



Prayer



Prayer

Opening Prayer

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

We worship You, holy Spirit of God, and we may only guess, as best we can, who You are for us.

We open our hearts to receive You that we may learn how deeply and invisibly You are present everywhere.

You are the air we breathe, the distance we gaze into, the space that surrounds us. You are the kindly light in which people are attractive to each other.

You are the finger of God and you playfully order the universe. You are the sensitive love with which we were created.

We pray to You, Spirit of God, Creator, complete the work you have begun; prevent the evil we are capable of doing and inspire us toward what is good -- to faithfulness and patience, to compassion and gentleness and awaken in us friendship for every living being, with joy for everything that is good and human.

Everything that lives grows only by your power. Your activity is strange and beyond all human words. You are hidden deep inside us like yeast, a seed of fire. You are our will to live, the love that keeps us here on earth and ties us to Yourself.

You urge us to go on to the end and to endure everything, not to give way, but to go on hoping, as love does. You are the soul of all our prayers, so there is nothing we may not expect from You.

Wisdom to understand each other, readiness to help each other. You are God's gift to us, God who dwells with in. Amen

(From *Out of the Ordinary*, Joyce Rupp)



Prayer

This unit presents a taste of many different ideas and ways of praying that hopefully will support and encourage prayerful living. It is intended to be used as a resource as you continue on throughout the units.

Sisters of Divine Providence reflect on their experiences of prayer...

After reading these comments, you are invited to spend some time reflecting on your own life and your experience of prayer.

- How would you describe your prayer relationship with God?
- Has it changed over the years?
- What is central, most important, for you in prayer?
- Have there been times when you have not been able to pray?
- Are there particular ways of praying that are meaningful for you?
- Is there a relationship of prayer to Providence in your life?

For me, as I have prayed over the years, I can now say...

- ...prayer is an articulation of my relationship with God. ~ *Michele Bisbey, CDP*
- ...walking the path of life, hand in hand with God, allowing God's grace to permeate every aspect of my being. ~ *Roberta Grzelak, CDP*
- ...staying in God's presence; thinking time about my life in God; putting myself in God's hands whatever I experience during a day; taking a breath with God; and devoting all to God. ~ *Veronica Kim, CDP*
- ...my deepest connection with God. Whether it's a fleeting awareness of God's presence with me or a long conversation, in all, the connection of love and care and comfort happens. ~ *Josephine Macias, CDP*
- ...being with God in stillness and motion, by myself or with others, and through words or song or dance or silence. ~ *Kathleen Matz, CDP*
- ...relationship with the Lord; talking and listening to the Lord as a friend. ~ *Patricia Ann Moffett, CDP*
- ...in me and beyond me, most of my waking hours...in joy, in sorrow, in most conversations, in reading and media, and above all in people. ~ *Francesca O'Regan, CDP*
- ...a loving response to the Presence of God--practice the presence until we are aware--then respond at each moment -- lovingly and we will KNOW GOD'S PROVIDENCE. ~ *Marian Senish, CDP*
- ...sharing laughter and joy with the Lord and others! God is my Listener. ~ *Carol Tenerovich, CDP*

Prayer is an awareness, a mystery and a Presence where there is no space between God and me (and us). ~ *Sr. Mary Thomas*

For me, prayer is opening my heart to God. It is letting Jesus have access to every part of my heart. This will enable Jesus to act through me in bringing God's love to others. ~ *Mary Weatherly, CDP*

Prayer is allowing my soul to rest: ...in the quietude with God in quiet wordless love.
...in quietude of soul to allow God to transform us into Himself, surrendering to His will. ~ *Sr. Connie*

The precious moments I spend with my God, letting Him know how much I love Him and trust Him and asking for His help and peace. This is my set-apart time for Him, but I do try to make everything I do a prayer. ~ *Sr. Rosemary*

Prayer is a "time of quiet" when I become more aware of the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), who dwells in me at all times. Prayer is a time when I try to listen and hear what God may be asking of me. Prayer is asking God for the Grace and Energy to do whatever He asks of me with a cheerful attitude. ~ *Sister Mary Jerome*

Prayer is awareness of God surrounding me 24 hours a day, from sunset to sunrise, from the ground to the sky. I sing alleluias and magnificats as I go my rounds in ministry. Prayer is "to be" in and with God always. ~ *Cathy Frost, CDP*

Union with God and may I bring Him wherever I go. ~ *Sr. Mary Ann*

Being a friend with God. Putting total trust in God's hands. ~ *Sr. Agnes Marie*



Understanding Of Prayer And The Experience Of God

Laying semantics aside now, we know the actual experience of prayer is most intimate, most personal to us. Even though we may say or sing words to pray, or use words to describe our prayer, the reality of praying is far beyond the scope of words to express.

Pause for personal reflection on the unique growth of prayerful consciousness for you. If the following suggestions for reflection are helpful, use them. Or use whatever means you wish to express what you know of prayer. Most of these suggestions are word-oriented. However, deep knowing, such as this, frequently eludes words. It may be that some other form says prayer more effectively for you. For instance, other expressions may be more eloquent, such as music. . .gestures. . .postures. . .dance. . .color. . .line. . .shapes. . .textures, etc. The best expression may be a sacred object from nature or ritual moments. This is your experience – your expression.

A way to begin: Develop a cluster of words, images, colors, sounds, movements, etc., that you associate with the essence of prayer. You may also wish to journal.

Consider:

- What persons, events, insights, experiences have most influenced your ways and understanding prayer?
- How have your present ways of prayer evolved over the years?
- What seems to inhibit your ability to pray?
- What seems to enhance your ability to pray?

