

# All Are Called to Pray

## Session Focus

This session explores the Christian call to prayer, what prayer is, the importance of prayer in our lives as disciples, and some of the rich paths of prayer that enable us to spend time with Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit. We profess the mystery of our faith in the Apostles' Creed or Nicene Creed and celebrate it when we gather for liturgy, so that our lives may be conformed to Christ in the Holy Spirit to the glory of God the Father. This mystery requires that the faithful believe in it, that they celebrate it, and that they have a living and personal relationship with the one true God. This relationship can be called prayer.

## Learning Objectives

The session guides learners of all ages to...

- Comprehend prayer as a vital and personal relationship with the living God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- Value the role of prayer in living the Catholic faith and its ongoing call to conversion
- Practice prayer as part of the discipline of discipleship

## Session Overview

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|---------------------------------|---|
| <b>Part 1. (15-20 minutes)</b>  | <b>Gathering and Opening Prayer Service</b>   |
| <b>Part 2. (20-30 minutes)</b>  | <b>All Ages Learning Experience</b>   |
| <b>Part 3. (90–120 minutes)</b> | <b>In Depth Learning Experience</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Learning Activity Centers Format - participants rotate through selected activities in the same room or in separate rooms.</li></ul> |
| <b>Part 4. (5–15 minutes)</b>   | <b>Sharing Learning Experiences</b>   |
| <b>Part 5. (5 minutes)</b>      | <b>Closing Prayer Service</b>   |

## Design for In-Depth Learning: Learning Activity Centers

The Learning Activity Center Format provides structured learning activities at a variety of stations or centers in a common area. Learning activity centers are self-contained learning experiences, focusing on a specific topic or theme. They include brief presentations by the facilitators, interactive and experiential activities, group discussion and sharing. Each center can utilize a different learning method, such as drama or role play, creative arts, prayer, ritual, film, games, demonstrations, exhibits, and music.

One of the best ways to envision a Learning Activity Center Format is to imagine visiting a children's museum or one of the Epcot pavilions at Walt Disney World in Orlando. You will find a variety of interactive, experiential exhibits, media presentations, and staff-facilitated learning activities.

Learning Activity Centers can be used with all age groups. They can be developed for an intergenerational audience or for particular age groups, such as families with children or adolescents or adults. Learning Activity Centers can also be utilized in the families with children learning program within the Age Group Format.

## Scheduling

Learning Activity Centers are designed to be conducted within a 20-30 minute timeframe. Depending on the session design, this will allow three or four learning periods to be offered during the In Depth Learning Experience.

Here is a sample schedule with four rounds of learning centers:

- 6:00 Hospitality and Dinner
- 6:30 Part 1. Gathering and Prayer  
Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience
- 6:50 Round 1: Learning Activity Centers
- 7:15 Break (move to next center)
- 7:20 Round 2: Learning Activity Centers
- 7:45 Break (move to next center)
- 7:50 Round 3: Learning Activity Centers
- 8:15 Break (move to next center)
- 8:20 Round 4: Learning Activity Centers
- 8:45 Part 4: Presenting the Home Activities (no small group sharing)  
Part 5: Closing Prayer

