was open. This environment made it easier for each person to observe his or her particular Sabbath.
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For Diane, Shabbat enhances her well-being knowing that Shabbos is a ritual she can count on each week. It brings her peace and reduces her anxiety even if all she gets to celebrate is the Friday Shabbat dinner. Diane is rejuvenated through time in nature, Shabbos rest, and spending time with her spouse doing things they normally do not do during the rest of the week. Finally, Diane has realized how important it is to her to have some friends who also observe a Sabbath as it is difficult to maintain a weekly Sabbath when few around you do so.

Nadine. Nadine is a 20-year-old Filipina American college student who has been accepted to law school next fall. She lives with her parents and her sister. She commutes an hour and a half to and from campus. A couple of years ago, Nadine attended a leadership retreat through her church where they were encouraged to spend a good deal of time intentionally resting. While initially feeling like she was wasting time, she soon found it healing and inspirational. This experience motivated her to start using a two-hour break between classes to do anything other than work. Nadine now keeps a day of rest on Saturday as she saves an additional commute and is a small group leader in her faith community so Sunday is already a full day.

Nadine spends time on her Sabbath in prayer, journaling, and doing creative things such as writing poetry. She likes to set her frame of mind for the week during her Sabbath. Nadine avoids schoolwork and administrative tasks, stays off her computer, and avoids social media and email. She spends a lot of the day in solitude but enjoys spending time with her family sharing a meal, talking and catching up, playing cards, or watching a movie together. Nadine describes herself as really introverted so uses her day of rest to recharge. She often goes to the library or a coffee shop or her room to minimize distractions.

A regular Sabbath has helped Nadine to avoid burn-out she experienced in the past:
I have a really hard time saying no when people ask me for things, and so for a lot of my life, I would just say... “yeah, of course, I'll do that.”... I... realized after being a person that just said yes all the time that... I have a certain capacity. ... Sometimes I'd just get so burnt out. ... I would load up my schedule... and not give myself time, that I would lose appreciation for things I love. ... I'd gotten to that place too many times... to the point where like, “Well, I'm just going to try this out that thing with Sabbath time”... and I finally did it.

On a psychological level, Nadine said her day of rest has provided space for important reflection and healing:

Things I can't figure out... letting that sit [and] marinate... that's been really helpful. ... I grew up in an abusive household... so I can see the way it has affected me. ... The main thing is... putting things together... and having a time when I could forgive... and being able to understand.

Sabbath-keeping has helped Nadine to be more appreciative. Taking a break allows her to come back to tasks that might otherwise feel tiring or difficult:

That time of rest... energizes me. ... For example, ... I'm reading Borges, a... 1,000-page novel right now. ... Taking that time allows me to think and be separated from it so that when I come back to it, it's like “this is great.”... It helps me... when I’m leading my girls in my small group. ... Being an introvert, that's... a difficult thing to do [even though] I... enjoy it. ... [My Sabbath] puts me in the right frame of vision... to... connect on a heart level... [even though] sometimes it's not the most fun thing to talk about... the random stuff of life.

Nadine has many responsibilities as a campus leader, with coursework, and studying for the law school admission test. While she occasionally finds that she may need to take time first thing in the morning on Saturday to complete something with a deadline, Nadine devotes the rest of her day to Sabbath-keeping. She believes her Sabbath contributes to her mental, emotional and spiritual well-being:

The Sabbath still takes precedence over getting things done. If I have not got something done, if I didn't finish my reading for the next day in school, that's fine. That's life. ... [My] mental, emotional, and spiritual health [is not worth] sacrificing. ... just so I can get this assignment finished. ... It's set me in a right place for the rest of the week.

Finally, Nadine’s regular day of rest also provides her space to be more creative:
I can be a little bit more intuitive and creative with things because it's not something that's completely, highly structured . . . I don't have to have an output for that day. But that is often the times that I get inspired to write the best poetry. . . . That's something that I really value . . . because I have allowed space for this in my life. . . . And I really think that . . . the spiritual and the creative bleed into each other. The . . . Sabbath allows me to do this really well.

In short, Sabbath prevents burn-out Nadine experienced in the past. Nadine’s Sabbath practice helps her maintain appreciation for work she would otherwise tire of without a break. Sabbath has also provided a vehicle for healing, forgiveness, and understanding of a past situation of abuse for Nadine and nurtures her spiritual and psychological health. Finally, Nadine finds she is most creative when writing during her Sabbath.

**Group Themes**

Six themes emerged for all co-researchers regarding the transformation they reported as a result of celebrating a regular Sabbath: Sabbath-keeping enhances self-awareness, improves self-care, enriches relationships, develops spirituality, and positively impacts the rest of the co-researchers’ weeks. Co-researchers’ Sabbath practices and philosophies also evolve over time.

**Sabbath-keeping enhances self-awareness.** Each co-researcher indicated, in some fashion, that her Sabbath practice enhances self-awareness. Unrushed time for reflection, prayer, mindfulness, journaling, poetry, and time for other creative arts are activities that seem to foster greater self-awareness:

*When you slow down and kind of take time to just . . . be . . . you have more awareness.*

A Sabbath can provide space for self-reflection:

*I'm a pretty self-aware person, but there's often not a lot of space . . . to think through passing thoughts that happen, like "oh, why did I do that?" And so, having a time on Sabbath to work through those things as well helps me . . . sort of connect those things and figure out why I did something.*
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An Orthodox Shabbat, which limits many activities, provides plenty of time for introspection:

*Shabbat has certainly made me a very extra introspective person. . . . You really do have to confront time on Shabbat when you take away . . . things that fill it up. . . . And so often times. . . for better or for worse when I’d be lonely and staring out the window that was my introspective time and like thinking about bigger questions and that sort of thing.*

While co-researchers indicated that self-awareness is a positive trait, it is difficult at times:

*Just having an opportunity to reflect on the week and, you know, be conscious of things that I think I can do better. . . be conscious of things that I know I’m already really good at too. . . . [We] can’t be martyrs in our own lives. We have to own up to our joys and our sorrows. . . but it’s not easy. . . . And I allow myself the opportunity to feel real emotions because for a long time, especially when I was depressed, there was no emotion.*

Sabbath for co-researchers provides time and space for mindfulness, reflection, and creative activities that help foster self-awareness and time to process thoughts and feelings that might otherwise get pushed aside for more immediate matters.

**Sabbath-keeping improves self-care.** Each woman reported that her Sabbath improved her self-care in some fashion, whether it was as an antidote to burn-out or a way to prevent it:

*Before . . . [my Sabbath] I felt obligated to say yes to people always. . . . But I feel like I’ve learned how to. . . . say no and it’s not because I don’t love them . . . but because we are limited beings and we do need . . . time and space away to . . . to remember . . . who God is and who I am.*

Similarly, a Sabbath can help relieve guilt from saying no to others in order to prioritize self-care:

*It’s relieved me of a lot of guilt. . . . because I’ve been able to have the boundary of this is my day, it’s not just you . . . this is my protected time. . . . I used to have . . . a tough time saying no to things and now I just say nope because this is . . . one day that I get to have for my . . . self.*

A Sabbath can be a way to exert some control over one’s life:
I think psychologically retail always sort of beat me up with feeling not in control . . . and it was really kind of a way of taking back some control.

