



1. Styles of Prayer

Guided Imagery Meditation

Guided Imagery Meditation is being taken on a trip through meditation. In meditation, we use our mental faculties to engage something in the world: a piece of art, a scripture passage, or a mystery of the rosary to name a few. Through this mental activity, we seek to become conscious of our union with God, and pray with our entire selves—our mind, heart and being. This style of prayer is often used in groups. A leader guides the group in relaxation and on an interior journey. Popular themes for guided imagery include: walking with Jesus; meeting Jesus; reconciling with yourself or others; reconciling with God; experiencing God's love; etc.

Reflective Reading

This is a very popular way of praying with scripture. This prayer utilizes scripture—particularly parables or stories from the life of Jesus. The person praying in this way puts him/herself in a scriptural story as one of the characters or as an observer. The reading is read once to familiarize the reader with the story, re-read with the intent of following a chosen character, and reflected upon.

Meditation/Centering Prayer

Meditation/Centering Prayer is spending time in silent communication with God—being present with a friend. Some find this prayer particularly helpful in times of stress or in times of decision-making. In this style of prayer, being quiet and recognizing God's presence leads to a time of listening. Begin by taking a comfortable posture and setting aside the cares of the day. Next, ask

for the presence of God and for what you want this time to be—a short prayer or scripture reading often sets the theme at this time. Many use a simple word or phrase to center themselves: “Jesus;” “have mercy on me, God;” “peace;” “love;” etc. A period of quiet reflection follows as one listens to God. Conclude with thanksgiving to God for this time and by journaling on the results of the prayer.

Daily Examen of Consciousness

This prayer from St. Ignatius Loyola is similar to Meditation/Centering Prayer and is often used at the end of the day. “Finding God in all things” is an often-quoted theme of Ignatian Spirituality of which this prayer is a part. The Examen can be done quickly (5-10 minutes) and is most helpful when used regularly—you may find that more time is desired after utilizing this prayer for a period of time. This prayer traditionally has five parts:

Give thanks to God for today

Ask for the grace to recognize and change our shortcomings of today

Look back over the day: Where was God ... in the people, places, and events of your day? ... in how you responded to people, places, and events?

Ask God for forgiveness for the times you have fallen short today and for help in understanding those times

Make a plan for tomorrow and ask for God's help in living it out: What do you need to continue to do/do more often? What do you need to do differently? How can you be more aware of God's presence in your day?



2. Leading Prayer: Some Suggestions

- L**ocal — keep a balance between local and universal concerns
- E**motion — it's okay to have and express feelings
- A**ttitude — don't pray it if you don't mean it
- D**eportment — be present to the prayer and the community
- I**nclusive — of genders, of races, of all of creation
- N**atural — God understands your everyday language
- G**iving — sharing prayer is a gift to everyone present

- P**repare — know when the prayer will occur
and have a sense of the theme/content of the prayer
- R**elax — calm yourself and invite others to calm themselves
- A**ddress — recognize that there are many images of God and use them
- Y**ou — the best leaders of prayer “disappear,” not drawing attention to themselves
but creating space for others to encounter God.
- E**ndings — conclude prayer with “Amen,” sign of peace, “Our Father,” etc.
- R**epetition — leading prayer is a skill that gets easier with practice
- S**ilence — quiet time is appropriate as part of shared prayer



3. Planning a Prayer Service

a. The Building Blocks of a Prayer Service

At some time, you may need to plan a short prayer service that can stand by itself—for a meeting, a community prayer for a special concern, a celebration, etc. Such prayer services usually follow a general format:

- 1 Gathering
- 2 Call to Prayer
- 3 Opening Prayer
- 4 Scripture
- 5 Response to/Reflection on Scripture
- 6 Intercession
- 7 The Lord's Prayer
- 8 Sign of Peace
- 9 Closing Prayer
- 10 Blessing/Dismissal

1. Gathering

The purpose of this initial part of a prayer service is to signal to the community that they are being invited to prayer. It calls us to set aside all else for a moment and to focus on this time, however short, given to God. Gathering can be as dramatic as calling to order and welcoming everyone or as simple as lighting a candle, gesturing for people to stand, or dimming the lights—the number of people, the purpose for the prayer, and even the room in which the prayer is being held all influence what is appropriate. A small group gathered in silence needs less than a boisterous room after dinner. Singing can play a key role: singing together helps create the sense that we are a people gathered for the same purpose.

Gathering is more than a routine introduction to a moment of prayer. It is part of our belief

that when we gather, as baptized Christians, we make Christ present (“Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” [Matthew 18:20]).