(Adapted from *Love, Mercy and Justice: A Book of Practices of the Sisters of Providence*, pg. 11.)

This excerpt is from the opening chapter, “The Practice of Prayer.”

“We choose for our purposes to use the word prayer as the name we give to all the varied ways by which we acknowledge, respond to, and enter into relationship with Ultimate Mystery as we come to know it at different times in our lives. While we recognize that it is important and helpful to listen to the prayer experiences of others and to learn from them, we also acknowledge that ultimately each person and each generation must search for meaning and for the sacred in the midst of unique historical and personal circumstances. What we are choosing to pass on to future generations, therefore, is not a particular way of praying. Rather, we hope we can pass on a practice of being faithful to the ongoing search for the sacred and a commitment to the search for an authentic response to the different faces of the God we will encounter as we travel our personal faith journeys, joined together in community with others.” (pg. 1)

In the above passage, the writer describes “Ultimate Mystery” as one of “the different faces of God.”

Pause for personal reflection on the “Ultimate Mystery,” the “faces of God” you have experienced. Once again your experience may elude words.

A way to begin: Develop a cluster of words, images, colors, sounds, movements, etc., expressive of your experience or realizations of God. You may also wish to journal.

Consider:

- How your sense of the ultimate mystery of God challenged, changed, or evolved for you through the years.
- What most effectively brings you to a prayerful sense of God’s presence.
- What seems to form a barrier to your sense of God’s presence.



Understanding Prayer: *The Breath of Life in Us*

By Michael Morwood

Christians who have believed that prayer is concerned with contacting an elsewhere God now face a radical shift in their understanding of prayer. Prayer is not so much about talking to or addressing God, but rather about deepening our awareness that God – the Breath of Life present throughout the universe – comes to visible expression in us. When we reflect on this truth, we deepen our wonder and joy about who we are, we appreciate the story of Jesus more than ever before, and we understand better what it means to say “Yes” to being the “Body of Christ.”

We gather to pray,
believing that
God, Source, Empowerer,
Breath, Enlivener,
and Energizer
prays in us.

We pray,
aware that
God at work
in the vastness of this universe
for billions of years
comes to visible
and audible expression
in our words
of appreciation.

We rejoice
in the Breath
breathing life and vitality
into our world,
into our lives
and into our gathering here,
connecting us
at the deepest level
with all that exists.

We rejoice
in the wonder of who we are,
bearers of the Breath of Life,
privileged
in our awareness of this,
and challenged
by our privilege
to allow the Breath of Life
full expression
in our living and loving.

We call to mind
Jesus of Nazareth,
who opened minds and hearts

(Continued on next column)

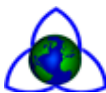
to this awareness
and to this challenge.
The Breath of Life
moved so freely and openly
in his life
that people recognized
the relationship
at the deepest level of being
between God and a human person.

In Jesus
we have come to see
the truth of who we are
and we give thanks for his life,
his teaching,
and the courage with which
he faced death
and the mystery
of relationship
with the Breath of Life
beyond death.

We take this bread,
as Jesus took bread,
mindful of the Breath of Life,
always present,
always sustaining,
always nourishing,
and we give thanks
for that Breath
and the wonder of who we are.

We break this bread
recalling Jesus' readiness
to love
with all his heart,
with all his soul,
with all his strength,
with all his mind,
and to love his neighbor
as he loved himself.

(Continued on next page)



We eat this bread,
praying that the generosity
of the Breath of Life
may find free expression
in our lives.

We take this wine,
mindful of the Breath of Life
bonding us with all that exists
in its fecundity
diversity,
complexity,
and supporting systems.

(Continued on next column)

We drink
with appreciation,
with respect,
and with gratitude
for that bonding.

Time for silent reflection:
The Breath of Life prays in me.

May we allow the Breath of Life
to be evident in our words and actions,
in our homes,
in our workplaces,
in all our relationships,
and in our world.

Amen.

Prayer for the New Story: *Expressing Who We Are*, By Michael Morwood

As we embrace the New Story we should become more familiar with a prayer form that deepens our awareness of who we are – a life-form giving the Creator Spirit a unique way of coming to expression. Jesus mirrors this reality for us and to us.

This prayer form does not address God or ask God to intervene and change the way things are. Rather it leads us to reflect on the wonder of God coming to expression in and among us. This is the Wow! of human existence from a Christian perspective. It is also the responsibility we each carry.

We pray,
conscious that
raising our hearts and minds
is a gift of the Spirit of Life
at work
in the depths of our being.
For the presence of that Spirit in us,
we give thanks.

We pray,
conscious that
our prayer
gives the Spirit
a way of breaking into word and song
unique in all the universe.
For the words and songs
within each of us, we give thanks.

We pray,
believing
we are bearers of a treasure,
the Spirit of Life
blessing us with a variety of gifts.
For the treasures we each bear,
we give thanks.

(Continued on next column)

We pray,
mindful of men and women
throughout human history
who allowed the Spirit of Life
to work in them
for the betterment
of our world and humanity.
For their lives and their inspiration,
we give thanks.

We pray,
remembering Jesus
who so allowed the Spirit of Life
to move in his life
that in him we have seen
the perfect expression
of the Spirit in human form.
For Jesus and all he means to us,
we give thanks.

We pray,
challenged by Jesus
to allow his life
to be a mirror for us
so that we might live life in all its fullness.

(Continued on next page)



We pray,
mindful
of all that has brought us together,
of the Spirit at work in our lives
and of what may be possible
if we allow the Spirit
to work freely in each of us.