All co-researchers indicated that their Sabbaths have become a significant part of their self-care:

The more intentional I become about it, the more insistent I am that I have it. Probably in my 20s I didn’t care as much, it wasn’t as important to me to have time to myself for reflection. It wasn’t as important to me to be so consistent . . . but now it’s . . . so fundamental it’s like having . . . drinking water, you just have to have it.

So, Sabbath for co-researchers serves as a remedy for burn-out or a way to avoid it in the first place. It allows co-researchers to say no to others without guilt and contributes to a greater sense of control in one’s life. Co-researchers also find that the longer they celebrate a Sabbath, the less likely they are to be willing to give it up.

Sabbath-keeping enriches relationships. Sabbath provides more time and space to nurture relationships for co-researchers. Several of the women spoke about how taking a break from technology helped them be more present to others. Feeling more relaxed and less stressed also benefit co-researchers’ relationships. Co-researchers’ Sabbaths provide un rushed time to enhance relationships whether it is spending more time together or being more present to one another:

A lot of times it’s just, like enjoying . . . [my family’s] company and being around them . . . and just living our lives together instead of just like living in the same house all going different ways.

Sabbath provides time to nurture a couple’s relationship:

[We might] watch a movie because we don’t have time during the week and we’re sitting together watching it together. [We might] put on some . . . music . . . maybe sing along with it, maybe dance . . . We can play Scrabble or something.
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Sabbath time also provides space to reflect on and process troublesome aspects of relationships with others:

*I’ve released people from my expectations, or I try to . . . and realize . . . we’re human, we all get tired. We all . . . have stuff.*

Sabbath can also impact how one interacts with strangers:

*It’s funny, you know, to be nicer to strangers . . . Um, nicer—it’s like more courteous because I don’t really have a personal relationship with them—so it is easier to be nicer . . . more thoughtful. . . . I think it carries over from the Sabbath—to be kinder.*

In summary, all co-researchers indicate that celebrating a Sabbath enriches their relationships in some way. A Sabbath affords more time to spend time together with family and friends and to engage in activities otherwise hard to include in a typical week. Sabbath-keeping creates space to reflect upon issues that arise with others. Finally, time to relax and de-stress during their Sabbaths helps them be more present in their relationships and more thoughtful and considerate of strangers they encounter.

**Sabbath-keeping develops spirituality.** Co-researchers find that Sabbath provides quality time for prayer and communion with the Sacred whether as a time to express gratitude, to grapple with a struggle, or to remember who they are and who God is:

*It’s difficult, trust me. Saturday evening—everyone will say, “Will you go here? Will you go to this concert? Will you go . . . ?” . . . But the time . . . in fellowship with God, those have been some of my best moments of learning and growth.*

The extended time on Sabbath allows for a deeper experience not typically felt during the rest of the week:

*As Shabbat was going out . . . as I’m watching the sun go down and that kind of peaceful feeling, there was . . . this . . . sense of connection and calm and cleaving to the divine and . . . this intimacy that . . . I didn’t experience in my prayer during the week. . . . and I think like, oh, I can’t wait to have that again.*

Sabbath affords time to be intentional and mindful:
There’s a spirituality that comes with . . . connecting with people. . . . and going to church . . . being able to . . . have that whole hour . . . to be more meditative than . . . thinking about the to do list or you know whatever. . . . practicing mindfulness . . . that whole hour.

Even those not actively involved in a faith community find that their Sabbath practices deepen their spirituality:

[My spirituality] feels deeper in some ways, but you know, not doctrinaire. I think it is just like a spiritual practice.

In summary, co-researchers report that their Sabbaths provide time and space to cultivate a deeper spirituality in their lives. Their Sabbaths contribute to more mindfulness when they have space to let go of work-related matters and have fewer distractions.

Sabbath-keeping positively impacts the rest of a co-researcher’s week. Celebrating a weekly Sabbath promotes serenity and helps co-researchers feel energized for the upcoming week:

Contentedness is a good way to describe that feeling where there’s no stress, there’s no expectation of yourself because hopefully after the work you’ve done during the day you’ve been able to let go of things that you’ve been harboring that maybe are negative in nature. You’ve been able to boost your self-esteem and laugh a little bit. You’ve been able to express yourself creatively . . . and get that energy out there. . . . Maybe you have been able to experience peace for the first time all week, or rest. And all of those things for me are safe places. They are home, you know? It’s about being at home with myself and feeling . . . energized to face the next day and the rest of the week and knowing that no matter what happens over the course of the week I get to do this again next week . . . I get to do it again. I don’t have to . . . I get to.

Sabbath helps co-researchers cope more effectively with the demands of their weeks:

Without being intentional [about Sabbath] . . . it will be difficult throughout the rest of . . . the week. [Sabbath allows me to] regroup a bit and get back into focus, realign [myself].

Sabbath can also help revitalize and contribute to an individual’s productivity:
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*I have definitely had plenty of days where I’ve just been overwhelmed with homework on Fridays and I . . . really needed that one extra day to . . . rejuvenate and rest. . . . That helped me be more productive on Sunday and get more things done.*

Sabbath can also help one see the value of taking breaks during the week as well:

*Practicing this stuff on Sundays has allowed me to [relax more during the week]—like last night my husband and I . . . went out to dinner and then I came home . . . and just read for the rest of the evening. And I don’t know that if I didn’t have the Sabbath practice if I would be able to . . . do that. . . . It would have been very easy for me to just . . . get right back on the computer. . . because I had emails to respond to.*

All co-researchers indicate that their weeks go better when their Sabbaths go well.

Celebrating Sabbath helps rejuvenate co-researchers for the upcoming week and cultivates a sense of peace and a way to realign and re-center themselves. Sabbath-keeping also contributes to a greater appreciation of the value of breaks during the week and not just during a Sabbath.

**Co-researchers’ Sabbath practices or philosophies evolve.** All co-researchers reported that their Sabbaths have changed in some fashion since they began celebrating a Sabbath. Most co-researchers reported a change in philosophy about their Sabbaths over time. All reported that they value their Sabbaths more as time passes and they experience its benefits. All co-researchers have indicated a degree of experimenting with different ways of observing a Sabbath. For the women who have recently incorporated a Sabbath into their lives, their Sabbaths have all evolved since they began to find what works best for them.

Half of the women grew up observing a Sabbath in specific ways, but all of them have added new components or have incorporated new philosophies into their current Sabbath practices. For example, Tabita’s reading of Heschel (1951/2005) provided a perspective of making room for what is most important in life. Kah has incorporated time to forgive herself and others as part of her Sabbath time. Allie has come to realize that Sabbath is more than a just a
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day to recover. How Artika honors her Sabbath continues to deepen as a result of her reflection and prayer time and her commitment to other Sabbath activities.

