



Save Our Parish Community Project
FutureChurch

Prayer - Uniting with the Spirit

Why Pray? How Do We Pray?

Prayer is an absolute necessity for discerning Catholics committed to listening to the whisperings of the Spirit. As we look to the future of our parishes and our Church, we remember the presence of God and our need to remain in union with God.

Just as our personal prayer varies according to our life experiences, age, feelings, personalities, and inclinations, prayer during the discernment of the future of a parish will vary as well. Prayer will change depending on the decision at hand, feelings of the group, personalities of the community members, how the group is used to praying, etc. There is no right or wrong way to pray, what is important is that we do it!

Scripture gives us rich example of the depth and variety of prayer. Prayers of gratitude and thanksgiving, petition, intercession, blessing, adoration and praise can be found through the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament. The Psalms are a particularly good resource in revealing prayers of frustration and anger as well as joy and gratitude. As your group progresses, many types of prayer to express the many experiences and feelings of the group will be necessary.

As prayer is planned, these differences need to be considered. The following questions should help your planning:

What is the most prevalent feeling right now in the group?
What is the purpose of our prayer (thanksgiving, petition, etc.)
How are we most comfortable praying?
How have we prayed in our community in the past?

Prayer Time as Reflection Time

Some prayer times should allow time for personal and community reflection. For example, after a reading, the presider may pose a question for the group. The group may have some time in silence (or with instrumental music) to respond internally to the question. After the time of quiet reflection, there can follow time for small group or large group sharing. This time can also be used to recall memories from life in the parish.

The Vibrant Parish Life initiative of the Diocese of Cleveland has several prayer services adaptable to the process. They can be found in Vibrant Parish Life resource manual downloadable off the Diocese of Cleveland website www.dioceseofcleveland.org/vibrantparish.life/. The questions below were taken from these services.

When you hear the words "community of faith" what image(s) comes to your mind?
Where do you think the Spirit is leading us in these times of change?
What plans would you hope God has in mind for the Church?
Given that we are always on some kind of a journey, what type of journey would you describe your parish to be on at this time?
What signs of hope do you see in this community?

Suggested outline for a prayer service

Our Catholic tradition has given us a rich tradition of symbol, sacrament and ritual. We can use this rich tradition to plan prayer services that are meaningful, familiar and call us into a sacred place. Below is a simple format for a prayer service based on Catholic tradition:

Opening song
Opening prayer (calling us together in the Spirit of Christ)
Scripture reading
Psalm
Personal or community shared reflection
Petitions
Our Father
Sign of Peace
Closing prayer
Closing song

Include All Involved in Your Prayer

A challenge for your group would be to pray for all those involved- Church leadership, institutional authority, lawyers, judges, those in decision making. Sometimes, when we are faced with strong differences of opinion, we tend to see these people as enemies. Remember that God is a God of forgiveness and healing. As Jesus said, "Love your enemies..." As St. Francis said, "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace."

Prayer Vigils

Some parishioners maintain 24 hour- 7 day-a-week vigils in their parish church. Here are some suggestions if the Spirit has led you and your community to choose this response:

- There is strength in numbers. Decide in advance how many people are going to be needed to keep the vigil going. See "How to Organize for Action". If you don't have enough people, you should rethink your strategy and the commitments you are able to make.
- Keep your community prayer times simple and consistent. Call upon the people of the community to lead them. The same prayer each day (the rosary, a special prayer your parish has already come to know and love, a created prayer for the vigil) can add unity to the prayer sessions. Some groups have found inspiration in Jeremiah 29:11-14 (*Yes, I know what plans I have in mind for you, Yahweh declares, plans for peace, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.*)
- Keep or create an environment for prayer by having some of the following: reflective background music before the service begins, group singing, a prayer table with sacred objects as a focal point, dimmed lights, prayer cards.
- If the intention is prayer, keep it that way. This is not the time to discuss or make a statement about what is happening in the Church or with your process.
- Feed each other actively, in all ways. Have a sense of hospitality and welcoming that will encourage members to come back and work for your mission.
- Keep all prayers and vigil members informed. Communication is crucial! Once again, see "How to Organize for Action".

Bibliography of Useful Prayer Resources

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