We pray,
inviting
the Spirit of Life, Love, and Goodness
to move freely in our words and actions.

Silent reflection

Using Images – A Way To Pray

Look at each of these haiku as a painting drawn with words. Are you able to see the pictures? Using their images is a way to pray.

A tiny gold leaf
offers a silent sermon
from a barren branch.

The tiger lily
stretching toward
the morning sun
drinks in the dew drops.

Fear is in my heart
the buttercups console me
in my healing field.

Casting aside fear
like wildflowers on the hillside
I abide in love.

Two friends journeying
through the forest at midnight
to visit the moon.

The red tennis shoes
left out in the rain last night
are filled with rain water.

After the hail storm
Papa looks toward the vineyards
my heart breaks with love.

Longing for warmth
I hasten to the kitchen
on cold winter mornings.

My first memory of snow
Oh so much sugar, I thought
falling from heaven.

In the dark of night
the stars fall into the lake
until morning comes.

Sleeping outside on a summer night
I pull a blanket of stars over me
and listen to the whippoorwill.

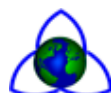
Searching For The Holy

Reading: AN OPEN MIND

A good traveler has not fixed plans and is not intent upon arriving.
A good artist lets (his) intuition lead (him) wherever it wants.
A good scientist has freed self of concepts and keeps (his) mind
open to what is.

Thus the Master is available to all people, and doesn't reject anyone.
(He) is ready to use all situations and doesn't waste anything.
This is called embodying the light.

Lao-Tzu



Reading: LOOKING FOR GOD

Are you looking for me?
I am in the next seat.
My shoulder is against yours.
You will not find me in stupas (towers),
not in Indian shrine rooms,
nor in synagogues, nor in cathedrals;
not in masses, not kirtans,
not in legs winding around your own neck,
nor in eating nothing but vegetables.
When you really look for me,
you will see me instantly –
you will find me in the tiniest house of time.
Kabir says: Student, tell me what is God?
(He) is the breath inside the breath.

Kabir, Translation by Robert Bly

If I Should Wake Before I Die, Lamont Satterly, page 170

Quiet Reflection: Sit quietly with soft music, breathing gently.
Feel the air move in and out.
Let this breath be THE HOLY.

Reflections On The Providence Of God And Prayerful Living

“Have confidence in the Providence that so far has never failed us. The way is not yet clear. Grope along slowly. Do not press matters; be patient, be trustful and rest assured, my dear daughters, if you lean with all your weight upon Providence you will find yourselves well supported.” (Letters and Journals of Mother Theodore Guerin.)

An Evolving Understanding Of Providence

In the contemporary model of Providence, emphasis is placed not on God’s power as control, but rather on God’s encompassing love and concern in the mysterious and manifold shaping of life. With the emergence of historical consciousness in the nineteenth century, a new theology began to develop which is oriented not simply to the past but to the future. In this model God is understood not so much as a sovereign king and master but as a transcendent and empowering presence within all of creation. (*Love, Mercy, and Justice: A Book of Practices of the Sisters of Providence*, p. 8)

Prayer and Providence is:

- dialogic – implying a relationship between ourselves and a transcendent presence or reality;
- multi-faceted – varying incredibly with aspects and circumstances of our lives;
- transformational – drawing us evermore into fulfilling awareness of ourselves and the Transcendent – God.

The Practice Of Prayer

“In the contemporary model of Providence there is more ambiguity as we struggle to discern – in the confusion of the many possibilities presented to us by world events, by nature itself and rising out of our own person – some direction in the process, some order in the chaos, a sense of the direction in which God’s will is luring our own wills, and leading us to discern the responsibilities that are ours. In this struggle a new (or an old) concern regarding prayer has emerged. That concern is how we, today, can discover the action of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our world.

(*Love, Mercy and Justice: A Book of Practices of the Sisters of Providence*)



“The kind of prayer to which this image of God as loving and empowering presence seems to be calling us at our time in salvation history is the prayer of discernment – a kind of prayer that will enable us to search out and to recognize more clearly God’s presence and lure moving and giving direction from deep within the complex ambiguities of our individual lives, nature and world events.

“How will we learn to recognize the Spirit of God moving in our midst? John, the Beloved, has warned us that it is not every spirit we can trust ... Fidelity to the practice of prayer will help us to stay on course.” (*Ibid*: pg. 9-10)

To Name God “Providence”

To name God “Providence” seems singularly appropriate in an age where the chaotic and irrational seem to prevail, in a time when we are concretely aware of the brokenness, the woundedness of our lives. Providence spirituality is not Pollyanna spirituality. Providence spirituality cannot say “God is in heaven; all’s right with the world.” Nor can it deny the realities of disorder, chaos, brokenness, alienation, and injustice. Providence spirituality calls us to see these realities, to name them, to wrestle with them, but also and at the same time, to know that there is meaning in the midst of what appears to be meaningless.

Because we, the associates and the Sisters of Divine Providence, have seen the meaning of our own chaos, in our own broken heartedness, in our own disordered lives, we can give witness, and we can reveal the vision we share. We witness to the reality that the God who weaves our lives is the Provident God. We eagerly anticipate that day when the whole tapestry of our lives might be unfolded before us and when we might exclaim with our foundress, “Visibly do I see in all things the wonderful Providence of God.” (*Sr. Michele Bisbey, CDP*)

How to Pray a Minute

By Barbara Bartocci

God is with us in all our moments

“I’d like to pray more but I don’t have time.”

