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## Introduction: How to Use This Resource

*This handbook Mid-Semester Gathering: Prayer is designed for use with leaders of small Christian communities as part of the Campus RENEW process.*

*Ideally, the SCC leaders will adapt what is offered here to suit the circumstances of their campus and the participants in the **Campus RENEW** process. However, it has been designed in such a way that, if necessary, it can be used “as is.”*

*We have adopted the following conventions throughout this booklet:*

- *text which appears in an ordinary font style (not bold, nor italics) is meant to be spoken aloud;*
- *text which appears in italics provides rubrics or information for the presenter;*
- *timing indications have been provided throughout. These are approximate, for guidance only, and certainly not for mathematically rigorous application!*

*The booklet concludes with some of the material presented in a way that can be easily photocopied as handouts for those who take part in the sessions on prayer. These will serve both during the session itself, and as handy references afterwards.*

*We remind you that, as for all sessions, your preparation should itself be prayerful. Please know that you are in the prayers of the **Campus RENEW** staff.*



# 1. Welcome and Introduction

## Purpose

*To introduce or reinforce several styles of prayer with SCC leaders and to provide training and support to SCC leaders, particularly in the area of prayer, and leading the SCC in prayer.*

*In this Workshop, you will be leading people in prayer, in order for those participants themselves to learn how to lead prayer in their own groups. As a result, you may not be able to enter into the moments of prayer in the same way you could if you were simply a participant. This is part of being a minister. You are an instrument of God—rejoice in this opportunity.*

## Set-Up

*Ideally, chairs are set in semi-circular groups of four to eight, open to the front of the room but close enough together for comfort and sharing.*

*Be aware of the environment, and do whatever you can to enhance it. Lighting and music are two powerful tools for creating an environment that welcomes people into prayer. For example, you might experiment with dimmed lighting; having soft music in the background.*

*Offer a symbolic focal point, however simply: a table spread with a cloth (a color appropriate to the season or celebration), and a large candle.*

*As part of set-up, entrust the readings to those who will be proclaiming them. Give them adequate time to look over and rehearse their reading/s. Remember, too, to make sure that they know both when and from where the readings will be proclaimed.*

## Approximate Time

*90 minutes*

## Welcome and Greeting

*Welcome everyone and thank them for coming.*

*If group is not too big and the people in the group do not know each other, invite everyone to introduce themselves by name.*

*If the group is too big, then these individual presentations would take too long. In this case, invite everyone to say hello and to introduce themselves to those in their small group.*

*After the introductions, refocus everyone's attention. Then invite everyone to quiet themselves, make themselves aware of the presence of God and allow the cares of the day to fall away. For example, you might say something like this:*

*Let us prepare to enter into prayer together.*

*Let us each take a moment to quiet ourselves.*

*Let us remember that God,  
who loves us unconditionally,  
is always with us.*

## Environment and Atmosphere

*Quiet background music should be playing throughout this exercise—volume may need to be adjusted as the prayer continues.*

*Anything the presenter says should be spoken slowly and deliberately—giving the participants enough time to take in the prompts and to reflect.*

*Remember that the timing indicated throughout is only a suggestion, for your guidance.*

## 2. Opening Prayer: Guided Imagery Meditation

### Preparing Myself to Lead this Prayer

*Remember, prayer is a response to God who is always initiating relationship with us. You are simply creating the space for others to listen to the ways that God is speaking to them. There is nothing you can say, or not say, that will make God speak.*

*However, there are steps you can take to create a space in which it is easier to encounter God.*

*First and foremost, prepare yourself. entrust your leadership of prayer to the Spirit, who is already praying inside you. It is, after all, God's work.*

*Secondly, make sure you are familiar with what you will be reading, and that you are relaxed. Your voice should communicate the calmness that you feel.*

*In the large group discussion, as you ask questions, do not be afraid of silence. If you feel that too much time has passed, try restating the question and/or asking the question in a different way.*



### Introduction

In this prayer experience, we are going to let our imagination lead us into prayer.