Making Christ present is a privilege and a responsibility. A good gathering will create a sense of both.

2. Call to Prayer

A call to prayer denotes the beginning of the prayer. In the traditional Roman Catholic call to prayer, the leader begins with the Sign of the Cross and a salutation such as:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
and the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all.

or:

The grace and peace of God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ
be with us all.

Another option is to gesture for everyone to stand and to lead the group in silently making the Sign of the Cross.

Remember to be sensitive to those of other traditions when planning ecumenical or interfaith services. For example, the sign of the cross, or invoking the Trinity may not be appropriate. In such circumstances, the greeting could become something like:

May God's peace be with us all.

3. Opening Prayer

This prayer came to be called the “collect” because in it the prayer leader gathers together

the individual prayers of those present into one single joint prayer. If this is to be a reality, then the prayer leader needs to respect the structure of:

- inviting to prayer (this can be as simple as saying “Let us pray”)
- allowing a moment of silence so that everyone present can pray

- only then beginning the opening prayer

A good opening prayer will conform to this basic structure:

- it begins by addressing God
- it expresses thankfulness, usually directly related to the petition or purpose of the prayer
- it voices the purpose or reason for which we are gathered to pray
- the prayer has a conclusion which affirms that the community is praying in the name of Jesus (“ . . . in Jesus’ name we pray”) or through Christ (“ . . . we ask this through Christ, our Lord”), and which leads naturally to
- the “Amen” by which all present identify with and assent to the prayer the leader has said aloud on their behalf.

4. Scripture

Prayer is a conversation with God. It is only right, then, that the Word of God be given a prominent place within a prayer service. We do this through a reading or readings from Scripture.

The texts from Scripture are like “letters from God” which let us “discover God’s heart through God’s words” (Gregory the Great, 6th century).

This time spent listening to Scripture helps to bring the issue or theme to focus; it should help purify our focus, so that we see it through the eyes of faith. Hearing God’s Word should also challenge and spur us to bring our faith into action. We use Scripture because it is an important part of our collective history and brings the story of faith to our lives

The Lectionary* offers suggested readings for many special occasions. Some bibles (particularly study bibles and student bibles) also have lists of

suggested readings for special needs.

Remember that Psalms and Canticles are also part of Scripture. These are already prayers, and so they can focus us in a prayerful way on the theme. In addition, it is good to respect their original literary form: they are songs, so whenever possible, sing them!

* The *Lectionary* is the book, or series of books, which contains all the readings organized for use in liturgy, both the Mass and the other Sacraments. The campus ministry office should have a copy; the campus church/chapel certainly will have one.

5. Response to Scripture

Scripture is not just something that to which we are invited to “listen.” If prayer is a conversation, then it must include how we respond to God talking to us through Scripture.

Prayer causes change in us and changes in our relationships with self, others, and God. Effective prayer can draw us beyond where we are, inspire us to change our response to an event. Prayer can offer us comfort in difficult situations, challenge us to action, to build community, etc.

Part of the role of the leader of prayer is to facilitate this movement. In other words, to structure the prayer service so that the participants not only have an opportunity to *hear* God’s Word, but also a clear opportunity to *respond* to God’s Word.

There are several classic or traditional ways of doing this:

- a reflection on the reading given by someone present,
- faith-sharing on the topic of the reading,
- a song,
- a period of quiet reflection.

With experience, you will be like a good cook who knows how to mix the ingredients: a good reflection offered by one person can be granted a longer time: a short reflection can be combined with a song and/or a time for silent reflection.

Responses to Scripture should lead to deeper insights into what God is calling us to do. For example, if the Scripture addresses sorrow, where is God in the midst of our sorrow? If the Scripture speaks to oppression, how does God

challenge us to fight against oppression? If the prayer service is celebrating an event, how does God become present to us in that event?

6. Intercessions

Having heard God's Word, and allowed the time for the participants to reflect on what it means, the service moves naturally to prayer of intercession. This is the time when those gathered bring their needs and the needs of the wider community before God and one another. For the ways in which we and world do not correspond to what God wills for us, we pray.

The basic structure of the Prayer of the Faithful can serve as a model here:

— the prayer leader offers a general invitation to pray. This invitation may take one of the phrases or expressions from Scripture used earlier. For example, if the Gospel reading is the calming of the storm from Matthew 8:23-27 (see page 12), the invitation could be something like:

We feel we are being swamped by concerns;
like the disciples,
let us put our trust in the Lord,
and turn to him,
pleading "Lord, save us!"