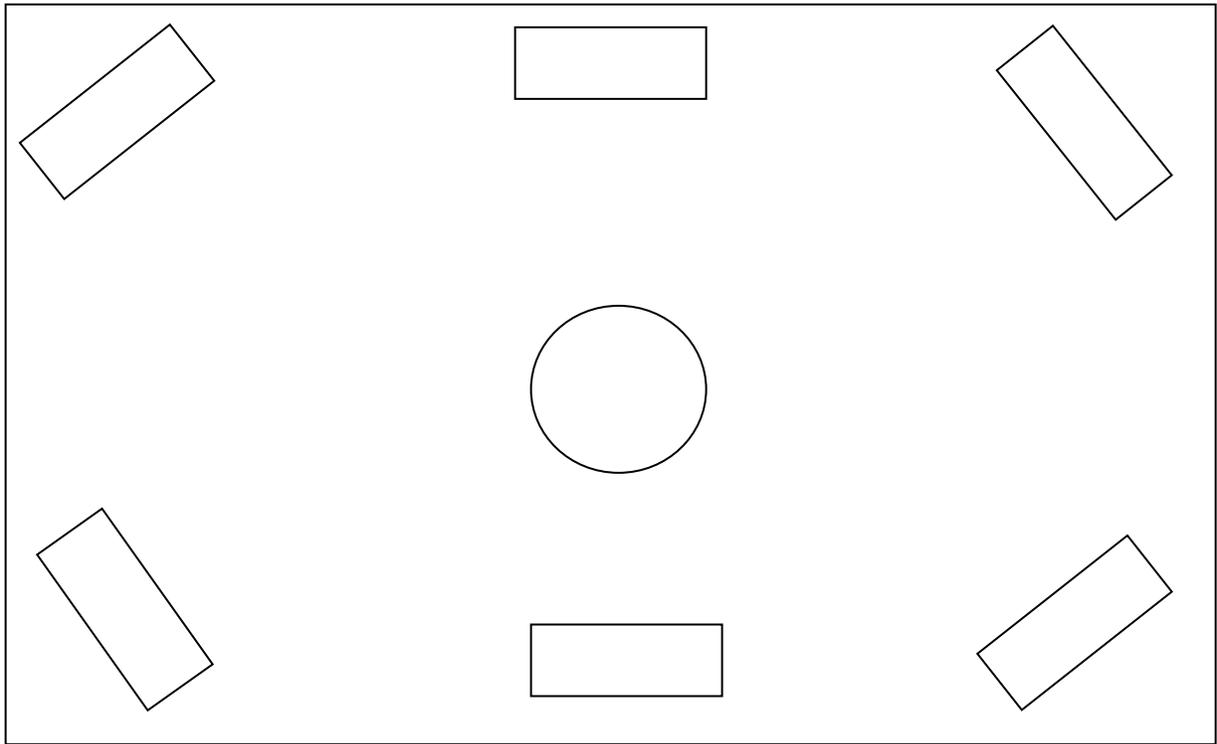
Here is a sample schedule with three rounds of learning centers:

- 6:00 Hospitality and Dinner
- 6:30 Part 1. Gathering and Prayer  
Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience
- 7:00 Round 1: Learning Activity Centers
- 7:25 Break (move to next center)
- 7:30 Round 2: Learning Activity Centers
- 7:55 Break (move to next center)
- 8:00 Round 3: Learning Activity Centers
- 8:25 Break (gather in intergenerational groups)
- 8:30 Part 4: Sharing Learning Reflections and Home Application
- 8:50 Closing Prayer

## Organizing the Activity Centers

There are two ways to set up activity centers: one large room, or multiple break-out rooms.

If you arrange all of the learning centers in one large meeting gym or parish hall, set-up the centers around the outside of the room (see example). The center space can become a storytelling center with a carpet or chairs for children to sit. The example below shows six different learning centers plus the storytelling center. You may still need separate rooms if you have a learning center that focuses on prayer (worship space) or shows a film (meeting room).



Keep in mind the following when organizing in one room:

- Make sure there is adequate space between learning centers so that people are not interrupted by the activity at other centers.
- Set-up each learning activity center with tables and chairs (or carpeted floor space) for participants to listen, discuss, and create. Children and teens can use the floor, but adults will need chairs.
- Assign each learning center a number and post the number on the wall and floor at each center.

If you arrange learning centers in multiple rooms such as meeting rooms, classrooms, parish hall, gym, worship space, assign one learning center to each space. This format resembles a conference where people move from room to room for each session. Place the learning center name outside each room and develop a list of centers with locations, and a map if necessary, so that people can easily find the correct room.

## Organizing Groups

Once you have determined how many learning centers you will offer, you can organize participants accordingly. If you offer four learning centers, you can organize the participants into four groups of equal size and assign each group a specific sequence that they will move through the learning centers. Assign a number to each learning center and an alphabet letter to each group, then describe how they will move through the centers: Group A: 1-2-3-4; Group B: 2-3-4-1, Group C: 3-4-1-2, and Group D: 4-1-2-3. If you offer three learning centers, there would be three groups rotating among the three learning centers. Keep families together in one group.

If you offer more than three or four learning centers, allow people to choose the learning centers they are going to experience. Remind them that if a particular center is crowded, they can move to another center and then return to their first choice in another round. Families with children should stay together because the activities require parents to work with their children.

## Staffing

Each center is facilitated by a team of facilitators who guide the participants through the activity plan. The teaching team facilitates the overall learning plan for the center: making presentations, guiding learning activities, organizing discussions, and so on. The number of team members needed depends on the complexity of the activities and the number of participants at a learning center. Teams should have at least two or three people, but some centers will require five or six people. Older adolescents can also serve as members of the teaching team, and are especially valuable in facilitating creative activities and dramatic presentations.