“I’m so busy, I can’t think about God daily.”

“Church on Sunday is all I can manage.”

Sound familiar?

Several years ago, a book called *The One-Minute Manager* hit bookshelves with a small explosion. Time-conscious managers loved it; it provided practical tips to better management—in one-minute segments.

Since then, it’s occurred to me that we need a guide to one-minute spirituality. After all, most of us feel the same time constraints managers feel on the job. But how can we become more God-conscious — in 60-second bits?

Well, here are some ideas:

- **Telephone thanksgiving.** Let the ring remind you of God’s blessings. Every time it rings, recall something good and say a brief prayer of thanks.
- **Thirty-second eye contact.** Too often, we ignore the person we don’t know. Next time you’re at the supermarket or mall, make eye contact with a sales person. Or another shopper. You’ll probably get a warm smile in return.
- **Observe a growing, green thing.** Whether it’s a tree, flower, or indoor potted plant, look at the veins in the leaves, or count the petals in a flower. For a minute, look at God’s living creation, be aware, and be thankful.
- **Stay in the present moment.** Too often, worry sends us into the future — a future where we’re sure something awful is about to happen. Tell yourself that, for one minute, you will live in the present with God. Remind yourself that God gives us our lives moment by moment and is always with us.

Experience God now.

- **Perform a one-minute kindness.** Keep postcards handy to write a few words to a friend or older relative. Let someone who’s rushed go ahead of you in



line. Help scrape the ice off an older person's windshield. Carry a plate of cookies to a neighbor.

- **The one-minute fast.** Tempted to eat something you shouldn't? Wait for one minute. Offer the minute to God and ask the Holy Spirit to help you control the desire. Indeed, you may no longer be tempted when the minute is up.
- **Affirm yourself.** We're often overly critical of ourselves. At night, take a minute to look in the mirror. Make eye contact with yourself. "God loves you," you might say, "and I love you."
- **Start a gratitude journal.** Take a minute each day to write in a notebook something for which you're grateful. When life seems tough, thumb through your journal.
- **Make a red-light act of contrition.** At every red light, tell God you're sorry for all the times you stopped living God's will to pursue your own desires.
- **Take a minute to listen to someone.** Maybe you can listen to a child, instead of absently saying, "uh-huh." Or maybe you can listen to a spouse, instead of responding, "That's nice."
- **The shower-power prayer.** Water is a powerful Christian symbol. As you soap and rinse in the shower, pray to be cleansed from feelings of anger, resentment, and bitterness.
- **The alarm-clock prayer.** As your alarm goes off, repeat the psalm: "This is the day the Lord has made. I rejoice and am glad."
- **Lunch-box communion.** Spend a minute experiencing the act of eating. Eat slowly. Notice the taste and texture of each bite. Thank God for our incredible abundance of food. How might you help the hungry?
- **Practice saying:** "I am loved, and through Christ, I love." We can love others only when we love ourselves. We can love ourselves only when we believe that we are loved by God as we are.
- **The count-to-60, stop-a-fight prayer.** Ever burst out in anger and regretted your words later? Next time, count to 60 this way: one-for-God, two-for-God. . . .
- **Remember the God-holder prayer.** Everyone you meet is a God-holder. Especially when someone acts rudely or meanly, it helps temper our response to remember that God is in each person. Like candle holders, each of us holds the Light (even if temporarily we hide it under a bushel).
- **The one-minute change-over for God.** Do you forget to replace the toothpaste cap? Or forget to leave the mail where your spouse can see it? Pick a habit that bothers you or someone else and dedicate one minute a day to correct it. Do it in God's name.
- **The TV minute.** Use the next commercial to focus on the Christian call to live simply. Notice how few products advertised relate to what we need, and how many are designed to make us want what isn't necessary. Talk back to commercials.
- **The gas-pump minute.** As you pump gas into your car, ask God's spirit to flow into you, filling you with holy energy.
- **The peanut-butter prayer.** When making school lunches, whisper a loving prayer into each lunch sack. Every so often, add a special note from Mom or Dad.
- **The elevator blessing.** Next time you share an elevator with someone, ask God silently to meet that person's special needs.

As you practice these exercises, you'll come up with others on your own. And, you'll notice that when we practice one-minute spirituality, a shift in consciousness occurs. We begin to see God in all the minutes of our day.

You don't have to allot to God a large block of time that is never available. God is with us in each little moment. It's up to us to see God in every one.



Experience Of The Living God: The Core Of Prayer

By Piet Penning de Vries, S.J., (printed in part)

When two lives intersect, life bursts into flame. Because another life crosses ours, a new vitality blazes in us. Authentic life is kindled by the life of another. The peaks of our life are where we have touched the life of another, where another's life and ours have mutually touched, have flowed together as into a pool and thus mutually raised one another's level. THIS is what our Provident God is for us.

God is not someone about whom we pray, about whom we think. No one is only to be "thought about." Our Provident God is to be experienced. Where God's life has touched ours, where we have felt Providence living, there too we felt that we were living. But what do we know of God's life and vitality? Nothing outside of the moments when we experience our Provident God makes us live. It is in our own life that we have to search, if we want to experience God's life, if we want to experience our Provident God living.

Prayer

By Rachael Remen, M.D.

In a book called "Kitchen Table Wisdom," Rachel Remen, M.D., writes of an experience of prayer. As she was lying on an operating table waiting to be anesthetized, one of her surgeons took her hand and asked if she would join him and his operating team in a prayer. Startled, she nodded in agreement. Following a moment of silence, he offered a traditional Indian prayer, saying, "May we be helped to do here whatever is most right."