Please take a comfortable position that you can stay in for a few minutes.

You may use the floor if you wish.

*[Pause for about 15 seconds]*

- Close your eyes and take three deep cleansing breaths . . .
- . . . in through your nose, out through your mouth . . .

*[Pause: 5 seconds]*

- . . . in through your nose, out through your mouth . . .

*[Pause: 5 seconds]*

- . . . in through your nose, out through your mouth.

*[Pause: 10 seconds]*

- If any part of your body feels tight, tense it and release, tense it, count to three, and then release.

*[Pause: 30 seconds]*

- Keeping your eyes closed, become aware of where you are . . .

*[Pause: 15 seconds]*

- Now, slowly allow this place to fade away.

*[Pause: 10 seconds]*

- Become aware of a path before you.

*[Pause: 10 seconds]*

- Notice the sound of your feet on the path . . .

*[Pause: 5 seconds]*

- . . . the smell of the air surrounding you . . .  
*[Pause: 5 seconds]*
- . . . the sights there for you to see.  
*[Pause: 15 seconds]*
- Continue down the path and recognize that someone is with you . . .  
*[Pause: 20 seconds]*
- . . . a close friend . . .  
*[Pause: 5 seconds]*
- . . . God.  
*[Pause: 5 seconds]*
- What does God look like?  
*[Pause: 15 seconds]*
- How does it feel to be in the presence of your friend, God?  
*[Pause: 15 seconds]*
- Continue to walk with God.  
*[Pause: 10 seconds]*
- As you come to a place to rest, stop, and take a seat.  
*[Pause: 15 seconds]*
- Allow God to tell you that you are loved completely . . .  
*[Pause: 5 seconds]*
- . . . that you are loved for being you.  
*[Pause: 15 seconds]*
- Feel God's love deep within you.  
*[Pause: 15 seconds]*
- Thank God for this time and for the abiding love you feel.  
*[Pause: 10 seconds]*
- Allow God's love to remain strong within you.  
*[Pause: 10 seconds]*
- Slowly, begin again along your journey.  
*[Pause: 15 seconds]*
- Whenever you are ready, begin to take leave of the path . . .  
*[Pause: 15 seconds]*
- . . . keeping the feeling of God's love within.  
*[Pause: 5 seconds]*

- Return to this place . . .  
*[Pause: 10 seconds]*
  - to this time...  
*[Pause: 10 seconds]*
  - . . . to this room . . .  
*[Pause: 10 seconds]*
  - Whenever you are ready, please open your eyes.  
*[Pause until everyone has opened their eyes]*
- Presenter**      Amen.  
**All**                Amen.

## Brief sharing

*Allow at least five minutes for the sharing—but be prepared to let it go on longer if it seems positive, and the participants are engaged by it.*

Thank you for participating.

Does anyone have something they would like to share?

What happened for you during this prayer?

*In this style of prayer, some are able to follow all the prompts or suggestions; others reach a certain point and then stop; still others go off in a direction of their own making. All of these responses are prayer!*

*This “guided imagery” style of prayer works very well for groups. However, it can also be used as an individual prayer, where I simply quiet myself and then go to a place in my imagination where I can meet with God. The concluding “sharing” can be committing your thoughts on the experience to your prayer journal.*



### 3. Prayer and Styles of Prayer

#### Introduction

Tonight (Today) we have several objectives:

- to spend some time renewing ourselves.
- to learn and/or deepen our appreciation of some the various styles of prayer that can be used in our groups.
- to offer support to each other in leading our SCCs.

#### Prayer and Styles of Prayer

What is prayer? Is there a “right” way to pray?

These are questions that have as many answers as there are people in this room—perhaps more! We could spend hours reviewing all that has ever been set about prayer, without ever getting down to praying. So instead, we will be talking about how to pray, or more exactly about several methods or styles of praying. As for the second question, it has no set answer—the “right” way to pray is whatever way connects you with God at a particular time.

