A Faith Practices Scale for the church

Recent studies demonstrate an overlapping relationship between faith practices of individuals, family functioning, and the corporate faith of congregations. This study reports on the psychometric properties of the Christian Faith Practices Scale (CFPS), which was created to empirically measure Dykstra's faith behaviors or "practices." Analysis of a large purposive sample (N=7,403) indicates initial evidence of reliability and validity for the instrument. We conclude that the CFPS is a useful tool for empowering faith practices through practical measurement and offer specific recommendations for using the scale with congregations, small groups, and family meetings.

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Throughout the past decade, the interaction of faith practices, family relationships, and faith has gained the attention of researchers and church leaders alike in the literature. Though the specifics of the studies are unique, there is a general consensus about the overlapping relationship among faith practices of individuals, family functioning, and the corporate faith of congregations. For instance, individuals actively involved in a community of faith are more often happy or satisfied with their family relationships. At the same time, congregations having a solid nucleus of families regularly attending worship, participating in fellowship, and volunteering for service are more active in corporately sharing their faith through words and service to the community (Call & Heaton, 1997; Deveaux, 1996; Ellison, Bartkowski, & Anderson 1999; Garland & Edmonds, 2007; Stinett, Stinett, Beam, & Beam, 1999). As congregations continue to recognize

this overlapping relationship, pastors and lay leaders could benefit from having resources that encourage faith practices. The current study examines the initial psychometric properties of the Christian Faith Practices Scale (CFPS)—a tool we posit as useful for reflecting on faith practices.

Protestant Christian traditions generally agree that faith is the affirmative response to the free and unmerited gift of God toward human beings through the power of God's grace. Faith is further developed and nurtured through a personal relationship with God (Dykstra, 1999; Lee, 1990a, 1990b). Given that overarching definition, scholars offer different perspectives on faith. For instance, Fowler (1986), one of the most influential theorists exploring faith, emphasizes cognitive processes—how persons understand their experiences and find meaning in them. He defines stages of faith that are congruent with human development theories and that build on stage theories of cognitive and moral development. In his perspective, there are universal stages of faith development, even though the content of faith may vary greatly. Fowler suggests that all people have faith, because all people develop and revise frames of meaning, or ways of understanding their world.

Nelson (1990) describes three aspects of faith. First, faith requires having knowledge of God encountered in the historical Jesus. Second, faith involves a commitment to what it knows, particularly the truthfulness of the story of God's action in the world. This involves an assent to the interpretation of human history transmitted through the Christian tradition. Third, faith is, above all, a trust in God, not only for forgiveness, but also for direction in life now and eternally. Therefore, from Nelson's perspective, faith is a relationship to God involving knowledge, commitment, and trust. Although Nelson and Fowler offer laudable

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understandings of faith, neither of their explanations translates well to measurement. For purposes of measurement, the CFPS is our attempt to operationalize Craig Dykstra's perspective on faith. For Dykstra (1986), faith is not just a way to create meaning or to understand the world, it is an activity of responding appropriately and intentionally to who God is and what God is doing (p. 55-56). Dykstra explains (1999: 17-18):

Faith involves being related to God in a particular way, indeed, being in right relationship to the true God. Ultimate relationship to anyone or anything other than God is considered to be idolatry, not faith. The notion of faith as a human activity is not denied, but this activity is set in the context of a relationship, and that relationship depends on the prior activity of God, who takes initiative in making the divine nature and presence known and accessible to human beings. Thus, faith is primarily a response to a gift, an activity of recognizing and accepting God's grace, which gives rise to a way of life—a way of believing, trusting, committing, and orienting all one's thoughts and actions.

Therefore, understanding faith as an activity of recognizing and accepting God's grace. Dykstra (1999) builds upon the work of Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) to offer a theoretical list of universal activities—referred to as "practices of faith"—that together constitute a Christian life of faith. The CFPS assesses "faith" according to Dykstra's list of Christian practices. Those practices include:

1. Worshipping together—praising God, giving thanks for God's creative and redemptive work in the world, hearing God's word preached, and receiving the sacraments given to us in Christ.