— the Intercessions themselves. It may help if the leader has prepared one or two Intercessions: these will serve as model or example to those present, and will help avoid long empty silences. Certainly, the leader should make it clear to that those gathered that they are invited to voice aloud their petitions.

These spontaneous prayers should be brief and addressed to God: it is not the time for expressing your own ideas and opinions to others by disguising them as prayers!

So that all present can "join" in the individually expressed petitions, there should be a simple invocation, said by all, at the end of each petition or intercession: for example, each petition could conclude "Let us pray to the Lord" to which all say "Lord, hear our prayer."

If the Scripture passage offers an appropriate short phrase, that can be used as the assembly's response. To continue with the example from Matthew 8:23-27, the response could be:

"Lord, save us!"

— the leader needs to draw this moment of intercession to a conclusion. This should not be an additional prayer, but a presentation of all the Intercessions into one, short concluding prayer such as:

"Loving God, we ask you to grant us our petitions as You will. Through Christ our Lord...Amen."

or

"We pray for all these needs and the needs known only to ourselves and God. In Jesus' name...Amen."

7. The Lord's Prayer

The Lord's Prayer, because it is the only prayer given to us by Jesus himself, has pride of place within Christian prayer. As well as being a prayer in itself, it is a model of prayer.

The natural place for the Lord's Prayer is after, or even as the conclusion to the prayers of intercession. The leader should introduce this prayer as appropriate: for example, combining the conclusion to the Intercession and the introduction to the Lord's Prayer:

"We ask all these things and for the prayers in our hearts as we say: Our Father . . ."

8. Sign of Peace

The leader invites everyone to share a sign of peace with those around them. The sign of peace is very important in prayer services because it is the response of the community to the prayer—it expresses the unity of those gathered.

The way that the sign of peace is exchanged depends on circumstances:

— if the group is small, then it is possible for everyone to exchange a sign with everyone else present;

— when the assembly is really large, then it is probably better to invite everyone to "exchange a sign of peace with those around you."

The nature of the sign depends on what is judged acceptable locally: where the members of the assembly do not know each other, a handshake is the most usual form; when the participants know each other well, the preferred way may be a refined hug.

Be aware that this can be a very emotional time for those gathered in time of crisis or loss.

9. Closing Prayer

The closing prayer is a summation of the service, in the sense that it both entrusts to God all that has taken place in the course of the service, and invokes God's help on the participants so that they may be faithful to any commitments they have made as part of their response to God's Word.

There are many sources for closing prayers, including the *Sacramentary**, collections of prayers, a ritual guide for lay people, to name a few.

The leader may also wish to pray in her/his own words. The focus of this prayer should be on going forward with God's help or having been renewed by this time of prayer rather than looking back on the reason for the prayer service.

10. Blessing/Dismissal

The most common blessing and dismissal is:

May God bless us all,
(while making the sign of the cross)
in the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Let us go in peace.

Thanks be to God.

Another common, simple blessing is:

May God bless us,
protect us from evil,
and bring us to everlasting life.

Amen.

The *Roman Missal** or *Sacramentary** contains extended blessings for special occasions (for example, for use during Advent) which you should not hesitate to use if they are appropriate to the theme of your prayer service.

Here is one from the *Roman Missal*, which is based on the famous Old Testament blessing found in Numbers 6:24-26 (which makes it an appropriate blessing for ecumenical and inter-faith services):

May the Lord bless us and keep us.

Amen.

May his face shine upon us
and be gracious to us.

Amen.

May he look upon us with kindness,
and give us his peace.

Amen.

If a priest or deacon is present, the leader may ask him to invoke the blessing.

Just as an entry song can unify the participants as they prepare to enter into prayer, so too a closing song can unite them in proclaiming a message of common purpose.

* The *Roman Missal* is the book which contains all the official prayers which are used at Mass. The campus ministry office should have a copy; the campus church/chapel certainly will have one. You may find that it is titled *Sacramentary*.

b. Other Hints and Suggestions

Themes

It takes skill to prepare a prayer service based on a theme, because there is always a danger of forcing Scripture to match your theme.

Of course, there will be times when a theme is obvious and the appropriate readings and prayers will be relatively easy to find: for example—a major disaster has just happened, someone has died, closing prayer for the semester, Lent, Thanksgiving, etc.

Other times the theme may be more difficult; or at least, you have a theme in mind but finding the readings to go with it is more difficult. If there really is nothing in Scripture that seems to match your theme, you should be asking yourself, is this really a theme we should be praying about? Or at least, should we adapt our theme so that it corresponds to what Scripture seems to say?