One way of looking at prayer is to compare it with a friendship—we build friendships with those who give us joy, who are there for us, who challenge us, who are worthy of our trust. Prayer is the building of our relationship with someone who displays all of these characteristics (and more)—our God. With most friends, we are able to “be” together—to spend time in one another’s presence; with God, that’s a little bit harder. It’s helpful to recognize that prayer is a dialogue—we both speak and listen in prayer. And, yes, God does sometimes answer.

Just as our relationships with friends we may

experience different phases, so too in our relationship with God, in our prayer life.

Sometimes we want to grow closer to our friend or learn more about our friend and we use a method such as praying with Scripture—which we will do together later in this session; or a method such as guided imagery—which is the style of praying we have just concluded. Sometimes in prayer we want something, or we just need to talk—prayers of petition and unstructured prayer. Sometimes we are just able to sit quietly and enjoy the presence of our friend—meditation and centering prayer do this. And, sometimes, we need to gather with others and celebrate: this is the kind of prayer in which we engage in the sacraments, and especially in the Eucharist.

A very wise man who experienced the world and then became a monk—Thomas Merton—said:

“It is not good to make a great issue out of prayer. It should be as simple as breathing and living. As soon as you make an issue out of it, it tends to get confused and distorted. It is life. It is our life and comes from the ground of life.” (Kentucky, 1963)

That pretty much covers it—prayer is life; life is prayer.

Let’s try another image. Prayer is like tapping into the conversation that God is continually having both with you and with God within you. Think of it as a broadband connection that is going fast and furious. Prayer is hooking into just a fraction of that broadband exchanging data between you and God. You never can fill up the capacity, but, just tapping into a little bit is enough.



## 4. Reflective Reading

### Preparing Myself to Lead this Prayer

*Prayer techniques are for us—to help us to quiet ourselves and dispose ourselves to attend to God. You will invite other students to quiet themselves and to bring their attention to the reading at hand, to view the reading not as something that happened long ago, but a place where God speaks to them about their own lives and struggles.*

*Read over the reading yourself, so that you have a clear grasp of its general sense. Choose the readers who will proclaim it, and allow them enough time to prepare their proclamation of this reading.*

*Familiarize yourself with the questions that follow the reading. It might be good to have these questions printed on handouts that can be given to the participants, and/or projected onto a screen to facilitate the small group sharing.*

### Reflective Reading

*Reflective reading is a popular way of praying with Scripture. Most often, stories from the life and work of Jesus are used. The scripture story is read and reflected upon for a short time. Then, the story is re-read while listening from the perspective of a character in the story.*

*If reflective reading is used as part of prayer with others, then reactions can be shared with the other members of the group*

*If this is being used as personal prayer then you can “share” your reactions with your prayer journal.*

#### Presenter

By way of introduction to this style of prayer, please take a comfortable posture and close your eyes as you listen to the following reading.

*Have someone, or several people, proclaim this reading. The text is presented here in a way that can be read in three voices: a narrator; Jesus; and others.*

**Luke 4:14-30 (NRSV)**

#### Reader 1

A reading from the Gospel according to Saint Luke

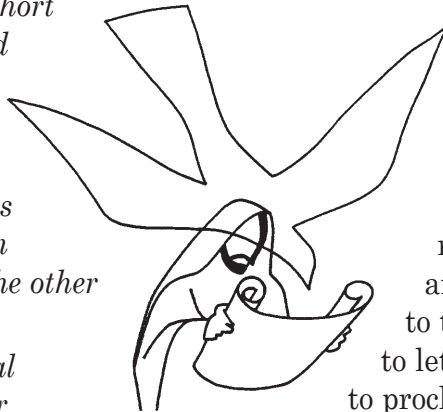
Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

#### Reader 2

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”



**Reader 1**

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.  
Then he began to say to them,

**Reader 2**

"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

**Reader 1**

All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.  
They said,

**Reader 3**

"Is not this Joseph's son?"

**Reader 1**

He said to them,

**Reader 2**

"Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!'  
And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'  
'Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.'"

**Reader 1**

When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage.  
They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.