2. Telling the Christian story to one another—reading and hearing the scriptures and also the stories of the church's experience throughout its history.

3. Interpreting together the Scriptures and the history of the church's experience, particularly in relation to their meaning for our own lives in the world.

4. Praying—together and by ourselves, not only in formal services of worship but in all times and places.

5. Confessing our sin to one another, and forgiving and becoming reconciled with one another.

6. Tolerating one another's failures and encouraging one another in the work each must do and the vocation each must live.

7. Carrying out specific faithful acts of service and witness together.

8. Giving generously of one's means and receiving gratefully gifts others have to give.

9. Suffering with and for one another and all whom Jesus showed us to be our neighbors.

10. Providing hospitality and care, not only to one another but to strangers and even enemies.

11. Listening and talking attentively to one another about our particular experiences in life.

12. Struggling together to become conscious of and to understand the nature of the context in which we live.

13. Criticizing and resisting all those powers and patterns (both within the church and in the world as a whole) that destroy human beings, corrode human community, and injure God's creation.

14. Working together to maintain and create social structures and institutions that will sustain life in the world in ways that accord with God's will.

This list of practices has evolved in the mainline Protestant denominations' theory and practice of Christian education, beginning with the work of John Westerhoff more than three decades ago (Westerhoff, 1980; see also Bass, 1997). It is a useful list, though not necessarily comprehensive, reflecting mainline Protestant Christian traditions. Moreover, it is theoretical and thus not designed as a direct measure of faith or religiosity. Nevertheless, it has potential for a richer examination of the complexities of faith than the typical measures of religiosity that include one or more of the following: frequency of worship attendance, engaging in personal prayer and devotion, psychological maturity, Bible knowledge, and sense of spiritual well-being (e.g., Belanger & Cheung, 2006; Cain, Combs-Orme, & Wilson, 2004; Dudley & Cruise, 1990; Hackney & Sanders, 2003; Hill & Hood, 1999; Koenig, 2008; Kristensen, Pederson, & Williams, 2001). It addresses the impact of faith not only on private but also interpersonal relationships and on commitments.

PROJECT DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This project is part of a larger study that is exploring the impact of service ministry on Christian faith and congregational life (Garland et al., 2002; Garland, Myers, & Wolfer, 2005; Hugen, Wolfer, & Renkema, 2006; Sherr, Garland, & Wolfer, 2007). In the larger study, the research team selected a purposive sample of 35 congregations located in six states that were (1) Protestant Christian, because the project was not large enough to study the array of U.S. religious congregations; (2) urban and/or suburban rather than rural because of the greater potential for formal community service programs in urban settings; and (3) currently involved in at least one community service program.

The sample included congregations with diverse identities and affiliations: Baptist (including Southern Baptist, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, National Baptist, and Missionary Baptist) (n=9); Christian Reformed (n=7); United Methodist (n=5); Episcopal (n=3); Presbyterian (n=3); nondenominational (n=3); Assemblies of God (n=2); Lutheran (n=1); Seventh Day Adventist (n=1); and African Methodist Episcopal (n=1). Researchers also selected a distribution of congregations that were predominantly Anglo American (n=18), African American (n=9), Latino (n=5), or multiethnic, i.e., with no dominant ethnic group (n=3). The total sample consisted of 7,403 participants that completed surveys attending the 35 congregations.

Respondents completed a four-part congregational survey developed by the research team. First, the congregational survey gathered demographic information about congregants—length of time attending the congregation, frequency of church attendance, gender, ethnicity, age, and family living situation. Next, it included a brief version of the Faith Maturity Scale (FMS) (Benson, Donahue, & Erickson, 1993). The FMS is a 24-item structured instrument that asks respondents to indicate how true each statement is personally, using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "never" to "always."