Shira and Diane have both experimented with observing the 39 prohibitions in a traditional Jewish Shabbat and provide examples of how their Shabbos practices have changed significantly depending on the larger communities to which they belong or not, and as their life situations change. For example, Shira felt like her Shabbats were ideal when she was at a Talmud Academy for a semester. She now lacks the community support she had in this situation or when she was able to observe Shabbat with her sister. Even how one feels about their Sabbath may change. Shira provides an example when she said:

*I kind of developed this sort of love/hate relationship with Shabbat because . . . I loved the powerful feelings that I would get from being with the music but also that time in between was just un-fillable.*

Allie provides another example. She found that lying in bed all day and watching Netflix did not help her feel rested or ready for the following week. It was only after introducing a more creative kind of work to her Sabbath practice that she felt refreshed and well-prepared for the week ahead.

**Changes since our interviews.** Since the interviews three months ago, four co-researchers have indicated changes in their Sabbath practices. Tabita has gone back to school while continuing her full-time job and has found that she has not always been able to get everything done without some work on Sundays, although she always reserves time to unplug and often spends time with her daughter on Sundays. Reading her story made her want to get back to her 24-hour Sabbath. As work got more intense for Molly, her Sabbath changed from being one day a week to 3:00 PM to midnight every day. Another co-researcher has chosen to stop drinking since our interview and says that her Sabbath is now a time for doing deeper work.
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Shira reported some major changes as well in her efforts to observe a traditional Orthodox Shabbat. A couple months after our interview, Shira considered changing her practice or moving to a more supportive environment. She decided to compromise and started to drive to synagogues and chose to include more music in her Shabbos practice which helped her enjoy Shabbat more. With the later sunsets on Saturdays due to Daylight Savings Time, Shira began to feel lonely again. She started feeling that the distinctive spirit of Shabbat was disappearing as she participated in weekday activities such as driving. As Shira was starting to despair, she had an opportunity to move close to a Jewish college. She now lives close to a few classmates and others who observe Shabbat. Shira lives alone now so she feels comfortable singing and creating an atmosphere conducive to her Shabbos. She no longer needs to drive and has several friends with whom she can celebrate parts of Shabbat. She wrote:

*The ache of that "missing something" has gone away, and I feel extremely happy and able to be true to what my ideal vision of Shabbat had been: a time of rest, connection to God, absence of technology, caring for the earth, and of course, joy.*

Since her move, Shira’s love/hate relationship with Shabbat, and her longing for what could be, has turned to joy.

**Primary Researcher’s Transformation**

This project has provided me with an opportunity to experiment with an entire Sabbath day rather than just elements of a Sabbath. As a result, I have been convinced of the value of Sabbath time and will continue to celebrate a weekly Sabbath. Hearing co-researchers’ stories has encouraged me to share my own with others. As valuable as it is, however, Sabbath-keeping can be challenging.

Paradoxically, Sabbath-keeping has felt like a detriment to this project at times as it has significantly reduced the number of hours I could devote to this research while working full-
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time. What it has done, however, is given me an appreciation for the importance of rest, rejuvenation, and spiritual renewal. It has also meant that I have lived a more balanced life and made more time for significant relationships in my life that I could have easily put aside for more urgent, but less important matters. I was able to celebrate a Sabbath in some fashion about 90% of the time. Ironically, the few exceptions I made were usually for this project when I had deadlines that I could figure no other way to come close to meeting.

My Sabbaths look different depending on the particular week. I celebrate all of Sunday as my Sabbath. My priorities for my Sabbath have included: not working or doing things that feel like work; avoiding shopping, errands, and financial matters; nurturing my spiritual life; making time for people in my life; naps; time in nature; service; and ideally reading. I normally limit TV and stay off the computer unless I am trying to connect with a particular person and email makes more sense than the phone.

I typically start my Sabbaths by going to church. If I take my 92-year-old mother to church, as I often do, she likes to go out for breakfast afterward. Because my mom lives half an hour away, I also run errands for her and help with anything she needs around the house, but plan to do this during the week once I finish this project. If I do not take my mom to church, I usually chat with friends after Mass and then have a nice leisurely brunch with my spouse. What the afternoon looks like depends on the week. It is often a time to gather with family or friends, to visit friends or family who may be sick, to get out for a walk, or to take a nap if we have the luxury of doing so. In the evening, I may read a bit and often try to connect with out-of-town friends and family or those I have not seen recently.

No matter how I spend my Sabbath, I ordinarily am not rushed—a welcome change from the rest of my week. A slower pace during my Sabbath helps me be more present to people in my
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life. Sabbath-keeping has afforded more room for spontaneity such as visiting out-of-town in-laws and enjoying a glorious fall day before succumbing to a long, cold winter.

I have gained an appreciation for how set guidelines can create helpful boundaries and not continually needing to decide what is or is not appropriate during a Sabbath. This research has also reinforced my belief in the need for flexibility in discovering what works for each of us and the various seasons of our lives. I have thought more about Sabbath not being about recovering but rather resting and taking a break from work—and worry about work—in a mindful way that renews and rejuvenates us after hearing co-researchers’ stories. I have less certainty and more questions about activities I engage in on my Sabbath when it involves spending time with others who are not celebrating a Sabbath as well. I have also been reminded that Sabbath is for all of creation and not just people and that this too is an important aspect of Sabbath-keeping. Shira, in particular, has made me think about how going without something for a day, such as electricity, can help promote a greater appreciation for it. Her story has made me more mindful of my use of electricity.

I went into this project thinking a day of rest could have many benefits for everyone—and I still believe that. Because of my research, I now have a greater appreciation for what a spiritual Sabbath has to offer. If we see ourselves as spiritual beings, honoring the sacred or Spirit within and renewing ourselves spiritually is likely the most important aspect of a weekly Sabbath unless we already adequately nourish our souls in some way on a daily basis.

I was surprised at how many individuals I know who celebrate a Sabbath, yet I have never heard them talk about it. It feels as if we must justify ourselves for focusing on being rather than doing for a day. I have been hesitant to tell others why I am not available for most
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projects on Sunday. As a result of this research, I have started sharing more about my experience of Sabbath-keeping and have found most people have been quite open to the idea.

In learning more about Sabbath, three concepts stand out regarding anxiety, worry, and my image of God. First, Brueggemann (2014) asserts that honoring a Sabbath proclaims that we choose not to partake in “the anxiety system” (p. 31) that permeates society. Brueggemann helped me realize that much of my anxiety is a choice and that celebrating a Sabbath can contribute to saying no to some of that anxiety.

Second, if I worry during my Sabbath I am not celebrating as Heschel (1951/2005) suggests when writing, “the Sabbath was given to us by God for joy, for delight, for rest, and should not be marred by worry or grief” (p. 30). Brueggemann (2014) likewise has challenged me to let go of worry when asserting that Sabbath is a call to make a “divided heart” (p. 67) whole again. It is difficult to be anxious and in a Sabbath spirit simultaneously, so I continue to strive to not only rest from work but worry as well.

