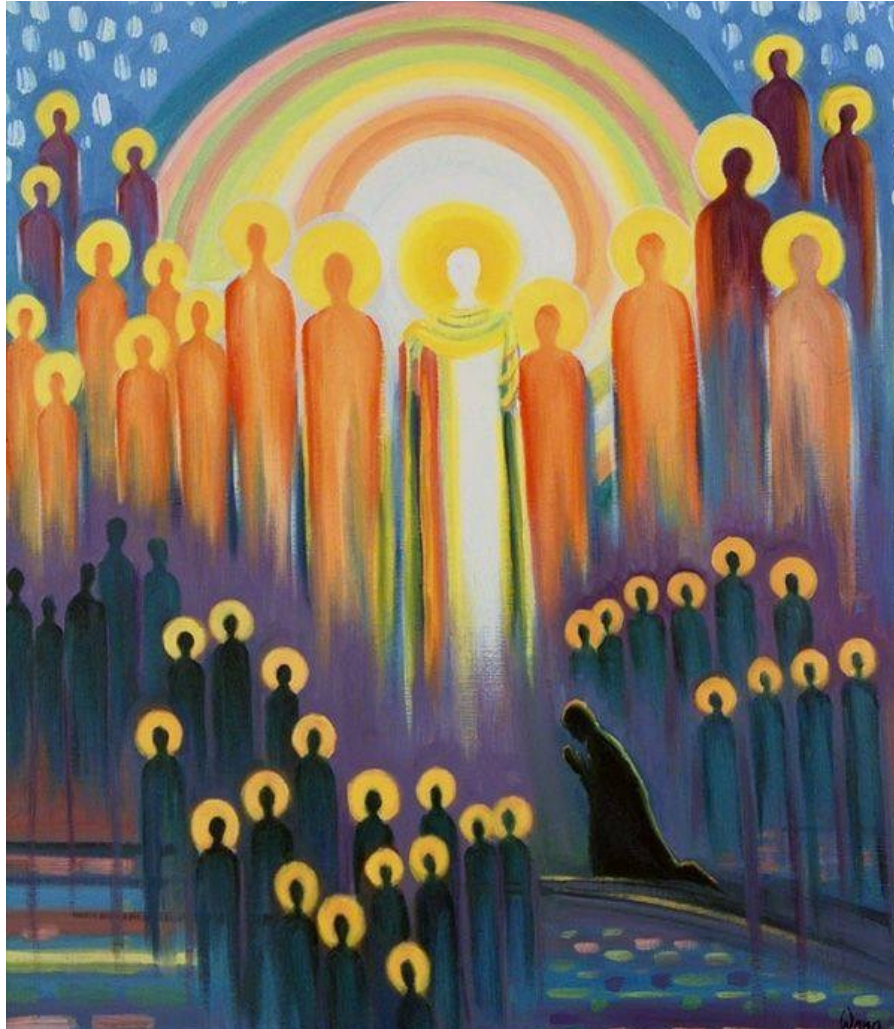


First English Lutheran Church

Sabbath & Ministry Pause Reflections



Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in. If you refrain from trampling the Sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests or pursuing your own affairs; then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Isaiah 58:12 - 14

Introduction

This eight-week reflection guide leads our congregation through the spiritual practice of Sabbath pause. During this time, we are stepping back from active ministry work in order to engage in the deeper work of tending the fields entrusted to us—mending where it is needed, strengthening our understanding of what supports, enriching what will sustain future growth.

Each week includes a focus scripture for worship and reflection. Each community member is encouraged to use this reflection booklet with daily reflections for Monday through Saturday each week. Sundays remain a time to gather in worship, to be fed by the Word, and to be nourished at the Lord's table. Throughout the week, you are asked to engage these reflections intentionally and consistently, allowing them to shape how you understand your role, your ministry, and our life together as a congregation.

The purpose of this reflection is to guide our Community Discernment toward real decisions about our life together as a congregation—decisions about what we will sustain, what we will reshape, and what we will release. As we look honestly at our shared life, we do so trusting that God is already at work among us, providing both the clarity and the courage needed for what comes next.

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Also included for your use, is a Daily Ignatian Examen Practice. The Ignatian Examen is a reflective prayer practice developed by Ignatius of Loyola in the 16th century as part of his broader spiritual framework known as the Spiritual Exercises. Rather than focusing only on failure or confession, the Examen was designed to also help people become more aware of God's presence and activity in everyday life through gratitude, reflection, and discernment. The practice traditionally guides a person through reviewing the events, emotions, choices, and relationships of the day in conversation with God, noticing both moments of consolation and places needing healing or growth. Its intention is to cultivate deeper spiritual awareness, strengthen one's relationship with God, and form a more attentive, responsive way of living in the world.