The team then developed the Christian Faith Practices Scale (CFPS) creating statements that related to Dykstra's (1999) faith behaviors or "practices." Some items were combined and wording adapted to a survey for congregations. For example, Dykstra's items "Carrying out specific faithful acts of service and witness together" and "Suffering with and for one another and all whom Jesus showed us to be our neighbors" became the item "I volunteer time to help those less fortunate." The scale also includes the item "I share the Christian story with others," which specifically addresses evangelism. The faith practice "Confessing our sin to one another, and forgiving and becoming reconciled with one another" became the two items "I confess my faults to others," and "I forgive and work toward healing relationships with others." Other such

Table 1: Factor Loadings with Varimax Rotation for CFPS

CFPS Items	Serving	Devotional Practices	Relating
Attend weekly worship services	-.080	.739*	.062
Bible study	.232	.765*	.033
Evangelism	.399	.595*	.291
Study History of the Church	.439	.582*	.154
Prayer	-.015	.459	.529
Confess faults to others	.235	.108	.688*
Forgive and work on healing relationships	.212	.169	.792*
Encourage others, especially in failure	.217	.094	.781*
Give financial support to church	.106	.461	.167
Provide hospitality to strangers	.700*	.073	.317
Volunteer time to help	.802*	.177	.177
Participate in activities to promote social justice	.840*	.103	.111
Discuss Christian response to contemporary issues	.524	.474	.233

* indicates item in factor

modifications can be identified by comparing Dykstra's faith practices, listed earlier, with the items in the Appendix. The items in the scale thus do not directly correspond to the Dykstra list, although we sought to preserve the intent of all the original items.

Respondents were asked to fill out the same seven-point Likert scale used in the FMS to indicate how often they participated in the various faith behaviors or "practices" (see appendix for copy of CFPS). A final section of the survey asked respondents to indicate whether they were personally involved in "community ministry," a term familiar in American Protestant congregational life (Bobo & Tom, 1996; Dudley, 1991; e.g., Dudley, 1996; e.g., Garland et al., 2002; e.g., Martin & Powers, 1981; e.g., Smith & Brown, 1996). "Community ministry" is defined on the survey as "involvement in activities encouraged by your church that support the physical, material, emotional, and social well-being of people from your congregation, neighborhood, and community." The survey provided examples of community ministry to facilitate accurate responses.

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RESULTS

The results of a factor analysis with the CFPS revealed three sub-scales. After reviewing the scree plot and eigenvalues, we conducted a varimax rotation; extracting three factors (see Table 1). We subsequently named the factors: (a) Serving; (b) Devotional Practices; and (c) Relating. Using factor loadings above .55, Serving consisted of three items, including providing hospitality to strangers, volunteering time to help others less fortunate, and participating in activities to promote social justice; Devotional Practices consisted of four items including, attending weekly worship services, Bible study, evangelism, and studying the history of the church; and Relating consisted of three items, including confessing faults to others, forgiving and working on healing relationships, and encouraging others, especially in failure. Prayer, giving financial support to the church, and discussing Christian responses with contemporaries to contemporary did not load into any of the factors. Instead, these items may be stand-alone practices or influence more than one factor.

RELIABILITY

We used two methods of analysis to determine reliability of the scale. First, Chronbach's coefficient alpha was computed to assess the internal consistency of the CFPS by measuring the relationships between each individual item and the sum of the rest of the items. A value greater than .7 is accepted as a good indicator of internal consistency. The Chronbach alpha for the CFPS was .86, indicating acceptable reliability for the tool. As an added measure of caution, we used the split half method as a follow-up analysis for reliability. The split half method splits the items of an instrument and treats them as alternate forms. Then the Spearman-Brown coefficient is used to assess the reliability of each half. Similar to the Chronbach alpha, a value greater than .7 is accepted as a good indicator of split-half reliability. A Spearman-Brown coefficient of .79 for the CFPS confirmed the reliability of the scale.

CRITERION AND CONSTRUCT VIABILITY

Three methods of analysis determined validity of the scale—Pearson's r correlation, linear regression, and binary logistic regression. We computed Pearson's r correlation to examine the concurrent and convergent validity of the CFPS with the FMS. Concurrent validity is a subtype of criterion validity that determines a scale's correspondence to a coexisting variable. Convergent validity connotes that different measures of a similar construct will strongly correlate. For the current study, a strong and

positive correlation (r=.784, p=.000) existed between Christian Faith practices and Faith Maturity relationship as measured by the CFPS and FMS, respectively.

