

REFUGIA FAITH

Discussion Guide

How to Use This Discussion Guide

A good reading group can serve as a small refugium space. So I hope you will let this discussion guide enrich your experience of reading the book with a group of friends, a church group, a book group, or some other gathering of people where there is shared trust, a willingness to be challenged, and some joy.

For each chapter in the book, this guide offers a set of questions, some ritual actions, a prayer, and “invitations” for outside your meeting times.

Questions

As you shape your discussion, feel free to focus on the questions that seem most meaningful and important for your group. For every chapter, it can be useful to ask one another: What spoke to you? What unsettled you?

Ritual Actions

The suggested ritual actions can be done together or—if you are meeting virtually—individually. Ritual actions are playful, tangible ways to engage yourself more fully with the ideas explored and feelings raised by each chapter. Ritual actions are meant to create a space for reflection, so reserve a little time after the ritual actions for the group to reflect on the experience. What did you think about or feel while you were doing the action?

Invitations

The “invitations” are meant for participants to try between your meeting times either alone or with others. Reserve a little time at the beginning of the next meeting to debrief about these activities. What did you learn? What did you think about?

And of course, all the questions, actions, prayers, and activities are merely suggestions. Do what seems most appropriate to your group in order to help you respond to the book most fully and productively.

I have designed this discussion guide for Christian readers, but if some of the prayers or actions aren't right for you, that's fine, of course. Perhaps you can think of alternative words or actions that speak to your spirit.

Finally, let me know if you have suggestions! I plan to continue upgrading this Discussion Guide, incorporating the brilliant ideas that you come up with. Send suggestions to debra.riestra@gmail.com. You can also find me on Facebook and Twitter @debrakriestra, or use the contact link on my website: debrariestra.com.

Thank you!



Many thanks to the “shenaniganators” from Ron Riestra’s Liturgical Shenanigans course who helped me come up with ideas for ritual actions and activities: Lex Cummings, Luke Harkema, Marcy Ryan, Emily Holehan.

Introduction: The Great Work and the Little Work



Questions

1. What public crises have most affected you in the last five years? What has most made your heart break?
2. Has your connection to Christian faith felt like a balm in the midst of crisis, or has Christianity been part of the crisis? Or both? Explain.
3. What are you most fearful about as you consider the future? What does it feel like to “live at an inflection point” (9)?
4. Have you found your “little work” in connection with the climate crisis?

Ritual actions

Cut a regular paper grocery bag into small, thin strips (about .5 x 4 inches). Have everyone take a few strips and write on them the fears, angers, and heartaches you feel for the world. Place all the papers in a small basket. Think of the basket as a refugium where those fears and heartaches can simply be held and respected for now. Keep the basket in a place where you can find it again and revisit it.

Prayer

God of all ages, you hold the universe in existence.

Eternally loving, eternally self-giving,

you are beyond deep time,

and we are so small.

As we try to face the upheaval and crisis of our age,

as we seek understanding and wonder how to live our days,

hear us when we cry out, “How long?”

Receive our fear and anger and heartache with gentleness.

Reveal to us our many greeds and complicities.

Remember that we are dust.

Have mercy on us, God,

so that we may discover new wisdom and fortitude,

so that the Spirit’s power might overwhelm us,

and teach us a new and exhilarating song.

Amen.

Invitations

1. Take another one of those grocery-bag paper strips and write the word “refugium” on it. Carry it with you this week or put it somewhere you will see frequently. Let it be a reminder that your fears and heartaches have a place to be held and respected in the basket refugium.
2. Create your own refugium space: make a blanket fort, establish a quiet corner with a comfy chair where you can do your reading, or find a spot outdoors where you can sit.
3. One of the most useful spiritual disciplines from the Ignatian tradition is the “consolation-desolation” pattern, sometimes called the “examen.” Try a very simple version of it: each night, write down what felt most consoling or life-giving to you that day. Don’t think too hard about it—just write a few phrases for what comes to you. Now do the same for desolation, writing down what felt most life-draining, fearful, or anxiety-producing. Simply give these things to God without much comment. After a week or so (or longer), review what you wrote and ask God to show you whatever patterns you need to see. Then ask yourself: What has this process revealed about where your heart is?