Third, Leport’s (2015) notion that our image of God can shape our view and experience of Sabbath has challenged me to think about my image of God and what that implies for my Sabbath practice. Leport writes:

If we see God as a taskmaster who keeps a checklist of our wrongs and punishes us when we accumulate too many, then our approach to Sabbath may be one of obligation and duty based on the fear of reprisal if not done properly. If, on the other hand, we have an image of God who is full of love, life, grace, joy and who revels in... creation, then keeping Sabbath and taking Sabbath moments with God will eagerly be anticipated and participated in with joy and love. (p. 3)
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In summary, incorporating a Sabbath has helped me live with more balance and created space for making people a higher priority in my life. My Sabbath has cultivated a more enjoyable pace and room for spontaneity at least one day a week. I have gained a new appreciation for the complexities of celebrating Sabbath and how one size does not fit all. This project has challenged my assumption that a day of rest without an emphasis on spirituality can provide the same benefits as a spiritual Sabbath. This research has also reminded me of the need for a Sabbath for all of creation—not just for human beings. Lastly, I have also recognized that I can choose to limit my anxiety and that my image of God can impact my experience of Sabbath.
Discussion

What time-stressed contemporary people most need is not more time, but time of a different quality, time that is beyond price, time that has shape and substance, time that need not be wrestled with each day as if it were an enemy, time that is the habitation of blessing.

(Bass, 2005, pp. 34-35)

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the research results in the context of related literature. I examine ways the literature supports findings of the study, I outline general implications, implications for holistic health, implications for future research, and make concluding remarks.

Findings Supported by the Literature

The literature regarding benefits and challenges of Sabbath-keeping supports much of the experience of the co-researchers. Six themes emerged for all co-researchers regarding the transformation they reported as a result of celebrating a regular Sabbath. Sabbath-keeping develops spirituality, enhances self-awareness, improves self-care, positively impacts the rest of the co-researchers’ weeks, and enriches relationships. Co-researchers’ Sabbath practices and philosophies also evolve over time, and all co-researchers encountered challenges related to Sabbath-keeping. The literature also addresses several common individual themes of the co-researchers.

Sabbath-keeping develops spirituality. Several authors write of the spiritual benefits of a Sabbath (Allender, 2009; Baab, 2005; Barton, 2006; Bass, 2005; Brueggemann, 2014; Bryan, 2009; Buchanan, 2006; Carter, 2013; Chittister, 2006; Dana, 2012; Dawn, 1999; Dein & Loewenthal, 2013; Heschel, 1951/2005; Hickman, 1999; Jantos, 2007; Keating, 1992; Kent, 2009; Leport, 2015; Lieberman & Klinghoffer, 2012; Lowery, 2000; Muller, 2000; O’Flaherty, Petersen, & Norton, 2010; Ray, 2000; Ringwald, 2009; Shirer, 2014; Shulevitz, 2011; Taylor,
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2005; Wilks, 2010; Winner, 2007; Wirzba, 2006). All co-researchers reported that celebrating a Sabbath contributed to their spiritual development. Several co-researchers report that their Sabbaths cultivate more gratitude in their lives to which Carter (2013), Dein and Loewenthal (2013) Muller (2000), and Taylor (2005) refer.

Sabbath-keeping provides time for serving others (Brueggemann, 2014; Nickels, n.d.; Ringwald, 2009) and can promote right and just relationships (Brueggemann, 2014; Chittister, 2006; Gottlieb, 1995; Jantos, 2007; Nickels, n.d.; Ringwald, 2009; Taylor, 2005; Wirzba, 2006). Several co-researchers refer to being more thoughtful of or serving others in some way on their Sabbath or are more likely to help others during the rest of their week knowing they will have a day of rest for themselves. A few co-researchers also mention how a Sabbath has raised issues of social justice for them or acknowledged that celebrating a Sabbath is a privilege. Guptara (2009) speaks of Sabbath as an opportunity to turn to something other than the material. Some co-researchers spoke specifically of forgoing opportunities to make money to maintain a Sabbath in their lives.

Sabbath-keeping enhances self-awareness, improves self-care, and positively impacts the rest of the co-researchers’ weeks. Researchers and scholars suggest that Sabbath-keeping can promote personal reflection, rest, and renewal and can contribute to one’s mental health (Dein & Loewenthal, 2013; Goldberg, 1986a; Goldberg, 1986b; Golner, 1982; Smith-Gabai & Ludwig, 2011; Superville et al., 2014). Co-researchers’ experience bore this out. Several co-researchers confirm four specific themes that Goldberg (1986a) and Goldberg (1986b) identified related to mental health. First, Sabbath-keeping can counteract physical and psychological stress resulting from an overemphasis on work. Second, Sabbath-keeping enhances individuals’ feelings of their capacity to direct their lives. Third, a Sabbath establishes
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a natural rhythm to one’s week. Fourth, a Sabbath provides regular opportunities to deepen connections with family and friends, to recognize that one matters to others, and creates a space to process significant issues and feelings with others.

Almost all co-researchers affirmed findings from Dein and Lowenthal (2013) who report that participants benefited from taking a break from everyday concerns and technology, having fewer distractions, feeling unrushed, and having time to reflect on important matters during their Sabbaths. Co-researchers also confirmed Dein and Lowenthal’s research results that Sabbath was something participants looked forward to with anticipation throughout the week and that all indicated that their weeks were better when their Sabbaths went well.

**Sabbath-keeping enriches relationships.** Researchers and scholars have also identified social benefits of observing a Sabbath (Dein & Loewenthal, 2013; Goldberg, 1986a; Gordis, 1982). Most of the women in this study involved others as part of their Sabbath in some way or expressed a desire to do. Even those who spent time in solitude sometimes used this time to reflect upon their relationships with others. Co-researchers confirmed Dein and Lowenthal’s (2013) finding that their research participants found it easier to communicate with others when taking a break from technology. Co-researchers reinforced Goldberg’s (1986a) point that a Sabbath promotes regular occasions to connect in a leisurely manner with family and friends. Boyd’s (1999) research shows that Sabbath-keeping for intrinsic reasons can lead to greater intimacy for married couples. Dorff (2005) asserts that observing a Sabbath can be a significant means of strengthening family relationships. While this project did not focus on the impact of a Sabbath on marriages or committed partnerships, co-researchers indicated that their Sabbaths provided for more time together with their partners and that their decreased stress levels likely contributed to better relationships.
Sabbath practices and philosophies evolve over time. I have not seen literature that addresses this topic. It seems reasonable to expect some change for individuals who are creating their Sabbaths outside the context of a larger Sabbath-keeping community when Sabbath-keepers have less support or tradition to follow. Even the Jewish co-researchers, however, with prescribed expectations for observing Shabbat, have cultivated changing practices and experienced different feelings over time. Results indicate that an individual’s life circumstances can significantly affect one’s experience of Sabbath and therefore how one feels about it. Whether someone is single or has a partner, lives with others, has children, or lives close to a faith community and friends or family, can influence how one celebrates and experiences a Sabbath.