If no theme seems obvious, remember that “prayer” itself can be the theme. In other words, the service can simply offer an opportunity for prayer—an evening of reflection, an evening of musical praise, etc.

If using a theme, not every part of the service needs to “match” perfectly; the individual parts of the service can all speak to the theme but from different perspectives.

Scripture

The *Lectionary* is a good place to start—much of the work of choosing readings that fit an occasion has already been done for you. If you know what reading you want to use, you might check to see if it is in the *Lectionary*—there is an index of readings in the back—so you get a sense of how long a reading needs to be to convey the whole message. The translation used by the *Lectionary* in the United States is the New American Bible. You may find that a different translation is clearer, or the way that it expresses the text fits your theme better: the New Revised Standard Bible, or the New Jerusalem Bible are reliable translations.

If a reading is going to be proclaimed from a Bible, there are three conventions about reading Scripture texts in public, which are already built into the way the texts are presented in the *Lectionary*, that you should know and imitate.

1. Begin by announcing the source of the reading. For example:

A reading from the book of the Prophet Isaiah
or

A reading from the holy Gospel according to
Matthew

And conclude by saying

The Word of the Lord

to which all respond

Thanks be to God.

2. Some translations of the Old Testament will use the Sacred Name *Yahweh*. Out of respect, this Name was never pronounced by the Jewish people. The *Lectionary* respects this tradition, and we recommend that you do the same. Wherever the word *Yahweh* appears, replace it in proclamation by “the Lord”.

3. When you have chosen an appropriate passage, be prepared to make any small adjustments to the beginning of the text that will help the hearers understand what is being proclaimed.

For example, suppose your theme is peace and you have chosen John 14:27-31 as a Gospel reading. This is part of a long discourse that Jesus is making to the disciples just before his arrest. Instead of starting the reading directly at

verse 27 and beginning by saying

Peace I leave with you . . .

preface it by

Jesus said to his disciples:

“Peace I leave with you . . .”

Music

When used appropriately, music can add a lot to a prayer service. A gathering song can help build the sense of gathering and community; instrumental music can soften a period of silence (especially for those not used to long moments of silence). Parts of Scripture were originally written as songs, and singing them can reinforce their message, can make it come alive.

The choice of song should contribute to the overall movement of the service, which means:

— the lyrics of all the songs should focus on and develop in some way the theme of the service;

— determining which songs it is appropriate for the participants to listen to, and which songs ought to be sung by everyone.

Some examples: a solo song to which the participants are invited to listen could be justified as part of the reflection time after hearing the Word proclaimed, precisely because it focuses on and offers an interpretation of the Scripture that has just been proclaimed.

The function of the opening song is to help the participants leave behind their individuality and create a sense of being a group or community praying together: this will mean that everyone ought to be able to sing it.

If using an unfamiliar song, then take time before the service begins to teach at the least the refrain so that everyone can participate.

If using recorded music, it should be ready before the prayer service starts. Whenever using any kind of music, someone other than the person leading the prayer should be responsible for it.

Ministers

A good prayer service will involve a variety of ministers:

Prayer leader or presider

A self-descriptive title for the person who is responsible for leading the prayer, or who

presides over the prayer service. This does not mean that this person does everything! Simply, this is the person responsible for the flow of the prayer service, who does only what is necessary to keep that process on track. The leader should be familiar and at home with all that is to happen during the service. It demands both a sense of presence and of discretion. Everything that this person does or says should be prayerful in nature: gestures, words, demeanor. (See the next main section for tips.)

Lector

The person entrusted with proclaiming the readings. Reading in public requires more than simply knowing how to read! A lector should be at home with the text that he or she is to proclaim. Public reading requires a greater degree of enunciation and a much more measured pace than most people imagine. Good preparation means not only being familiar with the text, but that you actually rehearse proclaiming it in public.

As well as the Scripture reading, prepared petitions can be read by the lector or cantor; this is more appropriate in large gatherings.

Music leader

The one who coordinates the music to be used, and often who will direct the music and singing during the service itself.

Cantor

This usually means the person who leads the people in singing. It also means the person who is entrusted with singing any solo parts: most notably, the verses of the psalm (everyone sings the response). Note that the role of the cantor determines where he or she should sing from: for the Psalm, since this is from Scripture, the Cantor should sing from the ambo (the same place from which the other Scripture readings are proclaimed); for leading the congregation in song, obviously choose somewhere where the cantor can be clearly seen, and that (if they need it) they have a microphone, but *not* from the ambo.

Preparation

Each minister should know what he or she is responsible for during the service.