**Presenter**

Let us take time to reflect silently on the story we have just heard.

*[Pause: 1 minute]*

Now, choose a character in the story—you may want to choose a character other than those chosen by members of your group—and listen again from that character's perspective as the story is read aloud again.

The reading is proclaimed again, by a different reader (or different readers).

*At the conclusion of the second time of reading:*

Let us take a moment to reflect silently on what we have just been listening to.

*[Pause: 1 minute]*

Please turn to your immediate group and share your experience of this prayer.

The questions on the handout may help you express your experience:

- Who were you in the story? Why?
- Where were you in the story? Why?
- What was different when listening from this perspective?
- What surprised you about your perspective? Why?
- How does God speak to you through this reading?
- What other character might you like to follow in this reading? Why?
- Would you ever use this style of prayer with your SCC? Why or Why not?

## **Optional Large Group Discussion**

*If time allows, the small group discussion can be followed by large group discussion.*

*Potential topics on which to encourage discussion include:*

- insights gained from this exercise.
- reactions to this style of prayer.
- other experiences of prayer with Scripture.
- questions and discussion about using this style of prayer.



## 5. Sharing and Mutual Support

### The Theological Importance of Sharing

Sharing is important, for all sorts of practical reasons that we will explore in a moment. However, it is important in a much more fundamental way: it is important “theologically,” that is to say it speaks to us about our relationship with God.

First, by accepting to “share” we are recognizing the place of others in our life. This contact and sharing with a variety of little “others” will build an improved appreciation of the greatest of “Others,” God. This is especially important when trying to improve our life of prayer, which depends on appreciating the presence of God.

Yes, faith is something deeply **personal**, and each one of us does have to say “**I** believe.” This can make it sound as if it is “my” faith.” However, this faith existed before me, and will exist after me; it is something that was entrusted to me by others, and which in turn I help to pass on to others. In other words, by saying “I believe” I am identifying myself with the faith of the Church, with all those who went before me, and all those who will come after me. In technical terms, this means that faith is not only personal but it is also **ecclesial**: it is shared, it is something I hold and cherish with everyone else who is baptized.

This is why faith sharing is so important: because it is true to the nature of faith as:

- something personal (which is why **I** share)
- and as something ecclesial, (which is why I share).

### The Practical Importance of Sharing

Collective wisdom and experience is always greater than individual knowledge and know-how. By sharing in your groups you can all learn from others’ experiences, both good and bad. From the bad, you can learn what to avoid; from the good, you can take encouragement. Both can help you to determine objectives realistically, and strategies for achieving them.

In your groups, share about the following topics:

- What is the most exciting thing that has happened in your small Christian community? Why?
- What is the most challenging thing that has happened in your small Christian community? Why?
- How would members of this group of leaders respond to this challenge?
- How has your experience of leading a small community challenged you? Helped you? Uncovered your gifts, or strengthened you in being able to share them?





## 6. Leading Others in Prayer

### Top Ten Tips for Leading Prayer

#### 10 Environment is (almost) everything

Creating a comfortable environment is key to prayer—dimmed lighting, a focal point (candle, bible, prayer cloth, etc.), a comfortable place, and even soft music can set the mood. Sometimes just closing your eyes and taking a few breaths is all that is needed.

#### 9 Attitude is (almost) everything

Be present to the place, the people, and God. It is hard to pray when you are worried about how you look or where you are going afterwards.

#### 8 It is **s** not about the words

Pray who you are and how you are—emotions, included!

#### 7 Relax

Breathe! Loosen up and let it happen.

#### 6 Let God in

Get yourself out of the way and tap into that broadband conversation.

#### 5 There is no wrong way to pray

Silence, words, song, dance, etc. can all be prayer.

#### 4 People will remember their connection to God

Get it started and get out of the way—let the Holy Spirit flow.

#### 3 It is **prayer**—not about prayer

Lead—do not explain or respond; bring people to prayer—do not pray at them.