Researchers must be careful, therefore, in assuming that their findings will necessarily apply over an extended period for any individual. For example, in just three months, one person who was celebrating a nearly ideal Sabbath is now finding it difficult to maintain a full 24-hour Sabbath since she started a graduate degree in addition to her full-time job. A second co-researcher who was struggling with observing a fully Orthodox Shabbat moved and is now keeping what she considers as an ideal Shabbat. As Clandinin (2013) writes, “there will never be a final story” (p. 203). As co-researchers’ stories change, their thoughts about Sabbath-keeping may as well. Sabbath-keeping, then, is best seen as an evolving practice.

Challenges in Sabbath-keeping. The literature outlines several potential challenges for Sabbath-keepers. They can take a physical break but not a mental one and continue to worry (Dein & Loewenthal, 2013; Diddams et al., 2004). Others find it difficult to share with co-workers why they are not free to work on their Sabbath (Dein & Loewenthal, 2013). Some hesitate to share that they celebrate a Sabbath with acquaintances, and even friends and family in
some cases (Dana, 2012). Keeping a Sabbath is difficult when work schedules require an individual to be available during their Sabbath (Keeley, 2007). School events and coordinating even more schedules with young people in families is another challenge (Marks, 2004). Some see those who keep a Sabbath as fanatical, even within their own faith communities (Shulevitz, 2003). Having a Sabbath on a different day than the majority of society and living in suburbs where it is not easy to avoid driving makes it difficult for those who are Jewish wanting to observe a traditional Shabbat (Ringwald, 2009). Carving out time for a Sabbath when lives are full and it is most needed is also when it is most difficult to do (Marks, 2004). Co-researchers face all of these challenges so confirm the work of these authors. A few co-researchers also spoke about giving up income to have a Sabbath—something I have not read in the literature.

**Themes from co-researchers’ individual stories.** Limited research exists on the relationship between Sabbath-keeping and physical health (Superville et al., 2014), although Lee et al. (2008) and Lee et al. (2006) found a correlation between positive attitudes regarding Sabbath-keeping and better physical health and improved sleep. White et al. (2015) also found that those who keep a Sabbath were significantly more satisfied than non-Sabbath-keepers with the amount and quality of their sleep. I did not ask a specific question about physical benefits of keeping a Sabbath. One co-researcher did state, however, that she slept better than she ever had when she was observing Shabbat in an ideal manner. Another co-researcher mentioned that if she misses a Sabbath and does not get enough sleep, she can count on getting sick.

Stress can have several adverse effects on our physical health (Sapolsky, 2004; Seaward, 2012). Co-researchers all felt their Sabbaths help them prepare for, or deal with, the stresses of their weeks more successfully and expressed that Sabbath-keeping is an important part of their
self-care. The experience of co-researchers, therefore, indicates that Sabbath-keeping may be another holistic practice that contributes positively to physical health as well.

A weekly Sabbath can promote creativity according to Kwall (2012). Most co-researchers felt that a Sabbath nourished their creative sides or mentioned a way in which they engaged their imaginations during their Sabbaths in ways they seldom experience other days so affirm this assertion that Sabbath-keeping encourages creativity.

All co-researchers confirmed that Sabbath-keeping provides more time to spend outdoors (Goldberg, 1986a). Keeping a Sabbath can also contribute to a greater concern for and action on behalf of all of creation according to Conroy (2010), Hartman (2011), and Wirzba (2006). Three co-researchers expressed a particular interest in stewardship of the earth’s resources and concern for animals as part of their Sabbath practices. They found that their Sabbath traditions impact some of their practices during the week as well such as turning off lights, unplugging computers when not in use, driving less, and being more conscious about food choices. I did not explore this area as a topic, so it is possible that there may be more interest regarding a concern for the environment than co-researchers expressed given their interest in spending time in nature.

Co-researchers found their Sabbaths created space for activities they typically do not engage in during the rest of the week. Typical Sabbath activities include: enjoying the outdoors, connecting with family and friends, spending time in solitude, walking or physical activity, napping, praying and meditating, journaling, cultivating gratitude, reading, spending time with music and other creative arts, playing games, cooking and eating nourishing meals. These activities often get put on the back burner in the rush of everyday life. Creating an unhurried day that is different from the others makes room for these activities on a regular basis. Carter (2012) and Dein and Loewenthal (2013) report similar Sabbath activities for research participants.
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Participants in Dein and Loewenthal’s (2013) research study spoke to the value of a break from routine and time to reflect on spiritual and other matters.

Implications

Sabbath-keeping can be an effective, accessible, free or inexpensive holistic health practice that can contribute to the well-being of individuals, families, and our broader communities. A greater emphasis on Sabbath-keeping could also benefit our planet as we face significant challenges regarding the natural environment. Connecting with nature on a regular basis could encourage Sabbath-keepers to seek ways to help heal the earth. Working to heal the planet is more likely to happen if Sabbath-keepers have an opportunity to connect with others with similar interests.

Co-researchers indicated that it would be very useful to meet with others Sabbath-keepers, particularly others who are also keeping a Sabbath with little support. Faith communities could consider ways to assist those wanting to incorporate a Sabbath in their lives, Meetup Groups, community education, or online forums could provide additional assistance for those celebrating a Sabbath primarily on their own and particularly for those not a part of a faith community. Garnering support and learning from one another can help individuals maintain a Sabbath when it is counter-cultural to prevalent societal messages.

Discussion with others to address philosophical issues and attitudes about celebrating a Sabbath could also be helpful, particularly when Sabbath-keepers are not part of communities where celebrating a Sabbath is the norm. Such a forum may be especially important as it appears that Sabbath-keepers may not reap all the benefits and potential for transformation if Sabbath-keeping is seen as a means to an end rather than as an end in itself (Brueggemann, 2014; Diddams et al., 2004; Heschel, 1951/2005). One’s attitude about Sabbath also seems to correlate
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with its impact (Lee et al., 2006; Lee et al., 2008; White et al., 2015). As co-researchers point out, Sabbath-keeping is not always intuitive. Resting in any fashion does not always bring about rejuvenation. Having a place to raise such issues could benefit those attempting to incorporate or enhance a Sabbath in their lives.

There are drawbacks along with the benefits of being connected 24 hours, seven days a week. We can easily lose our most important connections—to ourselves and the sacred. As one co-researcher pointed out, it is a lot easier to spend time on social media than it is to nourish our souls or to welcome what we need to do for healing in our lives. Based on experiences of the co-researchers and Dein and Loewenthal’s (2013) research about the benefits of unplugging from technology, I recommend that Sabbath-keepers limit the use of electronics and social media to support a restful and renewing Sabbath practice. I also recommend that employers and employees question the long-term effectiveness of practices that require or encourage employees to be available seven days a week.

Co-researchers and the literature (Dana, 2012; Dein & Lowenthal, 2013) as well as my own experience indicate it can be difficult to discuss Sabbath practices with colleagues, friends, and even family. I encourage Sabbath-keepers, who are willing, to talk about Sabbath with others. By doing so, we can help others see that Sabbath is not an outdated concept and help slowly create a culture where Sabbath-keeping is considered an ordinary practice. Others may also be more likely to experiment with a Sabbath knowing someone who has already done so.