They should know this well in advance, so that they have time to prepare adequately. It is not by accident that we speak of a “prayer service.” The various ministers are at the service of God’s Word and the prayer of the community. It is both a privilege and a responsibility which demands full and careful preparation.

When choosing who will fulfill which ministry, competence must always be the first criteria. Thereafter, take an overall view of the service. This could mean that where there will be several readings, they are shared out so that they are proclaimed by both men’s and women’s voices. The change of tone and timbre will enhance the audibility of their proclamation. It could also mean making sure that the ministers represent the community in terms of age, race and gender.

Tips for Prayer Leaders/Presiders

The essence of your role is to lead the community in prayer—and you yourself are part of that community. This means any announcements you do make should be phrased in “us” or “we” rather than “you”. It means guiding the gathering into and through the various moments, when necessary reminding them of the why that underpins what is being done and not just declaring what is to happen.

Some examples:

- inviting
“Let us quiet ourselves for a moment to remind ourselves that God is always present among us.”
is much better than demanding
“Could everyone get quiet?;”
- “We begin, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .”
is used instead of
“We’re going to start now”
- A good presider will say,
“Let us offer our prayers and needs to God”
in preference to
“We’re going to have the petitions now...”

Pacing is important. A good presider will allow time for quiet and time for any necessary movement during the service.



4. “Sending Forth”

Sample Prayer Session

Theme	Ministers	
End of Semester Prayer Service	<i>Presider</i>	Grace
Sending Forth	<i>Music</i>	Christine (guitar) Angela and Joseph (cantors)

Prayer Service

Gathering

Gather Us In by Marty Haugen (© 1982 GIA)

Salutation

We gather
(lead the participants in making the sign of the cross)
in the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**
The grace and peace of God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ
be with us all. **And also with you.**

Call to Prayer

Let us take a moment
to remind ourselves why we are gathered
and to bring to mind our prayers.
[Pause: approximately 10 seconds]

Opening Prayer

Loving God, be with us
as we celebrate both an end and many beginnings.
We thank you for the year we have had together
and we ask for your guidance as we go from here
—some to new phases of life,
others to return again in the Fall.

Be with us this evening and throughout the Summer
keep us safe and ever close to you.
In your name we pray. **Amen.**

Scripture

Psalm 21/22

The Lord is my shepherd . . .

Matthew 23: 34-40

“You shall love the Lord God
with all your heart, soul and mind,
and love your neighbor as yourself.”

Response to Scripture

*Invite everyone to spend a few minutes reflecting on the past year
and how they have experienced the love of God and their neighbor
through their participation in small groups.*

Then, allow for people to share their experiences.

Close with “The Road Ahead” by Thomas Merton:

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think that I am following your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this
you will lead me by the right road
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore will I trust you always
though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

Intercessions

For those who are graduating:
that they may know that God is with them always.
We pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

For those who go without the necessities of life:
that their needs may be met through the grace of God
and by our hands.
We pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

For all of us gathered here:
that we may know the love of this community always
and may carry it to others.
We pray to the Lord.
Lord, hear our prayer.

For what else shall we pray?

Allow time for others to voice prayer intentions

We join these prayers,
the prayers in our hearts,
and our voices as we say:
Our Father, . . .

Sign of Peace

Let us offer each other a sign of peace.

Closing Prayer

Let us pray.

Pause for approximately 10 seconds

God of all, we thank you for this time together
and for the growth we have experienced this year.
Help us all to remember the love and feeling of community
our groups have brought us.
Guide those who leave us:
may they never forget the community here
and may they always know that they are not alone
since our prayers and your presence go with them.
Keep us all safe as we journey from here and until we meet again.
In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

Blessing/Dismissal

God has called us out of darkness
into his wonderful light.
May we experience his kindness and blessings
and be strong in faith, in hope, and in love. **Amen.**

Go in peace. **Thanks be to God.**

*[Remember to invite everyone to the gathering in the basement
to say goodbye to our departing students and staff.]*

Closing Song

City of God by Dan Schutte (© 1981 Dan Schutte & OCP)



5. Concluding Prayer Reflective Reading

This style of prayer 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, or as an imaginary observer.

Reactions can be shared with the group or, if utilizing this style of prayer by yourself, journaling can be very fruitful. 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.

Matthew 8:23-27

Jesus got into the boat and his disciples followed him.
A windstorm arose on the sea,
so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves;
but he was asleep.
And they went and woke him up, saying,
“Lord, save us! We are perishing!”
And he said to them,
“Why are you afraid, you of little faith?”
Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea;
and there was a dead calm.
They were amazed, saying,
“What sort of man is this,
that even the winds and the sea obey him?”