Remen goes on to write that "... prayer may be less about asking for the things we are attached to than it is about relinquishing our attachments . . . It can take us beyond fear, which is an attachment, and beyond hope, which is another form of attachment . . . When we pray, we stop trying to control life and remember that we belong to life . . . prayer is a powerful way of embracing life, finding a home in any outcome, and remembering that there may be reasons beyond reason. Prayer is a movement from mastery to mystery."

Prayerful Companionship In Providence

In this section, you are invited to focus on the following considerations related to prayer and Providence:

- First consideration: personal hopes, fears, needs you bring to the Providence Associate relationship
- Second consideration: personal gifts and experiences which will enrich this relationship.

We will look at several of the prayer traditions among the Sisters of Divine Providence.

Prayer In Word

1. **Liturgical prayer:** "The community, mindful of its role as a segment of the praying Church, participates in the official prayers of the Catholic community – the Eucharist and the other sacraments and Morning Praise and/or Evensong."
 - "The community strives to find its center in the Eucharist, shared frequently in a spirit of praise, thanksgiving and reconciliation."
 - The Liturgy of the Hours: Morning Prayer and Evensong is a familiar form of prayer for the Sisters of Divine Providence.



Resources:

People's Companion to the Breviary Volumes I and II
by Carmelites of Indianapolis
Psalms Anew by Nancy Schreck and Maureen Leach
Psalms Journal Book I and II by Joan Chittister, OSB
Rejoice and Be Glad! by Maureen Fritz
Rejoice Beloved Woman! by Barbara J. Monda
Psalms for Praying by Nan Merrill
You Shall Not Want by John Kirvan

2. Meditational Practices

Suggestions for meditational practices:

Spiritual Reading of Sacred Scripture and Inspirational Writing

Prepare a passage from Scripture and have it marked and ready.

Place: Where you are alone and uninhibited in your response to God's presence.

Posture: Relaxed and peaceful. A harmony of body with spirit.

Presence of God: Be aware of it and acknowledge and respond to it.

When you are ready, turn to the passage. Read the passage from Scripture slowly and listen attentively. PAUSE.

Lectio – reading/listening to sacred text

Meditatio – pondering the word of the text

Oratio – Responding with heart and will to the Word

Contemplatio – Resting in the presence of God

(Adapted from *When In Doubt, Sing*, pg. 60)

The Method of Centering Prayer

By Thomas Keating

Theological Background

The grace of Pentecost affirms that the risen Jesus is among us as the glorified Christ. Christ lives in each of us as the Enlightened One, present everywhere and at all times. He is the living Master who continuously sends the Holy Spirit to dwell within us and to bear witness to his resurrection by empowering us to experience and manifest the fruits of the Spirit and the Beatitudes, in prayer and action.

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is the most traditional way of cultivating friendship with Christ. It is a way of listening to the texts of scripture as if we were in conversation with Christ and he were suggesting the topics of conversation. The daily encounter with Christ and reflection on his word leads beyond mere acquaintanceship to an attitude of friendship, trust and love. Conversation simplifies and gives way to communing, or as Gregory the Great (6th century), summarizing the Christian contemplative tradition, put it, "resting in God." This was the classical meaning of contemplative prayer for the first sixteen centuries.

Contemplative Prayer

Contemplative Prayer is the normal development of the grace of baptism and the regular practice of Lectio Divina. We may think of prayer as thoughts or feelings expressed in words. But this is only one expression. Contemplative Prayer is the opening of mind and heart – our whole being – to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond thoughts, words, and emotions. We open our awareness to God whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than choosing – closer than consciousness itself. Contemplative Prayer is a process of interior purification leading, if we consent, to divine union.



The Method of Centering Prayer

Centering Prayer is a method designed to facilitate the development of contemplative prayer by preparing our faculties to cooperate with this gift. It is an attempt to present the teaching of earlier times (e.g.: The Cloud of Unknowing) in an updated form and to put a certain order and regularity into it. It is not meant to replace other kinds of prayer; it simply puts other kinds of prayer into a new and fuller perspective. During the time of prayer we consent to God's presence and action within. At other times our attention moves outward to discover God's presence everywhere.

The Guidelines:

Explanation of the Guidelines

- I. "Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within." (cf. *Open Mind, Open Heart, chap. 5*)
 1. The sacred word expresses our intention to be in God's presence and to yield to the divine action.
 2. The sacred word should be chosen during a brief period of prayer asking the Holy Spirit to inspire us with one that is especially suitable for us.
 - A. Examples: Lord, Jesus, Abba, Father, Mother.
 - B. Other possibilities: Love, Peace, Shalom
 3. Having chosen a sacred word, we do not change it during the prayer period, for that would be to start thinking again.
 4. A simple inward gaze upon God may be more suitable for some persons than the sacred word. In this case, one consents to God's presence and action by turning inwardly toward God as if gazing upon him. The same guidelines apply to the sacred gaze as to the sacred word.
- II. "Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within."
 1. By "sitting comfortably" is meant relatively comfortably; not so comfortably that we encourage sleep, but sitting comfortably enough to avoid thinking about the discomfort of our bodies during this time of prayer.
 2. Whatever sitting position we choose, we keep the back straight.
 3. If we fall asleep, we continue the prayer for a few minutes upon awakening if we can spare the time.
 4. Praying in this way after a main meal encourages drowsiness. Better to wait an hour at least before Centering Prayer. Praying in this way just before retiring may disturb one's sleep pattern.
 5. We close our eyes to let go of what is going on around and within us.
 6. We introduce the sacred word inwardly and as gently as laying a feather on a piece of absorbent cotton.
- III. "When you become aware of thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word."
 1. "Thoughts" is an umbrella term for every perception including sense perceptions, feelings, images, memories, reflections, and commentaries.
 2. Thoughts are a normal part of Centering Prayer.
 3. By "returning ever-so-gently to the sacred word," a minimum of effort is indicated. This is the only activity we initiate during the time of Centering Prayer.
 4. During the course of our prayer, the sacred word may become vague or even disappear.
- IV. "At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence, eyes closed for 2 or 3 minutes."
 1. If this prayer is done in a group, the leader may slowly recite the Our Father during the additional 2 or 3 minutes, while the others listen.
 2. The additional 2 or 3 minutes give the psyche time to readjust to the external senses and enable us to bring the atmosphere of silence into daily life.