#### 2 Address God directly

You are speaking to God; the others with you are praying with you. Use whatever way of addressing God that makes you comfortable and expresses your beliefs.

#### 1 **Pray, pray, pray**

Prayer is a habit—leading prayer comes from praying yourself—spend time with God offering up your prayer and asking for help before you lead prayer.

### Announcements

*The next part is the closing prayer.*

*Make any necessary announcements (about handouts, clean-up, etc.) now, before the prayer begins, so that the session prayer itself closes the session.*



## 7. Concluding Prayer: Examen of Consciousness

You may have heard people speak of Ignatian Spirituality: they are referring to a form of prayer and spiritual life inspired by the teaching and the life of St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits). One of the key elements in Ignatian spirituality is the daily “examen of consciousness.” This is a prayer which advances through five successive movements:

1. Giving thanks to God for today.
2. Asking for the grace to recognize and change our shortcomings of today.
3. Looking back over the day with gratefulness for the day, “finding God in all things” in your day, and being aware of how you responded to places, people, and things today.
4. Asking God for forgiveness for the times you have fallen short today and asking God to help you understand those times.
5. Making a plan for tomorrow and asking for God’s help in living it out.

We are going to use a shortened version of this as our closing prayer. You may find this to be a very good prayer style to use in your own faith life.

*Read each prompt slowly, repeat it, then allow time for reflection before going on to the next prompt.*

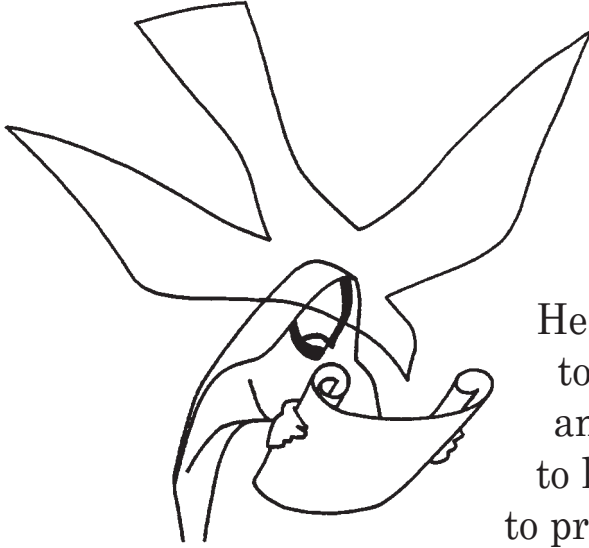
*Appropriate background music will help set a prayerful atmosphere.*

- Take a moment to become mindful of the presence of God and ask for God’s presence in this exercise.  
*[Repeat, then pause for 20 seconds]*
- Reflect upon your day, recalling the moments for which you are grateful and remembering that God is present in all of these moments.  
*[Repeat, then pause for 1 minute]*
- Consider the challenges of your day, remember, too, that God is present in these times.  
*[Repeat, then pause for 30 seconds]*
- Reflect upon where you have not done your best today—ask God to help you understand why and ask for forgiveness.  
*[Repeat, then pause for 45 seconds]*
- Make a plan for tomorrow: What will you do differently? What will you be more aware of?  
*[Repeat, then pause for 45 seconds]*
- Thank God for today and ask for help for tomorrow.  
*[Repeat, then pause for 15 seconds]*

Amen.

Thank you for coming—I hope you enjoy the rest of your day (evening)!

*Congratulations!*  
*You have just finished leading the*  
*Mid-Semester Gathering: Prayer.*



**Luke 4:14-30 [NRSV]**

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- This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.



## The Value of Sharing

- What is the most exciting thing that has happened in your small Christian community?  
Why?
- What is the most challenging thing that has happened in your small Christian community?  
Why?
- How would members of this group of leaders respond to this challenge?
- How has your experience of leading a small community challenged you?  
Helped you?  
Uncovered your gifts,  
or strengthened you  
in being able to share them?

**Campus RENEW**  
Mid-Semester Gathering: PRAYER  
Sharing Handout



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