To present the focus of each learning activity center, ask the teaching teams to present a very brief overview of what they will be doing in each center. Give each participant the list of learning activity centers with short descriptions, a schedule, and the locations of the centers.

## Materials Needed

### Gathering

- Name tags
- Opening Prayer Service
- Bible, wrapped in the following layers: Begin the wrapping with brown wrapping paper, followed by rainbow colored paper or an old liturgical year calendar poster, then white tissue paper, then newspaper, and end with gold paper. *Hint: alternate the taping from front to back, so tape is not on top of tape. When one wraps a package one tends to place the tape on the bottom of the package so it is not seen. As you wrap the bible, on the first layer tape the back of the bible, on the next layer place the tape on the front of the bible, and so on, until all the layers of paper are on.*
- Bible (used throughout)

### All Ages Learning Experience

- Large floor pillow
- Candle and colored cloth
- Telephone
- Wrapped box and lid—the lid needs to come off easily so all can see that the box is empty, with the note (see play script) taped on the outside bottom of the box
- Large heart, constructed either of foam—which will make it three dimensional—or of poster paper
- Markers, crayons, stickers, glue sticks, pictures from magazines to create prayer journal covers
- Supplies to create prayer journals, one for each household (families with children grouping) and one for each adolescent and one for each adult (adolescent and adult grouping):
  - Option 1: Notebooks on which a blank label has been attached for participants to decorate.

Option 2: Binders on which a blank label has been attached for participants to decorate. Place lined paper in the binder. A binder is a good option as the participants will then have a place for any handouts distributed in this learning session and other learning sessions on prayer.

Option 3: A clear view binder in which a cover page decorated by the participants can be inserted.

#### **In-Depth Learning Experience**

- Handouts
- The materials participants will need are identified in each Learning Activity Center plan.

#### **Closing**

- Closing Prayer Service

# Session Plan

## Part 1. Gathering (10 minutes)

### Registration and Hospitality

- Welcome people and ask them to sign in for the program.
- Provide nametags or invite people to make their own.
- Invite people to share a meal; depending on time of day, the program may end with a meal instead.

Consider the following activities for participants as they wait to eat or wait for others to finish their meals:

- Invite them to decorate their group's tablecloth (white butcher paper) with words and symbols that respond to the statement "Prayer is..."
- Invite them to share with each other the moments of their day or week when they might find themselves praying.
- Invite them to create a list of all the prayers the table collectively knows by heart.

Welcome the participants to the program and introduce the theme of the session, using the words below or your own words.

This session explores the call to prayer, what prayer is, the importance of prayer in our lives as disciples, and some of the rich paths of prayer that enable us to spend time with Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit.

## 1. Group Formation

This program utilizes a learning activity center format. Six learning centers are developed for your use. Each activity lasts from 20-30 minutes, allowing everyone to participate in three to four learning activities within a one and a half to two-hour timeframe. Once you have determined how many learning centers you will offer, you can organize participants accordingly.

## 2. Opening Prayer Service

### Gather

God of love, prayer nurtures and deepens the gift of your spirit within us. Be with us as we explore our call to prayer and as we journey to deepen our relationship with you and your Son Jesus.

Send the gift of your Holy Spirit that we may open our hearts and minds to your Word, that through your Word we may know you more intimately. Amen.

### Listen

"Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come

down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and *succeed* in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.”  
(Isaiah 55:6-12)

**Respond**

(Hold up, for all to see, the Bible wrapped in gold paper.)

Our path to prayer is deepened by this valuable treasure—the Word of God. May our hearts ponder and treasure its gift, as we pray:

Response: May your Word be planted in our hearts.

(Remove the gold wrapping paper to reveal the newspaper beneath it, hold the Bible up for all to see.)

Our path to prayer is deepened by the stories of the many people in faith who have journeyed in prayer before us. May our hearts be open to their stories, as we pray:

Response: May your Word be planted in our hearts.

(Remove the newspaper to reveal the white tissue paper beneath it, hold the bible up for all to see.)

Our path to prayer begins in baptism, when we symbolize the putting on of Christ as we are dressed in white garments. May Scripture in our prayer help us to become more like Christ, as we pray:

Response: May your Word be planted in our hearts.

