

New practices (2 Thessalonians 3:6–13)

At this point we're all into whatever is our way of being together as endemic church.

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Churches order their life and work together through practices, through what Craig Dykstra defines as “those cooperative human activities through which we, as individuals and communities, grow and develop more character and substance.”

In our text from 2 Thessalonians, the community has fallen out of order, out of their common practices and patterns of being together. At this point we're all into whatever is our way of being together as endemic church. Some practices may be gone for good, while others have just been tweaked.

This got me thinking about all of the practices my congregation has developed during the pandemic/endemic that we love and don't want to stop. A lot of them you probably already were doing, but they've been new and wonderful for us:

- Live streamed services
- Hybrid and online-only classes and retreats. We get to learn from and with people from all over the globe and can co-host or co-sponsor with other groups so much more easily.
- Evening meetings by Zoom, especially in the dead of January but any time for single parents, those who don't feel safe driving at night, and a whole host of

others

- Hearing stringed instruments in our sanctuary, which we got to indulge in when we couldn't sing
- Bringing flowers to people
- Meeting for walks and at playgrounds
- Staying home when you feel sick
- Working from many places
- Moving to an online directory and registration platform
- Antiracism commitments
- Incorporating visual art into our sermons and worship space
- Having a chance for people to stop, start, and change what they're involved with. We've liked that part so much we now have annual "open enrollment" for all things at the church.

There are things that we do that some would like to have in the rearview—like individual communion cups and masks on and off and on and off. Neither really bothers me, but I'm happy not to have to register people for worship or take temperatures any longer.

Of course so much has been lost in these years, but I'm beyond grateful for the practices of being church together that we've developed out of necessity and opportunity—practices that are defining and redefining who and how we will be as church together now.