Next, regression analysis determined that 61.4% (^{adj}R2=.614, p=.001) of the variability in the FMS was explained by the CFPS. With a regression equation of FMS = 39.24 + 1.31*CFPS, for each increase in one in the score of CFPS, on average, the FMS will increase 1.31 points. Therefore, the predictive validity of the CFPS on FMS appears strong and could be quite helpful to clergy and lay leaders as a practice tool because the CFPS is shorter and easier to administer than the FMS. At the same time, a computed tolerance value of 1.00 and variance inflation factor (VIF) of 1.00 indicate that multicollinearity was not a problem for the two scales. This means that the CFPS measures a construct (faith practices) that is distinct from faith maturity.

Finally, we used binary logistic regression to determine predictive validity with a behavioral variable—in this case predicting involvement in community ministry (binary yes/no variable) given a particular score on CFPS. The CFPS was a significant factor (p=.001) for predicting community involvement. The relationship between the two variables indicated that for each point increase in the CFPS a person is 1.081 times more likely to be involved in community ministry. With a total possible score of 91 for the CFPS, the significant connection of community ministry with engagement in faith practices is powerful, according to these findings. For example, we used the mathematical model for logistic regression as follows: probability (y=1) = e$^{alpha + betax}$ / (1 + e$^{alpha + betax}$) where: probability (y=1) is the probability of a person being personally involved in community ministry; alpha and beta are parameters of the regression estimated from the data, and corresponding to the intercept and slope of the regression line;

x is a person's score on the CFPS; and e is the base of the natural logarithm (approximately 2.718). Based on this model, a person that scores 10 points higher on the CFPS would be approximately twice as likely to be involved in community ministry.

DISCUSSION

Considered together, the acceptable psychometric properties of the CFPS is an important finding because it provides empirical support for Dykstra's (1999) notion of understanding faith as an "activity" of responding to the unmerited gift of God's grace. Similar to other scholars, the research team remains cautious about using quantitative research methods to reduce "faith" to a concept with measurable units for statistical analysis. We posit the efficacy of the CFPS as a practical tool, however, because it does not directly measure faith. Rather, the CFPS measures the practices that are connected to how people develop and live out their faith.

The conceptual distance between faith practices and the actual construct of faith is paramount because it prevents our understanding of faith development from becoming prescriptive. As Garland (2002) discovered, individuals and families have unique narratives that influence how their understanding of God develops and becomes evident in their lives. Clergy and church lay leaders need to be sensitive to these diverse narratives and offer individuals different opportunities to deepen their faith. Nevertheless, a consistency of activities seems to exist. The practices measured by the CFPS emerge as "activities" persons "do" as they live out their faith through worship and services—thus reinforcing the corporate faith of congregations. As Miles (1990) aptly describes this relationship, "The aim of faith practices is the production of a combination of understanding and strong experience that creates a religious self and, ultimately, together

The CFPS measures the practices that are connected to how people develop and live out their faith.

with many people who participate in similar experiences and understanding, community" (p. 90).
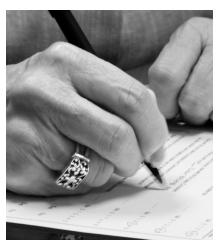
Several limitations in how we developed and tested the CFPS warrant caution when considering the initial validation statistics. Although basing the items of the scale on the theoretical work of Dykstra (1999) ensures a certain degree of content validity, we did not use standard procedures of developing a test bank of items that were then narrowed down through a process of field testing and item analysis. To account for this shortcoming, we ran two forms of reliability analysis to be sure that the items produced consistent responses, and the responses appeared to be consistent. Still, we do not know if a different group of items phrased differently or in another order would produce more reliable information or if the scale is more reliable with some faith traditions than others.