Chapter 1: From Despair to Preparation



Questions

1. In what ways do you feel as if we are living in an uncomfortable between-time, bewildered in a wilderness? How do you tend to respond to “wilderness times”? Do you experience resistance? Avoidance? Hope? As far as you experience the wilderness right now, who is there with you?
2. What do you think God wants to deconstruct in the cultures and communities you are a part of right now?
3. What capacities need building and strengthening? What can you see when you “look to the margins” (43)? Do you feel on the margins yourself? If so, what do you perceive that needs to be more widely understood?
4. In what ways are you experiencing these years of crisis convergence as a “severe and merciful reorientation” (33)? How might you understand your experience as a “pilgrimage refugium” (43–44)? How might God be reshaping you and your community?

Ritual actions

Create a metaphorical “go-bag.” Pack a backpack or tote bag with items that represent what helps us survive in a time of wilderness: perhaps a photo of someone dear to you to represent companionship, a tea bag to represent comforting rituals, a flower to represent beauty, and so on.

Prayer

God of wisdom,
you hold all things in the universe together
with strength and sweetness.
Forgive our drive toward domination.
By your mercy, draw us into the wilderness,
and provide for us there.
Strengthen our trust in you even amid disorder and loss,
comfort us with companionship,
sustain us with what we need,
prepare us for your purposes,
so that we can perceive what you are breaking down
and rejoice in what you are building up.
Teach us the way of prudence.
Amen.

Invitations

1. Take a trip to the busiest shopping area near where you live and observe what you see, considering both the enormous gifts of affluence as well as what is sacrificed and lost to enable this wealth for some. Ponder the ecosystems and indigenous peoples that used to dwell here. Find out, if you can, who and what lived here.
2. Alternatively (or in addition), visit a place in the deconstruction stage of restoration, such as the demolition of a building, the destruction process of a redecorating project, or even just that basement storage space you're trying to clean out and organize. Write down your thoughts about what it takes to make something new.
3. If it's winter where you are, you might simply take a walk and observe how plants and trees seem "destroyed" in winter as they rest and renew. Take photos of what you observe and jot down some notes on your thoughts and feelings.

Chapter 2: From Alienation to Kinship



Questions

1. Of the options on p. 61, which best describe the attitudes toward “nature” that you were taught? Which ones are you drawn to now? Which ones seem wrong or incomplete?
2. Do you have “nature deficit disorder”—feeling out of touch with and not very knowledgeable about the more-than-human creation? If so, do you experience a sense of alienation? If you do feel connected to the more-than-human world, how have you cultivated that connection?
3. When and where do you most feel kinship with the more-than-human creation?
4. Would you say that the expression of Christianity you know best is overly individualistic and/or spiritualized? Give some examples of where you see this. Or describe ways you have seen this tendency resisted.
5. If “Errand Boy Jesus” is the predominant depiction in your context, what are some possible corrections to this reductive view of Christ and the incarnation? What do you think is at stake in the way we talk about the incarnation?

Ritual actions

Get out your family nativity scene—or borrow one. Have a little fun surrounding the holy family with as many items as you can that represent different kinds of people and creatures. Bring in your houseplants. Add some stuffed animals to represent more species. Prop up a family photo nearby. If the weather allows, you could set the nativity scene up outside (at least temporarily).

Prayer

God of all creation,
out of your inexhaustible love,
you stitched yourself forever to the life of your creatures
in the glorious humility of the Christ child.
Renew our love for the whole beloved kinship of creation.
Reveal to us our shared life and shared beauty.
Be praised through all your creatures:
Brother Sun, Sister Moon, stars, wind,
water, fire, earth, trees, grasses, flowers,
and all the creatures of earth, air, freshwater, and seas.
Show us your divine fullness,
shining in all that you have made.
Amen.

[As an alternative, you might use St. Francis of Assisi's Canticle of the Sun.]

Invitations

1. Indulge your “biophilia” (58). Find one tree near you to connect with. Identify and learn about the species—its Latin name, common names, and characteristics—and visit the tree several times, perhaps at different times of day, simply to observe quietly. You might use photographs or notes to help you recall what you perceive. Or you could make drawings each time you visit. Even if you are not good at drawing, just giving it a try is a meditative practice that helps exercise your ability to pay attention.
2. Spend some extra time with the animals in your life, being together in one another's presence. Try to imagine what it's like to see the world from their perspective.
3. If you can, visit a park or nature preserve and imagine how everything there—landforms, water, microbes, insects, birds, lichen, everything—is “swept up into the divine project together” (64). You could write a prayer of praise in response.