This practice is meant to accompany your daily reflections, grounding our *individual* Ministry Pause work in thanksgiving, confession, forgiveness, healing, and prayer. As you establish a rhythm for this practice, trust that its fruits will grow and ripen over the course of these eight weeks, preparing both you and this community for the work ahead.

Daily Ignatian Examen Practice

Give Thanks to God: Begin by giving God thanks for the gifts and moments of this day. Reflect on signs of grace, connection, beauty, strength, and care, both large and small.

Ask for the Spirit's Presence: Before you review the challenging or unfinished parts of your day, ask God to surround you with the Holy Spirit. Pray for honesty, wisdom, and gentleness with yourself as you reflect.

Review & Recognize: With God beside you, look back over the last 24 hours. Notice the moments where your actions, words, or choices may have caused harm, missed an opportunity for love, or fallen short of who you hope to be. Also notice places where you were carrying too much, reacting from exhaustion, fear, or hurt.

Ask for Forgiveness & Healing: Bring these moments before God. Receive God's mercy where forgiveness is needed, and God's healing where there were mistakes, misunderstandings, or unintended consequences. Ask for freedom to release what weighs heavily on you and for guidance to grow with wisdom and compassion.

Pray About What's Ahead: Imagine the day to come: the people you will encounter, the work before you, the conversations and responsibilities awaiting you. Ask God to guide you in both expected and unexpected moments, and to help you move through the day with courage, clarity, and love.

During the entirety of this Ministry Pause, use this booklet and the spiritual practices it contains to reflect individually on your personal role in the ministry of First English. Grounding each daily reflection in the Ignatian Examen sets the pattern and pace for the entire pause. The pattern of weekly gathering for worship and sending to the spiritual practices of individual reflection, will be our method of *individual* discernment. The full effect of this practice is experienced by engaging in the work on a daily basis. You may read the whole booklet on day one, but you are encouraged to do the work gradually. Allow your practice of individual reflection over the entirety of this Ministry Pause to unfold at a natural pace.

Week 1 (Sunday May 31) John 12:23-28

Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say: ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”

Engage the Ignatian Examen Practice on page 3 after you complete your daily reflection work.

Monday

How did you receive your name?

Describe your name as if speaking to someone who does not know you.

Tuesday

What is challenging about this Ministry Pause for you personally? Why is that?

Continue to ask yourself these two questions and answer honestly until you feel you have finished this deep reflection.

Wednesday

Create a list of core identities that you embody as a human?

Create a list of core identities that FELC embodies as a community of disciples?

Thursday

What is lifegiving about this pause for you personally?

Where might you anticipate seeing God’s abundance in this Ministry Pause?

Friday

In your understanding of FELC, what may need to end so something new can grow?

What would be at risk if nothing changes at FELC?

Saturday

What is one insight from this week that FELC needs to hear as a community?

Week 1 Reflections

Week 2 - (June 7) Revelation 7:13-17

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?” I said to him, “Sir, you are the one who knows.” Then he said to me, “These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat, for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Engage the Ignatian Examen Practice on page 3 after you complete your daily reflection work.

Monday

Describe the ministry you are most active in by answering the following questions:

What does the ministry declare as its purpose?

What defines its work and boundaries?

What is the future of this ministry in 1 year, 5 years, ten years?

Tuesday

Reflecting on your ministry participation before this pause, what do you hunger or thirst for in your service?

Wednesday

Where is the sun beating down on you in a dangerous way?

Where do you feel guided to springs of life in service?

Thursday

Where in your life are your tears being wiped away? How?

Friday

How does the way FELC organizes ministry contribute to your hunger or exhaustion?

How does the way FELC organizes ministry contribute to your joy and vocational fulfillment?

Saturday

What part of FELC’s ministry organization and practice would need to change for ministry to be sustainable?

What part of FELC’s ministry organization and practice would need to remain the same for ministry to be sustainable?

What is one insight from this week that FELC needs to hear as a community?

Week 2 Reflections

Week 3 (June 14) Isaiah 61:1-4 | Luke 4:16-21

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

When JESUS came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” And JESUS rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Discernment includes a long, loving look at *the real*. (This is a phrase from Ignatian spirituality!) For you, this means a long, loving look at *the real* story of your congregation. This will be done by reflecting on stories in your experience with FELC.