Prayer of Petition: *Creating Ripples*

By Michael Morwood

Prayer is so much more than telling an elsewhere God what is going on and asking, petitioning this elsewhere God to intervene. Prayer is about “raising the mind and heart” to God – the God present with us in the depths of our being and present everywhere in the expansiveness of this universe.

While we may be unsure how God “hears” our prayer, we believe that the Spirit of God at work in and among us “can do more than we can ask or imagine” (Eph. 3:20).

We know that when we raise minds and hearts in prayer to the Presence within and among us extraordinary things happen. How this happens is quite a mystery to us. Love expressed here has an effect on love expressed there. While skeptics may scoff, there is plenty of evidence – for example “distance healing” with hospital patients – to show this does happen. There is also the fact that quantum physics reveals a similar mysterious world in which something here has an effect there. In ways we do not yet understand, all of reality is connected even across enormous distances.

Mind, as Bede Griffith suggests, is present everywhere as a “pattern of self-organization” and becomes conscious in us. This may be our best clue to some understanding of prayer of petition. It is not that we are trying to connect with a Supreme Being external to our world. Rather we are trying to allow mind to work in and among us. We are consciously tapping into mind (or Mind) in which we are all connected, but how the connection works is every bit as mysterious as quantum physics.

Seen in this new light, prayer of petition has hardly begun in the Western world. We have been too conditioned to asking the external God to intervene. We have been obsessed with “correct thinking,” with logic, and with what our senses proclaim as real. The challenge now is to bring the concerns we raise in prayer to a different format (not addressing an elsewhere God) and to a different understanding of what we are trying or wanting to do when we share these concerns prayerfully: create ripples in the unifying mind in which we all have existence, so that reality is effected somewhere else.

We should be more serious about this type of prayer rather than dismiss it or trivialize it by praying for better weather or a win for our football team or success in exams.

Yes, let us pray for someone’s good health or for a cure or for an end to war-mongering or more compassion in political and religious leaders. This prayer can be effective whether the people being prayed for know this or not. Let us also make evident in our prayer that we are not closing our minds to the suffering in our world or to the social evils of our times. And let our prayers challenge us to give expression to God’s presence in our world and in our homes.

When composing prayers of petition it is preferable to avoid the common usage of “that” statements, as in, “Let us pray for world leaders that . . .,” “Let us pray for Mary Smith that . . .,” with “Lord, hear us” and a response such as “Lord, hear our prayer” at the end of each statement. Rather, invite people to pray for a few moments in silence with invitations like the following:

Let us pray for our bishop . . .

Let us raise our minds to the reality of HIV/AIDS in Africa . . .

Let us be present in prayer to sick people in our parish . . .

Let us pray for the men and women fighting the brushfires . . .

Let us pray for world peace . . .

The period of prayer could conclude as follows:

We pray these prayers in the belief

that we are bonded

in God’s Spirit

with everything that exists.

We pray with faith and confidence.

Amen



Prayer Beyond Words: The Body And Prayer

Perhaps most of us are more familiar with praying with words than with movement. However, prayer is more than words. It might be described as the longing of one's heart or soul for God.

Our bodies are sacred temples, and we pray in and with our bodies. It is not always necessary to use words. You may find some of the following suggestions and practices of movement helpful for prayer and giving expression to what is in your heart.

“Praying with the body is related to knowing with the body. Body knowledge is real knowledge, not lesser knowledge. To know God is to know one's bodily self.”

(When in Doubt, Sing, Jane Redmont, pg. 29)

1. Movement and Prayer

- A. “Walking meditation is really to enjoy the walking – to be in the present moment and, aware of our breathing and our walking, to enjoy each step.”

(Peace in Every Step, Thich Nhat Hanh, p. 17)

Resources:

The Long Road Turns to Joy by Thich Nhat Hanh

Prayer Walking by Linus Mundy

Sparks of the Divine, P. 151-159 by Drew Leder

B. Sacred Journeying

Resources:

Labyrinth – Living the Labyrinth by Jill K. H. Geoffrion

Pilgrimage – Pray All Ways, p. 51-59, by Edward Hays

Procession – Dancing with Creation by Martha Kirk

C. Prayerful Gestures Indicated in the Psalms

Walking – Psalms 15, 17, 26, 32, 56, 86, 116

Sitting – Psalms 110, 131, 137, 139

Raised/open eyes – Psalms 25, 27, 63, 121, 123, 145

Raised head – Psalms 3, 27

Bowing – Psalms 22, 161, 95

Kneeling – Psalm 95

Prostrate – Psalms 119:25

Rising up – Psalms 16, 145

Touching the heart – Psalm 109

Standing – Psalms 134, 139

Hands lifted up or stretched out – Psalms 28, 63, 77, 134, 141, 143

Lying down – Psalms 3, 63

Sighing – Psalm 5

Lift up – Psalm 25

Wash hands – Psalm 26

Resources:

Stretch and Pray by Murray D. Finck

Embodied Prayer, “The Psalms: A Movement Map” by Celeste Snowber Schroeder

D. Sacred Dance

“Moving is the key to understanding how life is. Things, especially things like thoughts, concerns, dreams, problems, need to be moving in and moving out of us. We need to know how or learn how to balance between a holding on and a letting go. There is stillness also in movement and there is movement also in stillness.