Chapter 3: From Consuming to Healing



Questions

1. Try out the phrase “community of creation” as an experimental substitute for the word “kingdom” in a few familiar biblical texts. How does the substitution affect what you imagine when you hear each text? [Here are some example texts to try: Matt 5:3, Matt 6:10, Matt 6:33, Mk 1:15, Mk 10:15, Lk 1:33, Lk 10: 9-11, Lk 11:2, Lk 12:31-32, Lk 13:29, Lk 17:21, Lk 18:17, John 3:5.]
2. What does the word “stewardship” mean to you? Have you heard the terms “steward” or “stewardship” used in Christian contexts to describe our proper relationship with the more-than-human creation? How have you responded to those terms?
3. What new things do you notice in Genesis 1 and 2 after reading pp. 99–103?
4. Make a list of gifts (106) that the lands and waters, plants and creatures around you provide for you and your community.
5. What land—or water—healing is needed where you live, work, or worship? Are there urban neighborhoods suffering from pollution or neglect or lack of green space? commercial strips full of abandoned buildings and cracked parking lots? farms with degraded and eroded soil? How can you and your community help?

Ritual actions

1. Take out a bowl and fill it with water from the tap, pond, hose, body of water, or whatever seems fitting. Feel the water, play with the water, and describe what you know about how the water got to you. Perhaps go around the circle and offer examples of how water contributes to our lives. You might trace the sign of the cross with a wet finger on your forehead, remembering your baptism.
2. On a large piece of paper, using different colors, draw circles to represent different aspects of the community of creation. You might take turns adding circles, allowing them to overlap and intersect, perhaps creating an interesting design. If the weather allows it, you might head outside and find a spot to trace these circles right on the ground, gathering leaves or stones or flowers or moss to mark each circle with gifts from the earth.

Prayer

God of light,
you illuminate the household of all life with your radiance.
Repair our broken relationships with all our kin
on this beautiful earth.
Invite us into your healing work
that we might find ways to partner
with each other and with the plants and fungi,
rain and wind, birds and insects,
with all created things,
and with your gracious Spirit
so that the community of creation
might be revealed and fulfilled
to your glory.
Amen.

Invitations

1. Someone, perhaps a group of someones, in your community is already engaged in land—or water—healing. Find out who and what they're doing. If possible, visit a site that they're working on and perhaps volunteer to do some work.
2. When someone we love is sick, we are eager to offer comfort. We make chicken soup or sing lullabies or share consoling presence. As a way to imagine yourself as a healer, what gestures can you offer the suffering earth? Write a (compostable) get-well-soon card to the earth and bury it in your garden. Sing a song or hymn where creatures can hear you. Find a place that needs healing and be present there, praying out loud for the healing of that place.

Chapter 4: From Avoiding to Lamenting



Questions

1. In the faith communities you know, what have you been taught about how to grieve, individually and corporately? What have you been taught about how to lament? What have you been taught about how to repent? Have you noticed you or others fearing and avoiding these practices?
2. What losses have you already experienced in the ecosystems and communities you care about? Do you feel “solastalgia” (129)?
3. What climate-change-related losses most move you to grief?
4. Do you worry that mitigating climate change will mean living with greater limitations (140)? If so, how do you manage that worry?
5. What attitudes or practices do your communities—faith communities, business or workplace communities, family groups, or civic communities—most need to repent from? How might repentance, as both heartfelt contrition and changed life, come about?

Ritual actions

1. Take out that basket of fears, angers, and heartaches from the Introduction chapter. Make a list of things that you most grieve and add that to the basket. Now write, on more paper grocery bag strips, a few practices or attitudes that you believe you and your communities most need to repent of. Crumple up all the strips and add them all back to the basket. Make it look like a bird’s nest. Now find a beautiful cloth of some kind and lay it over the top of the basket. On top of the cloth, lay a cross.
2. If you’re crafty and ambitious, you might actually make a nest out of your paper strips. Here’s an example:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hxzG5qw_4Cg.

Prayer

Savior of the world,
in your intimate and infinite grace,
you know sorrow and suffering.
Grant us courage to grieve for all that is wrong and lost,
and to bring our grief to you.
Save us from despair.
Why do you allow us to continue in our evil ways?
How long until you fulfill your promises
to bring justice and restore righteousness to the earth?
Rouse our right and true angers within us

for people abused and neglected,
beauties destroyed,
species lost forever,
for all the damage and poison we have caused.
We repent from our cold love.
We pray for true conversion,
and a willingness to accept limits gladly and in hope
that we might join with the groaning of all creation
for the redemption you have promised.
Amen.