Engage the Ignatian Examen Practice on page 3 after you complete your daily reflection work.

Monday

Recall and describe a story about one of the worst times during the life of FELC as a congregation.

Tuesday

God's mission has a church. Describe how the FELC ministries you love and are active in support the FELC mission statement:

In 2026 we unify our congregation focus on stewarding our resources so we can continue to declare the Word of God and the love of Jesus Christ through proclamation, teaching, worship and a caring ministry to all people.

Week 3 Reflections

Week 3 (June 14) Isaiah 61:1-4 | Luke 4:16-21 (Continued)

Wednesday:

Recall and describe a story about one of the best times during the life of FELC as a congregation.

Thursday

Where have we tried to do more in ministry than we had the capacity to sustain?

What ministries have we loved but not supported enough to be healthy?

Friday

What is the cost to the congregation when we continue ministries we cannot sustain?

What ministries might need to end, pause, or be restructured for the health of the whole?

Saturday

What is one insight from this week that FELC needs to hear as a community?

Week 3 Reflections

Week 4 (June 21) Matthew 13:1-24 (worship vs. 1-9; reflection booklet vs. 1-24)

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: “Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on a path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched, and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. If you have ears, hear!”

Then the disciples came and asked him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” “He answered, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance, but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. The reason I speak to them in parables is that ‘seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.’ With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says: ‘You will indeed listen but never understand, and you will indeed look but never perceive. For this people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes, so that they might not look with their eyes, and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn—and I would heal them.’

“But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

“Hear, then, the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet such a person has no root but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of this age and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

Engage the Ignatian Examen Practice on page 3 after you complete your daily reflection work.

Week 4 Reflections

Week 4 (June 21) Matthew 13:1-24 worship 1-9; reflection booklet 1-24 (Continued)

Monday

What special recipe or food takes you back to a different time, a different place, or evokes powerful memories?

Describe that dish, the ingredients, who you usually share it with, or who taught you to make it.

Tuesday

What ingredients or processes (if removed or altered) would change the whole dish or change the experience surrounding the dish?

What would be different about this dish with the change you imagine?

Would it even be the same dish? Example: fresh fruit vs canned, made with a mix or made from scratch, served under different circumstances, made by a stranger?

Wednesday

Imagine there is a recipe that yields or describes the FELC congregation. Make a list of all the ingredients that go into making this congregation. This might include people, places, things, feelings, values, processes, activities, stories, and traditions you associate with FELC.

Thursday

Refer to the list of ingredients of this congregation you made yesterday.

Are these ingredients of a past, current, or future congregation?

Are these current ingredients that may be different from the past?

Are these aspirational – things you want more of for the future church?

Note which ingredients align with the past, present and future.

Friday

Which of the ingredients you listed on Wednesday are we no longer able to sustain?

Which ingredients are essential and must be prioritized?

If we prioritize these, what will receive less attention or be released?

Saturday

Based on your work this past month, where could your cherished ministry grow to support the mission of FELC. Dream big! No idea is too big or too outside the box.

What is one insight from this week that FELC needs to hear as a community?

Week 4 Reflections

Week 5 (June 28) Luke 6:35-38

Love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap, for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.

Engage the Ignatian Examen Practice on page 3 after you complete your daily reflection work.

Monday

Recall a time you've been seated around a table.

What were some of your favorite tables to join?

What were some of the most challenging tables you have joined?

Think about the individual people and groups with whom you regularly share space.

Draw a table (artistic skill level is not important!) for each of the above questions and then write the names of those who joined you at each table, seating chart style.

Tuesday

What was challenging about yesterday's exercise?

What surprised you?

What feelings came up as you thought of the different "tables" at which you sit?

Where do the tables overlap?

What does that overlap (or lack of overlap) suggest to you?

Wednesday

Returning to your tables from Monday, choose someone you sit with frequently but is not part of the FELC community. What do you imagine brings them joy?

What might be a source of worry or fear for them?

What sense of support or community does this person rely on?

What might you imagine to be their greatest fear and their greatest hope?

What are their gifts?

Week 5 Reflections

Week 5 (June 28) Luke 6:35-38 (Continued)

Thursday

What brings you joy?

What is a source of worry or fear?

What sense of support or community do you rely on?

What is your greatest fear and your greatest hope?

What are your gifts?

Friday

What would need to change at FELC for us to welcome new people into community and ministry?

