

# ECO-SABBATH: WALK/CYCLE TO MASS

## Objective

- Deepen understanding of Eucharistic thanksgiving and Sabbath rest by increasing use of sustainable transportation to mass

## Biblical References

- “But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD, your God. No work may be done then either by you, or your son or daughter, or your male or female slave, or your beast, or by the alien who lives with you. In six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the LORD has blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” (*Exodus 20:10-11*)
- “For remember that you too were once slaves in Egypt, and the LORD, your God, brought you from there with his strong hand and outstretched arm. That is why the LORD, your God, has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.” (*Deuteronomy 5:15*)
- “The Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’” (*1 Corinthians 23-24*)

## Doctrinal Content

- “The Eucharist is a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Father, a blessing by which the Church expresses her gratitude to God for all his benefits, for all that he has accomplished through creation, redemption, and sanctification. Eucharist means first of all “thanksgiving.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church 1360*)
- “The Sabbath brings everyday work to a halt and provides a respite. ... With compassion, Christ declares the Sabbath for doing good rather than harm, for saving life rather than killing.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church 2172-73*)

## Theological Background

As Christians, we believe that Sunday, the Sabbath, is a day of rest and prayer. In fact, the Old Testament tells us that, for the ancient Hebrews, the Sabbath was not only a day of rest for the Hebrew people themselves, but also for slaves, visitors, and even animals. It’s a reminder of God’s own day of rest after the six days of Creation, and also commemorates how God cared

for and rescued the Hebrew people from their oppression in Egypt. For Catholics, the most important way of honouring the Sabbath day of rest is by gathering together to celebrate the Eucharist. The word Eucharist means “thanksgiving.” So we gather to thank God for all the gifts of creation, and for all God’s acts of love and salvation: especially the gift of Jesus’ sacrifice on the Cross, and the gifts of bread and wine by which we remember his sacrifice.

When we receive a gift, the best way of showing our gratitude is by using and caring for that gift. Imagine you knit a beautiful sweater for a friend: how would you feel if you later found your gift in the trash, discarded and unworn? Or perhaps your friend carelessly left your gift on the floor, where it was damaged by a pet. Think of how hurt a child would be to see a picture that they had drawn just for you, covered in coffee rings and ink scribbles, rather than hung proudly on the refrigerator door.

Attending Sunday mass is the best way to honour God’s holy Sabbath and give thanks for the gifts of Creation and salvation. But that celebration of thanks is undermined when we inadvertently harm Creation by burning fossil fuels on our way to mass. Vehicle emissions are considered to be a major contributor to air pollution, greenhouse gases, and rising global temperatures. They can lead to respiratory and cardiac illness, and long sedentary periods spent in traffic are linked to obesity and mental health problems. Expansion of transportation infrastructure can also mean the destruction of green spaces, and contributes to the fracturing of ecosystems and wildlife habitats. Sadly, many of these effects are felt even in areas that don’t generate a lot of air pollution, including many impoverished areas. However, poor and vulnerable populations necessarily have fewer resources to compensate for decreasing air quality and declining ecosystem health, and so pay a heavy toll for our own vehicle use in more affluent countries like Canada.

Leaving your vehicle at home and getting to mass by foot, bike or public transportation is a simple and concrete way of caring for Creation and showing your gratitude for God’s gifts. By giving your vehicle (the family “beast of burden”!) its own day of rest, you set apart the Sabbath day and momentarily stop the everyday hustle-and-bustle of traffic jams, busy freeways, and vehicle collisions. You’ll also be giving a small period of respite to all the people, plants and animals in your neighbourhood that normally breathe in your vehicle emissions, yourself included. And you will reduce your own contribution to the devastating effects of global climate change, making your Sabbath a real opportunity to “save life” and “do good.” Use the time walking or cycling to peacefully enjoy God’s creation, or spend some quiet time in prayer outdoors. Extend your act of Eucharistic thanksgiving by committing to reducing your vehicle use during the work week as well.

## Plan

- Set a date and time for your Eco-Sabbath; get approval from your pastor
- Coordinate bicycle storage: book your parish hall or ensure there are enough secure outdoor bicycle racks nearby

- Advertise your event: put an ad in the parish bulletin, make an announcement at mass, put up posters, contact your local newspaper, diocesan office or neighbouring parishes
- Decide how you will measure your success: will you count the number of bicycles at the Eco-Sabbath? Will you do a before-and-after count of vehicles in the parking lot? Will you ask people who walked to check-in before mass?
- On the day of your event, have volunteers ready to open and lock-up the parish hall, hand out tap water to cyclists and pedestrians, greet and count participants, and take photos.
- Afterwards, evaluate your event; identify successes and problems areas, and brainstorm ideas for moving forward.

## Going Forth

- Have permanent bicycle racks installed at the church, if you don't have them already
- Organize an ongoing carpool for Sunday mass, especially for people with limited mobility, or those who live too far away to walk/cycle
- Think of other ways to "green" your Eucharistic celebration: try sourcing organic Communion wine; use fresh flowers instead of plastic; use green cleaning products and install energy-efficient appliances; purchase permanent missals and hymnals rather than subscriptions



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