What if rather than always asking one another “How are you?” we occasionally ask, “What have you done lately for radical self-care?” (Janice Barbee, 2011, personal communication). We can contribute to a revolution, as Williamson (1994) and one co-researcher put it, to work to transform society around us one person at a time starting with ourselves when
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we choose not to participate in the anxiety system that permeates our world (Brueggemann, 2014). Celebrating a weekly Sabbath is one way to be part of this revolution.

As a couple of co-researchers mentioned, Sabbath-keeping is a privilege. A Sabbath for those struggling to feed themselves or their families may not be realistic, and as Keeley (2007) points out, those who are caregivers or those whose work requires them to be available during their Sabbath is a challenge. Sabbath is for all, not just some of us (Brueggemann, 2014; Heschel, 1951/2005; Keeley, 2007). Those of us who have the privilege of celebrating a Sabbath can ask what we might do to include others in our Sabbath celebrations as one co-researcher’s family does. We can also consider ways to bring a bit of Sabbath to those for whom a Sabbath is not possible. Finally, we can also challenge ourselves to live the other six days a week in such a way that we are in some way making it more likely that all will have the privilege of celebrating a Sabbath someday. Brueggemann’s (2014) call for Sabbath as not just a way to rejuvenate ourselves but as a vehicle that can help us transform our world into one that values and promotes solidarity with the most vulnerable is a significant aspect of Sabbath we ought not to forget.

**Implications for holistic health.** Sabbath-keeping is a powerful, cost-effective, holistic practice that can contribute significantly to all aspects of our well-being. Sabbath-keeping can benefit both clients and holistic practitioners. Health insurance companies do not cover many effective holistic modalities, so many holistic practices are almost automatically out of consideration for anyone with a limited income, and often even for those with middle incomes. The practice of a Sabbath, or day of rest, is particularly ideal in this regard as it is accessible to almost anyone and requires no special tools or training. For those not required to work when they want to celebrate a Sabbath, this may be a free option. For others whose work schedule does not allow a consistent day off, seeing the income they forego as an investment in their well-being
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may be an investment they are willing to make. I recommend that health care professionals start prescribing a weekly Sabbath or day of rest for their patients and clients as appropriate. An entire day will not always be a feasible place to begin. Health care professionals can honor individuals by encouraging them to start where they are to incorporate some form of rest into their days and weeks—even if it is only to sit on a porch, take a walk, sit with a pet, or to engage in another enjoyable and restful activity for a few minutes each day.

I recommend that we opt out of our consumer society at least one day a week, preferably on a weekend, so that all workers have a greater chance of access to a day off. As more of us celebrate a Sabbath, collectively we could create less demand for businesses to be open seven days a week which contributes to some employees having little choice but to work weekends. Even if companies do not limit their hours, hiring a diverse workforce can make it more likely that workers will choose to work different days so employees could have access to a Sabbath or day of rest.

I began this project intending to consider a day of rest that might be of interest to anyone as a holistic practice that promotes well-being. Spirituality was an important aspect, however, for all of the co-researchers, so I did not look at the concept of a secular sabbath or day of rest. Given the number of people for whom a faith-based approach is not appealing, I recommend referring interested individuals to resources promoting secular sabbaths, slow living and voluntary simplicity, and unplugging and digital sabbaths when appropriate. Even those who appreciate a faith-based approach may find some of these resources useful.

**Implications for future research.** I recommend longitudinal studies because of the change I saw with co-researchers within a few months and the change they reported over time. Research regarding specific Sabbath practices that promote transformation is another area for
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further research. Are particular activities and practices more likely than others to contribute to positive change in Sabbath-keepers’ lives? Given the limited research on Sabbath-keeping, studies regarding any aspects of health with larger numbers and more diverse populations would be useful. I recommend more research exploring the connection between Sabbath-keeping and robust physical health given the pervasiveness of chronic, yet preventable conditions.

I recommend research on what supports families with children because of the extra challenges young people can add to Sabbath-keeping. I also recommend researching gender differences as they relate to Sabbath-keeping. Is there a difference between how men and women celebrate a Sabbath? Are the impacts of Sabbath-keeping different for women and men? Is there greater interest in Sabbath-keeping among women as my very limited research suggests? If so, what contributes to this? Might our experiences in the world and the inequity women face compared to men contribute to this difference? Additionally, I recommend that researchers ask “Does a weekly Sabbath provide a restorative space for anyone who faces discrimination and lacks institutional power?” If yes, are there particular Sabbath practices that may be useful to others in similar situations? Is there a difference between how individuals from various cultures celebrate a Sabbath? Are the impacts of Sabbath-keeping different for individuals from various cultures? Given the experience of two co-researchers who experienced burn-out from working for social justice, might Sabbath-keeping be a helpful antidote for others in similar situations? Can a Sabbath be a helpful strategy in any profession to address or avoid burn out?

Many individuals and families will not resonate with a spiritually-based Sabbath. Research related to a secular day of rest could also be useful. What do we currently know about secular sabbaths? Do secular sabbaths provide the same benefits and opportunities for transformation as faith-based Sabbaths? How might secular sabbaths be supported?
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While part of the power of a regular Sabbath is that it means that rest is never more than six days away and involves an entire day, it will not always be feasible for individuals to take an entire Sabbath day due to job requirements, caregiving responsibilities, or otherwise. I recommend studies exploring the benefits of other forms of rest such as vacations, retreats, and sabbaticals, and daily activities such as prayer, meditation, and time in nature and how they compare to those who celebrate a weekly Sabbath.

Conclusion

Most research on Sabbath-keeping has concentrated on individuals and families who are part of strong Sabbath-keeping faith communities. This research project, set in organic inquiry using semi-structured interviews, asks: “How might celebrating a weekly Sabbath, or day of rest, promote transformation for individuals or families?” I tell the stories of 10 women who were not part of faith communities in which Sabbath-keeping was the norm. This research confirms much of the literature related to the benefits and challenges of Sabbath-keeping and shows how Sabbath-keeping can promote transformation in the lives of Sabbath-keepers.

Sabbath-keeping is a practice with several holistic health benefits when done for intrinsic reasons. For the women I interviewed, Sabbath-keeping enhances self-awareness, improves self-care, enriches relationships, develops spirituality, and positively impacts the rest of their weeks. Co-researchers’ Sabbath practices and philosophies also evolve over time. Despite challenges of a weekly Sabbath, Sabbath-keeping can be an effective, accessible, inexpensive, no-tools-or-training-required holistic practice that can contribute significantly to well-being. Our Sabbaths, however, are not isolated from the rest of our weeks or the rest of the world. Our well-being depends on the well-being of our sisters and brothers near and far in addition to the well-being of creation. As one co-researcher stated, not everyone has the privilege to be able to celebrate a
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Sabbath and to unplug from injustice in the world. For those of us who do, working the other six
days of the week to promote a more inclusive and humane world that values all of creation can
be a vital fruit of Sabbath-keeping.