What current practices or expectations at FELC might limit our ability to welcome new people?

Saturday

What is one insight from this week that FELC needs to hear as a community?

Week 5 Reflections

Week 6 (July 5) Matthew 14:22-33

Jesus made the disciples get into a boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and, beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Engage the Ignatian Examen Practice on page 3 after you complete your daily reflection work.

Monday

What thoughts have you had or actions have you taken when your faith is challenged (healthy or unhealthy)?

Describe the challenge and your responses.

What were the results of those thoughts or actions?

Tuesday

When has fear influenced decisions in FELC's life as a congregation?

Wednesday

What risks are we avoiding as a community that may be necessary for faithful stewardship?

What decisions have been delayed as a congregation because they seemed too difficult?

Thursday

Reflect on what has challenged your faith in the last five years. Are you able to also see God's abundance present in that challenge? Articulate how you have seen God's abundance.

Friday

How are you being challenged by the Ministry Pause?

How has the Ministry Pause been lifegiving?

Saturday

What is one insight from this week that FELC needs to hear as a community?

Week 6 Reflections

Week 7 (July 12) Luke 24:13-35

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him.” Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, Jesus walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. When Jesus was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem, and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Engage the Ignatian Examen Practice on page 3 after you complete your daily reflection work.

Week 7 Reflections

Week 7 (July 12) Luke 24:13-35 (Continued)

Monday

Reflecting on the “Walk to Emmaus” text, what have we been focusing on as a community of faith in the past 90 years?

Tuesday

Reflecting on the “Walk to Emmaus” text, what are we currently focusing on as a community of faith?

How is that focus reflected in our organizational structure?

Where are we currently overextended as a congregation?

What would it look like to reduce that overextension faithfully?

Wednesday

What should we be preparing to focus on as a community of faith?

How are we preparing or planning for that?

Where could we make changes to support that future focus?

Thursday

What are we currently doing that does not align with what we believe we are called to focus on?

What would it look like to realign our structure, not just our intentions?

Friday

Has this Ministry Pause overflowed into your personal life patterns? If so, what was your response?

Saturday

Jesus comes into focus for the disciples when he breaks bread with them. What bread breaking can we do to keep Jesus central to the focus of our community?

What is one insight from this week that FELC needs to hear as a community?

Week 7 Reflections

Week 8 (July 19) Matthew 6:19-21

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Engage the Ignatian Examen Practice on page 3 after you complete your daily reflection work.

Monday

What pain points did you identify in the process of Ministry Pause?

What barns need repair?

What fences need mending?

Where should we be spreading fertilizer? And what is that fertilizer?

Tuesday

What do you imagine God desires *of our* congregation?

What do you imagine God desires *for our* congregation?

How should FELC prioritize its resources to sustain its core ministry?

Wednesday

What happened when you engaged the same daily Christian practices and reflected in this focused way?

Thursday

What resources and gifts do you represent in this community?

How will you steward these resources and gifts as we repair, mend and fertilize in the coming months?

Friday

Assuming there were some moments of discomfort during the Ministry Pause, what happened when you went to the edge of your comfort zone?

What curiosity do you have about your congregation's story and the story that has yet to be written?

Saturday

What will you personally continue, change, or release in your stewardship after this pause?

What is one change you believe FELC must make as a congregation in the coming year?

What is one insight from this week that FELC needs to hear as a community?

Week 8 Reflections

Week 9 (July 26) Luke 13:6-9 Return to Community Worship/Reflection

Jesus told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the man working the vineyard, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’ He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good, but if not, you can cut it down.’ ”

Engage the Ignatian Examen Practice on page 3 after you complete your daily reflection work.

Well done, good and faithful servant! You have reached the conclusion of this Ministry Pause journey. Looking back over your reflections from the past two months, answer the following questions for yourself over this next week. Responses will be gathered to inform Council and Stewardship decisions for the next phase of FELC’s ministry.

Monday

What is your main takeaway from these two months?

Tuesday

Where have you discerned you are investing your treasure (time, abilities and financial support)?

Wednesday

Where do you now see God’s abundance in your life, work, community, world?

Thursday

Where do you see needs for your chosen ministry that correlate to the farmer illustration?
(fence mending, field fertilizing, barn repairs)

Describe in detail and draw any connections to other ministries that you see.

Friday

What should take priority in our community if resources are limited?

Saturday

Where do you see an abundance of resources in this community?

Describe the abundance and connect it to ministries as you experience it.

Week 9 Reflections