(Remove the white tissue paper to reveal the rainbow-colored paper beneath it, hold the Bible up for all to see.)

Our path to prayer changes through the many seasons of our lives and through the Scripture revealed through the seasons of the church year. May we journey in prayerful attentiveness to the gifts of the seasons, as we pray:

Response: May your Word be planted in our hearts.

(Remove the rainbow-colored paper to reveal the brown wrapping paper beneath it, hold up the Bible for all to see.)

Our path of prayer often feels ordinary, and we are challenged to remember that Scripture reminds us how God speaks in an ordinary gentle breeze. May God’s word through prayer help us to see the extra ordinary in our ordinary as we live out our discipleship, as we pray:

Response: May your Word be planted in our hearts.

(Remove the brown wrapping paper to reveal the Bible itself, hold up the bible for all to see.)

Our path of prayer is gifted by the Word of God, that feeds our hearts and challenges our minds, calling us to transformation and service, as we pray:

Response: May your Word be planted in our hearts.

(Place the Bible in a place of honor, for example on a stand in the middle of the prayer space.)

### **Go Forth**

Gracious God, we are filled with new hope  
By the coming of your Word, Jesus Christ, among us.  
May Scripture be a faithful part of our prayer,  
That we may become all that we are called to be as your sons and daughters.  
We close our prayer  
In the name of the Father who brought all into being,  
In the name of Jesus his Son who redeems us,  
And in the name of the Spirit who sustains us.  
Amen.

## **Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience (20 minutes)**

The All Ages Learning Experience is a drama that introduces the concept of prayer as gift, covenant, and communion. It includes an opportunity for the participants to create a prayer journal for their household.

### **Preparation**

Recruit four volunteers to act out this drama, memorizing the lines. Characters are: Penelope Pray-er, Narrator, Phone Caller from the Catholic Prayer Office, and Representative from the Catholic Calendar Company.

Gather all the supplies as listed earlier in the materials overview.

Print four copies of the script using Handout #1.

### **Drama: I'm Ready – God, Where Are You?**

Narrator:

Penelope Pray-er has decided to create a more regular prayer life for herself. Sometimes she prays grace before meals, and sometimes she remembers to talk to God for a few minutes before she goes to sleep at night, but often she just falls asleep.

(Enter Penelope)

Penelope:

Ok, I think I am ready to pray. I have a pillow to sit on. I have this great smelling candle that I got from the Dollar Store. I have a beautiful cloth to put beneath it, and I even found this Bible the church gave me when I was in Fourth Grade.

(Penelope sets up everything as she mentions them, then lights the candle and plops herself cross-legged on the pillow).

OK, now for sure I am ready to pray. I will just close my eyes, breathe a little, and I am sure God will show up.

(She does some exaggerated deep breathing then sits still with her eyes closed for about fifteen seconds. Then one eye pops open and looks around, closes, then the other eye opens and looks around. She opens both eyes and looks around the room.)

Hmm, nothing seems to be happening. I will just have to breathe harder.

(She takes some more breaths until she hears a knock at the door).

Great – an interruption while I am trying so hard to pray.

(She gets up and goes to the “door,” opens it, and sees a wrapped box. She picks it up, shows it to the audience, and then says...)

I wonder what is in it and where it came from!?

(She lifts the lid and discovers that the box is empty, but notices a note attached to the bottom of the box that she reads out loud.)

“Dear Penelope, here is an empty box. I was reading about prayer the other day and learned that prayer is God’s gift—we need to humbly open our hearts to receive it. I thought the box might be a reminder to you that you don’t control prayer; it is in God’s hands. Peace, Miss Humble.”

OK, I guess I need to try again, this time reminding myself that prayer is a gift and I just need to receive whatever God has in mind for me today.

(She sits back on her pillow with the empty box in her hands as she once again does some exaggerated breathing.)

OK, God, your gifts can come anytime now...Hmm, this waiting for God’s gifts is a lot of work.

(Doorbell rings.)

Great, just when I am trying to get the hang of being patient I get interrupted again. Okay, what is it this time?

(She goes to the door again and there is a giant heart waiting for her.)

Hmm, what does this mean? Prayer takes heart? Prayer has heart? Prayer is about love?

(Phone rings, Penelope reaches to answer it.)

Hello?