Sabbath is a sacred gift from our Jewish sisters and brothers. Reviving the best parts of
this ancient tradition can be an antidote to many modern-day stresses. For some who are skilled
at living in the present, celebrating a Sabbath may come easy. Others may need to assess their
priorities to take an entire day off—or equally importantly, to trust radically that we will have the
time we need to do what is most important in life. As Lowery (2000) states, “Sabbath observance
. . . requires a leap of faith, a firm confidence that the world will continue to operate benevolently
for a day without human labor, that God is willing and able to provide enough . . .” (pp. 93-94).
Waiting for a perfect time to take that leap of faith, however, means it will never come.

Muller’s (2000) admonition is an important one: “If we refuse rest until we are finished,
we will never rest until we die. Sabbath dissolves the artificial urgency of our days, because it
liberates us from the need to be finished” (p. 83). In some cases, our lives will change
dramatically, in many others, transformation will be subtle. Either way, Sabbath-keeping can
help us live healthier and more balanced lives and simultaneously contribute to the health of the
rest of creation as well.
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Do You Celebrate a Regular Sabbath or Day of Rest?

You are invited to participate in a research study examining how celebrating a weekly Sabbath, or day of rest, may benefit individuals or families.

I am a graduate student at St. Catherine University wanting to talk with individuals or families who practice a regular Sabbath, or day of rest, who are not part of a strong Sabbath-keeping community (such as Orthodox Jews or Seventh-day Adventists). Participants will meet with me for 60-90 minutes to answer several questions in January 2016. Prior to our meeting, participants will be asked to be mindful of their Sabbath/day of rest practice and to reflect on: 1) what has been supportive in their practice, 2) any dilemmas they may have faced in maintaining a Sabbath, or day of rest, and 3) any changes they have seen as a result of their practice. Those chosen to participate in the study will receive a journal and a $20 Barnes & Noble gift card at the completion of their interview.

For more information:
Please contact Barb Speedling at xxx-xxx-xxxx or a.sanctuary.in.time@gmail.com
Appendix B
Interview Questions

A Sanctuary in Time: An Organic Inquiry of
How Celebrating a Weekly Sabbath, or Day of Rest,
May Promote Transformation for Individuals or Families

Demographics:
1. What is your age?
2. How do you identify yourself gender-wise?
3. How do you identify yourself culturally?
4. Do you live alone, or with others? If you live with others, please explain.
5. What terms do you use when describing your Sabbath, or day of rest? (e.g., Sabbath? day or rest? Celebrating? Keeping? Observing? Practicing? etc.)
   (* I will use participants’ terminology in my interview and data analysis to be respectful).

Starting to Keep a Sabbath
6. Tell me about your Sabbath practice.
7. What motivated you to begin celebrating a Sabbath/day of rest?*
8. How long have you been celebrating a regular Sabbath/day of rest?

What You Do and Don’t Do during Your Sabbath
9. What activities do you focus on doing during your Sabbath/day of rest?
10. Are any of these activities, ones you don’t normally engage in during the rest of the week? If so, please explain.
11. Are there any activities that you avoid during your Sabbath/day of rest? If so, please explain.
12. Have the activities you engage in, or choose not to engage in, changed over time? If yes, please explain how.
13. How did/do you decide what you do and don’t do during a Sabbath/day of rest?

Supports for Observing a Sabbath
14. Has anything or anyone been supportive to you in your process of observing a regular Sabbath/day of rest? If so, what or who has been supportive, and how has this been important to you?

Spirituality/the Sacred
15. Is spirituality, or the sacred, a part of your Sabbath/day of rest in any way? If so, please share how this is part of your Sabbath/day of rest.
16. Do you use any reflective exercises, reflections, or prayers during your Sabbath/day of rest?
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Challenges in Maintaining a Regular Sabbath/day of rest
17. Have you encountered any challenges or dilemmas in maintaining a regular Sabbath/day of rest? If so, please explain.
18. Do you ever take a break from observing a regular Sabbath/day of rest? If so, in what situations?

Changes from Observing a Regular Sabbath/day of rest
19. Has keeping a regular Sabbath/day of rest:
   a. Changed how you see yourself? If so, please explain.
   b. Changed how you see others around you? If so, please explain.
   c. Changed your spirituality in any way? If so, please explain.
   d. Changed how you relate to one another in your family or with those with whom you live (OR those closest to you)? If so, please explain
   e. Changed how you relate to the natural world? If so, please explain.
   f. Can you think of any changes that have resulted from celebrating a regular Sabbath, or day of rest, that we haven’t already discussed?
20. Have you learned anything from observing a regular Sabbath/day of rest? If so, please explain.

Benefits/Costs of Keeping a Regular Sabbath/day of rest
21. Are there any benefits you have seen as a result of keeping a regular Sabbath/day of rest? If yes, please explain.
22. Have you encountered any costs in keeping a regular Sabbath/day of rest? (e.g., Is there anything you miss out on or regret when you keep a regular Sabbath/day of rest?). If so, please explain.
23. If you have encountered a cost(s) in practicing a regular Sabbath/day of rest, what inspires you to maintain this practice?

Advice to others/Learning from Others
24. What advice would you give others wanting to celebrate a regular Sabbath/day of rest?
25. Is there anything you would like to know from others who also practice a Sabbath/day of rest? If so, what?

Other:
26. Is there anything else you would like to share with me that I have not asked about related to your practice of a regular Sabbath, or day of rest?
Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study!

With this Journal, I am asking you to reflect on your practice of celebrating a regular Sabbath, or day of rest, and the following questions. You do not need to use this Journal to do so if you would prefer to use something else.

The Journal is yours to keep. You can share as much, or as little, of it with me as you wish. The primary reason for asking you to reflect is to give you a chance to think about questions ahead of time.

Please reflect on the questions below in whatever form makes sense to you. You can use words, stories, drawings, art, poetry, pictures, quotes, etc. I am not looking for masterpieces or eloquence (unless you want, of course)—just seeking ways to reflect that work for you.

Questions:
Has anything been supportive to you in your process of observing a regular Sabbath/day of rest? If so, what or who has been helpful and how has this been important to you?

Have you encountered any dilemmas in maintaining a regular Sabbath/day of rest? If so, please explain.

Has keeping a regular Sabbath/day of rest:
1. Changed how you see yourself? If so, please explain.
2. Changed how you see others around you? If so, please explain.
3. Changed how you see others in the world? If so, please explain.
4. Changed your spirituality or view of the sacred in any way? If so, please explain.
5. Changed how you spend time together as a family or household (OR those closest to you)? If so, please explain.
6. Changed how you relate to one another in your family or with those with whom you live (OR those closest to you)? If so, please explain
7. Changed how you relate to others outside your immediate household? If so, please explain.
8. Changed how you relate to the natural world? If so, please explain.
9. Can you think of any changes that have resulted from celebrating a regular Sabbath, or day of rest, not outlined above?