Invitations

1. Visit a neighborhood or area near you that has been damaged or neglected as a “sacrifice zone,” where some people suffer so that others can avoid the costs of their lifestyle. Say a prayer of lament over this place.
2. Learn more about something that most grieves you—perhaps the damages caused by fracking or a particular critically endangered species.
3. Throw a temper tantrum. When children feel overwhelmed, they will often thrash, stomp on the ground, or yell so they can release some of the tension they are feeling and get grounded in the current moment. Take a few moments to throw a tantrum—in a safe and appropriate space—to release some anger over species extinction, environmental injustice, public indifference, or whatever most grieves you about the climate crisis.

Chapter 5: From Resignation to Gratitude



Questions

1. What are some examples of life renewing itself in the more-than-human world, especially examples that are special to your region?
2. “The shape of the cross reminds us that woundedness and renewal intersect, and at that intersection, we find the very person of God” (157). Where do you see woundedness and renewal intersecting, in your own life, your community, or in nature?
3. In what real places could you and your community work to create refugia and how could you do it? Could you transform some of your lawn, or your church’s lawn, to native plantings? Is there a spot in your neighborhood or community where you could plant a garden or do some ecosystem restoration? What resources would you need to make it happen, in terms of knowledge, labor, money, and so on?
4. What do you think happens at the end of history? How does that affect your actions now?

Ritual action

1. Go outside if possible and look around. Thank the natural phenomena you see for what they have given you and your community. Thank the sun for light, the trees for oxygen, the lake for providing fresh water, the birds for keeping insect populations in balance and singing their songs, and so on. If this feels awkward, you can simply thank God for providing each thing.
2. Take out your “nest” again and remove the cross and cloth. Fill the nest with signs of new life. You might add seed packets, hard-boiled and dyed eggs (obviously don’t leave those out for long), fresh or dried flowers. If you’re crafty and up for a challenge, you could fold origami eggs: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KXtgaMa5oM>). Display your nest with the cloth and cross underneath it, supporting it.

Prayer

Lord of life,
you transform death to life
through the work of the soil, the water, the seed,
through the work of decay and the miracle of birth.
You transform death to life
through the work of Christ and the power of the Spirit.
We give thanks for life's persistence
and for the promise that you are making all things new.
Grant us the humility and curiosity
to witness renewal in the earth,
in our human communities, in our hearts.
Equip us to join in your transforming work
as joyful partners and faithful witnesses.
Amen.

Invitations

Choose an activity that gets you involved in the persistence of life. You might

1. Choose a favorite food and figure out where it comes from so you know what it takes to bring that food to your plate.
2. Grow something from seed! If you're especially ambitious, start a garden. If you're already a gardener, help someone else learn how to grow something.
3. Sign up for a CSA share this year.
4. Learn how to compost.
5. Devise a new gratitude or joy practice and start incorporating it into your life. What is a practice you can manage even when you don't feel like it?

Chapter 6: From Passivity to Citizenship



Questions

1. Consider the list of examples on p. 186 and name some refugia spaces—including cultural and spiritual ones—that you have experienced and/or are currently experiencing. What conditions make these literal or metaphorical spaces serve as refugia for you or others?
2. How are the faith communities you know doing in becoming “the people of refugia”? Where are opportunities for your faith community to create or strengthen refugia of all kinds? What would it take to shift your community culture toward a refugia model?
3. Does your faith community have a “pyramid problem” (189ff) in which people depend too much on leaders? Do you and others in your community engage in the “infantile authority fantasy,” hoping someone else will fix things? If so, what has brought about this passivity? If not, how are people in your community formed so that they claim agency as citizens?
4. How have you understood what “the image of God” means? How would you describe the value of the more-than-human creation to God?
5. What opportunities could you receive for protecting the commons and engaging in “activism as refugial practice”?

Ritual actions

1. Have each person bring an unlit candle to the small group space (or within view of the others online). In a moment of silence, reflect on the places of refugia and people of refugia in your life. As these gifts come to mind, light your candle, and (if possible) create a circle with the lit candles. Once everyone has added their candle, share with one another the refugia that came to mind. Keep the candles lit during your meeting. Blow them out when you leave the space, but imagine the smoke coming along with you as you leave.
2. Darken the room as much as safely possible, and light a single, large candle. Give each person a few small pieces of aluminum foil. Go around the circle and have each person name ways you can engage your community as people of refugia. As each person speaks, they lay their foil down near the candle, together creating a reflective surface that seems to multiply the candle’s light. When you are finished take a few moments simply to enjoy the play of light on the foil surfaces.