“Dance is a living mantra. It is not a mere constant change of gesture and rhythm, calculated to intrigue the attention of the surface eye, but it is the very stuff and symbol of my inner creative life.” (*“Movement as Mediator of Meaning,” in Dance as Religious Studies, Valerie DeMarinis, pp. 113 and 210*)



2. *Breath and Prayer – Mindfulness*

“Breath is the bridge which connects life to consciousness, which unites your body to your thoughts. Whenever your mind becomes scattered, use your breath as the means to take hold of your mind again.

“Thus mindfulness is at the same time a means and an end, the seed and the fruit. When we practice mindfulness in order to build up concentration, mindfulness is a seed. But mindfulness itself is the life of awareness: the presence of mindfulness means the presence of life, and therefore mindfulness is also the fruit. Mindfulness frees us of forgetfulness and dispersion and makes it possible to live fully each minute of life. Mindfulness enables us to live.

“The instant you sit down to meditate, begin watching your breath. At first breathe normally, gradually letting your breathing slow down until it is quiet, even, and the lengths of the breaths are fairly long. From the moment you sit down to the moment your breathing has become deep and silent, be conscious of everything that is happening in yourself.” (*The Miracle of Mindfulness, Thich Nhat Hanh, pp. 14-15, 20*)

On Prayer

From *The Awakened Heart* by Gerald May

My life of prayer has always been stumbling and fitful, but it has convinced me of some basic truths.

~We are in love.

~God is absolutely and always present, intimately active and involved with us, and endlessly good.

~As God’s creation, we bear an essential part of God’s own goodness in our hearts that can never be removed, no matter how selfish, prejudiced, and vindictive we may be, no matter what we have done or what has been done to us.

~And, when we say yes to love, or try to say yes, or even honestly desire to try to say yes, love is as victorious in that moment as it is in all of cosmic time.

The great spiritual leaders have not preached fear and paranoia. They have said that we can trust divine goodness, that we can risk vulnerability if our intent is toward love.

When you have concerns about praying, pray about them. Pray about prayer. Ask the source of love to help you pray, to protect you, to show you *your* way, to make it possible. Prayer just happens as part of being in love. It happens in your heart more often and more steadily than you will ever know.

Whether we are distracted or not, whether we know it or not, whether we even want it or not, a communication between the soul and God keeps going on beneath the surface of our self-awareness. It is given everywhere and at all times. There is no need to attain it; there is nothing we have to do to make it happen. Neither can we escape from it (Psalm 139).

Relationship with the source of love is the most natural thing about us. Active practice of this relationship is nothing other than living, as best we can, in appreciation of, and fidelity to, the continual heart-to-heart connectedness with the holy Other whose presence makes us complete. Brother Lawrence called it conversing everywhere with God.

Little glances and repetitive prayers can be loving, sweet, and deep, but it is in *practicing direct relationship with God* that we encounter the grits and guts of love. The possibilities for practice are endless.

Three common ways are:

1. **Companionship:** All through the Gospels, Jesus keeps inviting people to follow him, take him in, keep him company, and love him. “I no longer call you servants... I have called you friends.” John 15:15
2. **Romantic:** passionately in love with God. Letting yourself be loved.
3. **Cosmic Presence:** love surrounding, embracing, pervading is and all creation. A relatively imageless awareness of God expressed through reverence, awe and wonder.



Faith Sharing as Communal Prayer

By Catherine Schwemer, PHJC

Formerly the Executive Director of the North American Conference of Associates and Religious

Faith sharing as a prayer form is very familiar to me. Through this communal prayer form, I have been fed by the powerful sharing of my Sisters and members of our Associate community. Through these times of shared prayer, we have come to know and understand each other in ways that have bonded us as individuals and as a community. I believe that there is no greater privilege a person can give another than to share how God is moving through their life, to share at a deeper level what it means to face the struggles and the joys of being a contemporary Christian in our post-modern world.

So I was surprised a few months ago while in the midst of giving a presentation on the process of discernment when the question of faith sharing arose. Oh, I wasn't so surprised that the topic came up, faith sharing is a wonderful way to do communal discernment; what surprised me was how many in this group, which was made up of Associates and Religious, had never viewed or even considered faith sharing as a prayer form at all.

It was this surprise that gave me pause to wonder and to ask myself, how many of us really use faith sharing as a form of communal prayer? Yes, faith sharing is a prayer form and more importantly one of the core elements in the building of the relationship between Associates and Religious.

Over the years, faith sharing has become a practice that many Christians have used as a prayer form and as a way to build community. Its current popularity grew in tandem with the growth of the Small Christian Community movement of the 1970s and 1980s, although hints of its roots can be found in Luke's account of the road to Emmaus (Luke 23:13-22). Three followers of Jesus were leaving Jerusalem following the crucifixion, hearts down cast and despondent. It was on this road that Jesus met and invited them to listen and reflect as he broke open the scriptures and shared with them how God had acted in him and through the events of that past week. They in return shared from their own struggling hearts which had now become inflamed with joy as they recognized Jesus in their midst. They in turn went back to Jerusalem as witnesses of the living Christ. In this story of divine faith sharing, sadness had indeed been turned into joy and new relationships strengthened.