Feel free to reflect on any other topics related to your Sabbath or day of rest, and other changes you have seen, what celebrating a Sabbath has meant to you, etc.
Introduction:
You are invited to participate in a research study investigating how observing a weekly Sabbath, or day of rest, may benefit individuals or families. I, Barbara Baker Speedling, am conducting this study. I am a graduate student at St. Catherine University under the supervision of Carol C. Geisler, Ph.D., a faculty member in the Master of Arts in Holistic Health Studies Program. You were selected as a possible participant in this research because of your experience in keeping a regular Sabbath, or day of rest. Please read this form and ask questions before you agree to be in the study.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to describe how observing a weekly Sabbath, or day of rest, may provide benefits for individuals or families. I am particularly interested in talking with individuals who are not part of a strong sabbath-keeping community. Approximately 6-8 people are expected to participate in this research project.

Procedures:
If you decide to participate, you will be asked to:

1. Talk with me, Barbara Speedling, the researcher, via phone or email to learn more about this project, go over this form, and to provide consent to participate in this project. This should take approximately 30 minutes or less.

2. If you decide to participate in this project, I will ask you to be mindful of your Sabbath/day of rest practice and to reflect on the questions below. I will send a journal for your use, or you can use something else if you wish. The Journal is yours to keep. You can share as much, or as little, of it with me as you wish. The primary reason for asking you to reflect is to give you a chance to think about questions ahead of time.

You can reflect on the questions below in whatever form makes sense to you. You can use words, stories, drawings, art, poetry, pictures, quotes, etc. I am not expecting masterpieces or eloquence (unless you want, of course)—just seeking ways to reflect that work for you:

   i. Has anything been supportive to you in your process of observing a regular Sabbath/day of rest? If so, what or who been helpful and how has this been important to you?

   ii. Have you encountered any dilemmas in maintaining a regular Sabbath/day of rest? If so, please explain.
iii. Has keeping a regular Sabbath/day of rest:
   1. Changed how you see yourself? If so, please explain.
   2. Changed how you see others around you? If so, please explain.
   3. Changed how you see others in the world? If so, please explain.
   4. Changed your spirituality or view of the sacred in any way? If so, please explain.
   5. Changed how you spend time together as a family or household (OR those closest to you)? If so, please explain.
   6. Changed how you relate to one another in your family or with those with whom you live (OR those closest to you)? If so, please explain.
   7. Changed how you relate to others outside your immediate household? If so, please explain.
   8. Changed how you relate to the natural world? If so, please explain.
   9. Can you think of any changes that have resulted from celebrating a regular Sabbath/day of rest not outlined above?

b. Meet with me in January 2016 in person at a coffee shop, library, or meeting place of your choice (or via Skype or FaceTime if that is not feasible for some reason) to answer several questions regarding your experience in observing a regular Sabbath/day of rest. This meeting will take approximately 60-90 minutes.

c. In some cases, I may ask to follow-up with you briefly via phone or email if I have additional questions about what we discussed in your interview.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the study:**
The study has minimal risks. You will always have the right to share only as much as you are comfortable sharing or to not answer a question at all. There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research.

**Compensation:**
If you participate, you will receive a journal to record your thoughts and a $20 Barnes & Noble gift card upon completion of our in-person interview. You will receive the gift card even if you choose not to answer some questions.

**Confidentiality:**
Any information obtained through this research study that can be identified with you will be disclosed only with your permission; what you share will be kept confidential. You will choose a pseudonym if you wish, and in any presentations, written reports, or publications, you will not be identified and measures will be taken so that you are not identifiable. If you decide initially that you want me to use your real first name, you can change your mind at any point as well. If you share stories regarding family members, friends, colleagues, or others, I will always use pseudonyms (that you can choose) for them even if you choose to use your real name. At the end of your interview, I will also ask you to let me know if there is anything you share with me that you would not want in any published results within two weeks of our interview.
CELEBRATING SABBATH

I will use a computer and a digital recorder to record our interview so I can report what you share accurately. Any recordings of the interview will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home or transferred to a password protected computer file on a password protected computer with a password protected internet connection. Only my advisor and I will have access to these recordings while working on this project. I will finish analyzing the data by June 2016 and will then destroy all original reports and identifying information that can be linked to you. All computer files will be password protected files kept only on my computer which is also password protected. Any paper copies will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home.

Voluntary nature of the study:
Participation in this research study is voluntary. Whether you participate or not will not affect your future relations with St. Catherine University in any way. If you decide to participate, you may stop at any time without affecting these relationships.

Contacts and questions:
If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Barbara Speedling, at a.sanctuary.in.time@gmail.com or xxx-xxx-xxxx. You may ask questions now, or if you have any additional questions later. My faculty advisor, Carol Geisler, Ph.D. at ccgeisler@stkate.edu or xxx-xxx-xxxx, will be happy to answer any questions as well. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone else, you may also contact Dr. John Schmitt, Chair of the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board, at xxx-xxx-xxxx or jsschmitt@stkate.edu.

I will provide a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:
You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read this information and your questions have been answered. Even after signing this form, please know that you may withdraw from this study at any time.

___________________
Signature of Participant  Date

___________________
Signature of Researcher  Date
What Is 2-1-1?
United Way 2-1-1 is an easy-to-remember, three-digit number that families and individuals in Minnesota and western Wisconsin (Douglas, Pierce, Polk and St. Croix counties) can call to obtain free and confidential information on health and human services. 2-1-1 call centers are staffed 24/7 by trained Information and Referral Specialists who quickly assess needs and refer callers to the help that they seek.

2-1-1 offers information on a broad range of services, including:
- Basic Needs
- Consumer
- Criminal Justice and Legal
- Education
- Environmental and Public Health/Safety
- Health Care
- Income Support and Employment
- Individual and Family Life
- Mental Health and Community/International
- Organizational/Community/International
- Target Populations

More than 80 percent of the United States has access to 2-1-1, along with several areas of Canada. For more information on the national 2-1-1, visit www.211US.org.

Search the 2-1-1 Online Database
Minnesota's comprehensive 2-1-1 database offers individuals and professionals access to more than 40,000 programs and services. Users can search the database quickly and efficiently using various criteria, including service category, agency/organization name, or key word. The online directory is continually being updated with new information on agencies and services.

2-1-1 in Minnesota
Currently, there are five call center hubs and six resource hubs across the state with a shared database containing more than 40,000 resources. Greater Twin Cities United Way funds and operates the largest call center in the state, covering the Metro region and most of the southern region. Since Minnesota first started using 2-1-1 in 2002, more than two million referrals have been made. Approximately 50 percent of calls are inquiries regarding basic needs such as food, shelter and transportation. For more information on the other 2-1-1 call centers in Minnesota, click on the statewide map.
I, ______________________________ (transcriptionist), agree to maintain full confidentiality regarding all audiotapes and documents received from Barb Baker Speedling.

I agree:
1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents.
2. To not make copies of any audiotapes or transcribed interviews texts, unless specifically requested to do so by Ms. Speedling.
3. To store all recordings and materials in a safe, secure location on a password-protected as long as they are in my possession.
4. To delete all electronic files containing documents from my computer hard drive and any back-up devices.

Transcriber’s name (printed) ________________________________

Transcriber's signature ___________________________________________________

Date ___________________________________________________