Another limitation in development is the extent of face validity of the CFPS and the possibility of a circular relationship between the scale items in predicting community ministry. The items are straightforward statements about practices of faith that could produce socially desirable responses. In addition, we decided not to include reverse scoring items or items that would detect whether or not respondents were forthright in their responses. It is possible to conclude that the scores of the CFPS are inflated relative to the actual faith practices of respondents. In the same way, it is possible that the relationship between the CFPS and participation in community ministry may be circular and, therefore, technically limiting the relationship as evidence of predictive validity. The practical value of the scale remains intact, however, because fluctuations in the scores can still indicate increases or decreases in the prevalence of faith practices, even if the absolute scores are inflated or the relationship between the scale and participation in community ministry remains unclear.

Testing of the CFPS was also limited to people in Protestant denominations. The strong initial findings, however, warrant attention to future research. For instance, future assessment of the CFPS is needed to examine the use of the scale outside of Protestant traditions. Furthermore, future research should examine whether certain faith practices are emphasized more among people with certain characteristics (e.g., age, gender, family status). Likewise, research examining the impact of faith practices on measures of personal well-being and social risk factors (e.g., health, life satisfaction, school performance, and avoidance of drugs) will also contribute to the literature.

We posit several uses for the CFPS. First, congregational leaders could periodically ask members of a congregation to complete the CFPS anonymously in order to understand how the congregation as a community is actually practicing its faith. Congregational leaders can focus worship, Bible study, or family service activities to reinforce faith practices that are prevalent and to address faith practices they would like to see occur more frequently.

The CFPS could also be used in connection with community ministry. One way of making community ministry more meaningful in congregational life is to provide opportunities for reflection (Garland, Myers, and Wolfer 2005). Clergy and church lay leaders could use the CFPS to encourage individuals and families participating in community ministry to reflect on how their service impacts other areas of their faith. We recommend having people

meet in small groups, complete the CFPS confidentially, and then have facilitators use the questions as "step-off points" to encourage them to reflect on how their participation in community ministry has impacted their faith development.

Finally, Garland and Edmonds (2007) found that families want churches to help them enhance their faith in six areas, including, serving others, planning family devotion and prayer time, improving communication, developing healthy lifestyle habits, developing strong marriages, and talking about faith together. Clergy and church lay leaders can provide families with copies of the CFPS to use on their own at home. Family members can consider the 13 statements both as individuals and in the context of their family system. Then they can reflect together on the practices most prevalent in their family and focus on ways to develop other practices that could enhance or "deepen" their faith as individuals and together. Furthermore, as families use the CFPS as a practical tool for reflection and devotion, further study is needed to determine if the reliability and validity of the scale can be extended to family systems. By empowering family systems to reflect on their faith practices, congregations ensure a solid and growing nucleus of active families attending worship, participating in fellowship, and volunteering for service to the church and the community.

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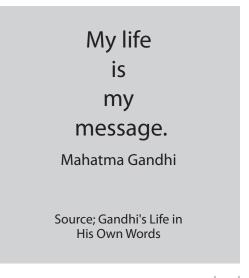Garland, D. E., & Garland, D. R. (2007). Flawed families of the Bible. Grand Rapids:

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My life
is
my
message.

Mahatma Gandhi

Source; Gandhi's Life in His Own Words

Christian Faith Practices Scale (CFPS)

Describe how often you participate in each of the following activities. Be as honest as possible, describing your true level of participation and not how active you would like to be.

Please circle your answer to the right of the statement.

	Never	Rarely	Once in a while	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always	Always
I attend weekly worship services	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I participate in Bible study activity.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I share the Christian story with others (evangelism).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I study the teachings and history of the Christian church.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I pray.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I confess my faults to others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I forgive and work toward healing relationships with others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I encourage others, especially when they fail.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I give financial support to my church.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I provide hospitality and care to strangers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I volunteer time to help those less fortunate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I participate in activities that promote social justice in society.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I discuss Christian response to contemporary issues with other Christians.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Identity
Thomas Merton

If you want to identify me, ask me not where I live, or what I like to eat, or how I comb my hair, but ask me what I think I am living for, in detail, and ask me what I think is keeping me from living fully for the thing I want to live for. Between these two answers you can determine the identity of any person.

Source: Unknown