This practice can also find some roots in the practice of *Lectio Divina*, or Divine Reading. *Lectio* is primarily a process of encountering God by listening to God's word and surrendering to it. Faith sharing takes *Lectio* and brings it one step further by calling us to share the fruits of this encounter with others.

Rose Mary Dougherty, SSND, in her book *Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment*, explains that, "Faith sharing is the practice in which two or more people share experiences about their relationship with God: their awareness of God's Presence in the events of their lives; their struggles to believe in God's Presence; the ways in which they have responded to or resisted God's Presence in their lives; places of suffering, confusion, or joy that have been the entry point for their prayer. It is grounded in humble acceptance of the truth that each of us is a person honored and loved by God and that God is present and active in all of our lives. It assumes the belief that God often chooses to minister to us through the sharing and support of others."

Faith-sharing provides a simple way to gather with others, read scripture, materials on our founders, or other spiritual materials, and to reflect on its meaning by sharing those insights with one another. As with all prayer, intentional faith sharing must be done in an atmosphere of reverent listening and respectful confidentiality. We share our experience simply and must receive the sharing of others without judgment.



Silence, prayerful silence, between sharing is important. This is the time that the group holds each other in the prayers of our hearts.

Where to start? Here are some simple rules before you start:

1. Remember, everyone has wisdom that is uniquely their own. To withhold this wisdom deprives the entire group.
2. Everyone gets a chance to share. Some might need a little encouragement at first but if you provide a respectful and supportive group where people will feel safe to share it will happen.
3. For those where talking is not such a hard thing to do, remember rule #2. Don't dominate the dialog.
4. Be open to new views and perspectives, they will stretch you in surprising ways.
5. If you disagree, do so with care and respect for the wisdom of the other.
6. Welcome Jesus in your midst, sounds simple eh? Not so much if your own agendas get in the way. Be prepared to listen to the voices around you – in other words be humble.
7. Take turns being the group facilitator– this person simply lets the group know what reading is scheduled, makes sure everyone has the time and date you will meet and, if necessary, remind people of rule #2.

The basic steps of Faith Sharing

- Invite God in. Open your minds, hearts and soul to receive the word.
- Read or listen to a text.
- Let the silence after the reading allow your heart to listen to God. What words or phrases touched your heart, challenged or puzzled you?
- Share what you have heard in your heart.
- Commit to some action either individually or as a group – how are we going to respond to what we have heard?

Remember the Emmaus story.

Faith sharing is a prayer style that is close to the heart of Apostolic Congregations. Many of our founders used a form of faith sharing with their early followers. Examine the foundation myths of your own congregation. For example, within my own congregation, our foundress, Catherine, called together each week her “holy helpers”. These young women would break open the scriptures for the week, pondering the question, what was Jesus saying of them? Then they went out to help their neighbors in the village. When the week ended, they came together to share where they saw Jesus that week and start the process of sharing over again. It was this process that bonded them as a community and as followers of the Gospel. It strengthened their trust in each other and in the voice of God speaking in their hearts.

It is this dynamic element of faith sharing which builds relationships, allows misconceptions and misunderstandings to be aired in safety. It opens our eyes and hearts to the God who is in the other; it offers the opportunity to hear the voice of our founders once again through lived experience of religious and associates alike. It is why faith sharing is such an important element in the development of the Associate-Religious relationship as well as an avenue for renewal for us all.



Prayer Reflection

From 40-Day Journey with Joan Chittister, published by Augsburg Books.

Prayer is neither a passive nor an empty act. On the contrary, prayer ‘works.’ The only problem is that when we pray, we get what we seek. What we want out of prayer determines how we go about it. If we want security and protection, we say suffrage prayers; if we want serenity and enlightenment, we meditate; if we want immersion in the mind of Christ, we immerse ourselves in scripture. Prayer is not one kind of activity, it is many. It nourishes the spiritual life. It also reflects it.

When we are young [religious], we ‘say’ our prayers. When we get older [in religious life], we ‘go to prayer.’ But, when we begin to see prayer as the undergirding of life, the pulse of the universe in the center of the soul, we become a prayer.

As Gandhi says, first we have words and no heart. Finally, we grow into a heart without words. The truth is that the way we pray says something about what we believe about God and about what we believe about life itself.

To the monastic mind, prayer is the marking of time and the pursuit of the known but unseen, the fulfilling but unaccomplished. Those qualities mark the prayer life of a monastic community in form and substance.

Closing Prayer

A Psalm Prayer Celebrating God’s Providence

It would have been enough if You had lifted us from nothingness to humanity. But you made us in Your image.

We praise You, Provident God.

It would have been enough if You had made a simple covenant limited to our lifetime. But you wove the generations into one long benediction.

We praise You, Provident God.

It would have been enough if You had led us out of slavery. But You continue to share our bondage until we are fully free.

We bless You, Provident God.

It would have been enough if You had championed the cause of justice for all who are oppressed. But You heal the broken hearted and You bind up all wounds.

We need You, Provident God.

It would have been enough if You had simply shared Your vision through the prophets of the past. But You speak prophetic words to us and through us, even now.

We hear You, Provident God.

It would have been enough if You had sojourned briefly among us. but you stayed with us and within us.

We live by Your Holy Spirit and we rejoice, O Provident God.

