



Sample Prayer and Discernment Process

As Catholics who love the church and want to see it flourish for years to come, we must decide on what path to walk to preserve the vibrancy of our parishes. Our options for action are many. They are determined by the current situation our parishes and our dioceses, the passion in our hearts, and the strength of our fellow travelers. Some of us are discerning how to respond to a parish closing. Some are discerning how to prevent parish closings from happening in the future. Still others are making choices to help strengthen their parish community. Our paths are varied but we are united by and our need to co-create with the Holy Spirit an institutional church that more closely reflects the Gospel of Jesus.

The following prayer service is designed to help your community decide on the next steps needed to visualize your goals and actions. It should be adapted to meet the needs of your group at this time.

May the Spirit be with you!

Call to Prayer

Leader: Let us begin. In the name of God, our Creator and Friend,
In the name of Jesus, the Way, the Truth, and the Life,
In the name of the Spirit who dwells among us, within us, and who sends us forth.
All: Amen.

Opening Prayer

Leader: The former things have passed away. (Rev. 21:4)
All: Behold, I make all things new! (Rev. 21:5)

Leader: I am the Lord your God, .. who leads you in the way you should go. (Isa. 48:17)
All: Behold, I make all things new! (Rev. 21:5)

Leader: I myself will send an angel before you to guard you as you go
and bring you to the place that I have prepared. (Exod. 23:20 JB)
All: Behold, I make all things new! (Rev. 21:5)

Leader: I will go before you and level the mountains. (Isa. 45:2)
All: Behold, I make all things new! (Rev. 21:5)

Leader: I will turn the darkness before [you] into light, the rough places into level ground. (Isa. 42:16)
All: Behold, I make all things new! (Rev. 21:5)

Leader: Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still, and trust in me. (John 14:1 JB)
All: Behold, I make all things new! (Rev. 21:5)

(from "Beginning Again" by Miriam Therese Winter,
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Reading I: Acts 2: 41-47

Reading II: 1 Thess. 5: 12-22

Reflection

Allow a few minutes of quiet so people can ponder these questions in their own hearts. Then, take time for small or large group discussion.

How is your parish/diocese answering the call of the gospel like the first Christian communities?

Does your current or proposed parish/diocesan configuration support the work of the gospel, of building the faith community, of active ministry? If not, what changes need to be made?

What plans do you hope God has in mind for the Church in our parish/diocese?

Refer to the “Best Practices for Preserving Vibrant Parishes in a Time of Fewer Priests” in the “Do Not Stifle the Spirit” statement and reflect on the following:

Are these “best practices” being used in our diocese/regarding our parish? If not, what can our group do to encourage their implementation?

Do these “best practices” make evident areas of injustice in our local church that we need to overcome? If so, how can we work together to overcome them?

Report back to the large group and refer to “How to Preserve Vibrant Parishes in Your Diocese” for ideas of concrete organizing actions.

To close the time of reflection, have the facilitator or a member of the group read the following quote from Teilhard de Chardin.

“Above all, trust in the slow work of God. We are, quite naturally, impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. We would like to skip the intermediate stages. We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new, and yet it is the law of all progress that progress is made by passing through some stage of uncertainty- and that may take a very long time. And, so, I think it is with you. Your ideas mature gradually- let them grow, let them shape themselves. Don’t try to force them on, as though you could be today what time and grace will make you tomorrow. Only God can say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be. Give God the benefit of believing that the Spirit is leading you. Accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.”

Closing Prayer *(read aloud by all)*

Loving Creator,
we ask for wholeness for ourselves and for your church.
Do not allow fear, ignorance or pride to limit the action of your Spirit,
nor allow mere custom to prevent
the divine creativity within us from bearing fruit.
We ask for the insight to understand
the needs of people today,
that we might grasp the complexity
of the situations that face us
and the absolute simplicity of human need:
the poor have a right to hear the gospel,
the hungry a right to food,
the oppressed a right to freedom.

Enable all of us to be women and men
enthusiastic for your ministry,
contagious in our love
and eager to be among your people as ones who serve.
This we ask through Jesus Christ,
who came as brother and servant to us all.
Amen

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