Prayer

Spirit of disturbance,
you bring fire and wind
to upset our complacencies and stir our courage.
Awaken us to the Spirit's wild work all around us.
Stir up miracles of unity and cooperation.
Help us to learn eagerly from the wisdom of others.
Reveal to each of us our little work,
uniting our purposes as citizens
with compassion, agency, and true communion.
Teach us words through which you will speak dry bones into life.
Place in our hands the leaves that will heal the nations,
so that we may be drawn more closely
into the circle of Jesus's friends,
and so that we may dwell more deeply
within the blessedness of all life.

Invitations

1. Practice your “testimony” about climate change. Katharine Hayhoe says that the most important thing we can do to help mitigate climate change is talk about it. (See Suggested Resources under “Where to Begin.”) Practice a two-minute story about how you became involved with climate action and why. What values underlie your commitment? Try recording your testimony.
2. Research action-focused groups that might be a good fit for you. You might start with the Suggested Resources list in the book or on the debrarienstra.com website. Find the local chapters of the national groups, or (better yet) find local groups working on problems particular to your region or voting district. Identify some projects that connect with what you care about most: perhaps watershed restoration or political activism or community gardening or environmental justice advocacy or refugee work (the conflicts that drive migration are often climate-related at root).
3. Are you already connected to a particular place? If so, learn something new about it in order to connect more deeply. If not, choose a park or river or other spot that you feel an affinity to and start to visit there regularly. What does this place need from you?
4. Find out what climate change is likely to mean for your region. You could start with one or more of these websites:
 - Explore the [States at Risk website](#).
 - Read about your region in the Regional Chapter section of the [Fourth National Climate Assessment](#)

- Search Climate Central's Resource Library for in-depth information about your area (use the "Search Media" function and select your area and the climate impact you'd like to know more about)
- Explore your state's preparedness level at the Climate Preparedness Report Card
- Find out if your state or city has a climate Adaptation Plan
- Read the Climate and Health Assessment's Ch. 9: Populations of Concern

(Thanks to the Evangelical Environmental Network Partners program for these websites.)

Chapter 7: From Indifference to Attention



Questions

1. Have you been lucky enough to experience a “green world” or two in your life (218)? If so, what were some of the freedoms and risks available there? How did those places change you so that you returned to the “real world” a different person? What made these green worlds valuable to you?
2. What does hope mean to you? How could you practice more intentionally the discipline of hope (226)?
3. In the summary on pp. 226–28, which characteristics of refugia most speak to you and why?
4. Where do you most experience wonder? How might you make the practice of wonder a more integral part of your life? How about your community’s life?

Ritual actions

1. If possible, go outside on a “wonder hunt” nearby. Find something large or small to wonder at. Take photos. Write a haiku. Make a sketch. Share with the group.
2. As an act of hope, imagine a future filled with robust refugia. Write, draw, or otherwise express what it would look like.

Prayer

God of hope,
you promise never to abandon us.
Awaken in us divine vision and imagination.
We give thanks for all those people
who inspire and persist, who dream and work.
Sustain us in the ordinary days.
Amid weariness and fear, bring us consolation.
Amid exhaustion, bring us true rest.
Grant us patience and resilience
to practice the discipline of hope.
Awaken our attention, inflame our wonder,
that we might fall in love again and again
with this exquisite world
for your sake and your glory.
Amen.

Invitations

1. Keep a “wonder diary.” Keep a notebook with you for the next few weeks and simply write down when you notice something that draws your attention and wonder. This could be another person, a work of art, a kindness you observe, or something wonderful in nature.
2. Put a reminder in your phone to buzz you once a day, reminding you to stop what you’re doing and find the wonder in the moment. Perhaps look outside or marvel at the miracle of the person near you or think of something marvelous you noticed earlier. Whatever else is going on, take a moment to practice wonder.
3. As a playful expression of kinship and gratitude, devise a way to “share a meal” with some more-than-human creatures. You might bring some appropriate duck feed to a park and say a grace before feeding the ducks. Or perhaps you could say grace before filling the bird feeder, then eat your lunch outside while watching the birds feed as well.
4. Practice the Sabbath. Put away all work for one day a week and rest. Make a celebratory meal. Find activities that feel life-giving for you. Share the day with those you love. What would it take to make this a regular practice?

I would love to hear from you!

Thank you for using this discussion guide to enhance your engagement with *Refugia Faith*. Will you let me know how it went? I would love to hear about the people in your group, about how you used this guide, and about the genius activities you invented or the profound ideas you discussed. And I would love to have your suggestions for improving the guide. You can contact me at debra.rienstra@gmail.com. You can also find me on Facebook and Twitter @debrakrienstra.

