



"We've really created a community..."

You'll hear these works at workshops, retreats, corporate off-sites, adult summer camps, wilderness trips, yoga teacher trainings and far beyond.

Our conception of what 'counts' as a [community](#) has moved toward experiences that are brief, occasional and intense. We are thrilled with the connection we feel with one another, the intimacy and comfort we experience. And then, everyone goes home.

This is no accident. Our dominant cultural values shape our conception of [community](#), which means that we seek - even in community - self-actualization, personal freedom and individual success exhibited through consumption. (As historian [Guy Ortolano explains](#), market liberalism succeeds when indifferent - even hostile - actors, such as community institutions, internalize its priorities.)

"While we want community, it is often community on our terms, with easy entrances and exits, lots of choice and support, and minimal responsibilities," writes Christine D. Pohl in her book [Living Into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us](#).

"It would be so much easier if we could be '[connected](#) without being encumbered.' Despite the fact that many of us claim to be dissatisfied with individualism, we cherish our capacity to make individual choices and to seek opportunities for personal growth."

I get it - I live that life! - frequent work travel, the choice of when I show up for [choir](#) practice, chatting only with the neighbors I like...

But this makes leading a relationally and financially sustainable [community](#) very difficult. Interviewing a yoga studio owner this week, I was reminded of the constant work that community

and congregational leaders have to do, in the age of [ClassPass](#), to [help](#) us remember that we cannot bring a 'consumer' mindset to community.

Pohl's book, introduces four key practices for [healthy](#) communities. These practices, when cultivated [intentionally](#), can strengthen a different way of being. Communities need to practice:

1. Gratitude
2. Promise-keeping
3. Truthfulness
4. Hospitality

"[[Community](#)] begins in gratitude, is sustained by our promises and truthfulness, and is expressed in hospitality," writes Pohl. Community cannot be expressed in the language of contract. ([Remember the Israeli school](#) that started charging parents who were late picking up their kids and it backfired spectacularly?)

Community is expressed in the language of covenant; how will we choose to be together?

"Communities in which we grow and flourish, last over time and are built by people who are faithful to one another and committed to a shared purpose. Community life certainly has moments of incredible beauty and intense personal connection, but much of it is daily and ordinary. Our lives are knit together not so much by intense feeling as by shared history, tasks, commitments, stories and sacrifices."

Not every moment needs to be extraordinary. Community can beautifully simple and steady, too.