Phone says:

Hello, this is a recorded message for Penelope Pray-er. We are from the Church’s Official Office on Prayer and want to remind you that prayer celebrates the covenant relationship you have with God. Scripture says that it is the heart that prays, and the heart as the place of encounter and covenant.

Pay attention to your heart, for it is there that you will find God. Prayer is about relationship, faithful relationship with God and living out his invitation to be people of love and service.

Penelope: (Hangs up phone)

Wow. I have never gotten a call from the church before. How do they know what's going on here?

So it is the heart that prays. It is the heart in which we encounter the faithful love of God. Prayer is about relationship, but not just with God, but also with the world around me.

Okay. Enough of these interruptions. Back to praying.

(She sits down and once again begins to breathe and to get herself still. Doorbell rings again.)

Oh for Pete's sake, just when I finally heard my heart beating there goes the door again. What is up today?

(She goes to the door and finds someone standing there, holding a large calendar.)

Penelope: Who are you?

Christian Calendar Company Representative:

I am from the Christian Calendar Company. We heard that you were actually scheduling prayer into your life and wanted to know which block of time to allot you. We schedule pray-ers all over the world and wanted to know how committed you are to being one. After all, prayer should be habitual. You want to be in the presence of God all the time, right? So, since you are starting this habit and seeking communion with God, I am here to schedule you in. You haven't been on our calendar for a long time now so I will give you some time to think about it. Expect me back here next week.

Penelope:

Uh, sure. I think I better get back to praying and figure this all out.

(She goes and plops down on her pillow, and simply sits there with her eyes closed and her hands open in her lap.)

Penelope:

God, I am not sure about all this prayer stuff. I thought if I had all the right tools – you know, a candle, and pillow, and so on—it would just happen. But now I know that I need to be still so that you can gift me with what I need. I know that I need to open my heart to love and be loved by you, and I need to be faithful as I seek communion with you and my brothers and sisters everywhere. I don't know how this will work out, but it is in your hands and that is good.

Thank you for the surprises of today, and keep me open to your presence in every moment of my life. Amen.

Narrator:

The End

## Creation of Prayer Journal

What did Penelope teach us about prayer? What are some things we want to remember about prayer as we continue this learning session?

Invite some answers by the large group OR give the participants a few minutes to talk about the play with others sitting nearby.

As we continue our learning session on prayer, we want to provide you with an opportunity to create a prayer journal for your home. This prayer journal will be a place for you to store tools for prayer that you will experience through this and other learning sessions, as well as a place to write your own prayers and reflections.

Distribute the supplies for the prayer journal and invite the participants to prepare their covers. The cover can be decorated with their name, and with words and images they associate with prayer, and even with one of their favorite prayers.

## Part 3. In Depth Learning Experience (90–120 minutes)

Introduce each center by having a team member who is conducting the center provide a brief overview of what is going to happen at the center. If you wish, give each participant or family the list of learning activity centers with short descriptions, a schedule, and the locations of the centers.

Each learning center is designed for 20–25 minutes, allowing everyone to participate in three or four learning activities. Families with children can do Activities 1, 2, 3, 5, and/or 6. Adolescents and adults can do Activities 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

- Activity 1. Creating A Space for Prayer (recommended for All Ages)
- Activity 2. Praying with Scripture (recommended for All Ages)
- Activity 3. Praying with the Psalms (recommended for All Ages)
- Activity 4. Centering Prayer (recommended for Adolescents and Adults)
- Activity 5. Intercessory Prayer (recommended for All Ages)
- Activity 6. The Jesus Prayer (recommended for Families with Children)

## Activity 1. Creating A Space for Prayer

This learning activity center explores some basic starting points for prayer and offers a few tools to help learners select a place, a posture, and a process for prayer.

### Preparation

Develop a prayer space with bible and candle.

Make copies of Handout #2 for each participant. Once learners have completed the activity, invite them to place the handout in their new Prayer Journal (created in the All Ages Learning Experience).

Create PowerPoint slides or a poster showing the practices of prayer, with images if possible: place, posture, preparation, process, and profession.

Choose a song for the music preparation activity.

### Materials

- Handout #2

## Activity Plan

Introduce the activity by saying that there are many paths to prayer but there are some elements that are part of all prayer times. Guide the participants through the following steps.

Share that the place we choose to pray is important. Invite participants to name all the places where Jesus prayed. (Potential answers should include in the desert, in deserted places, in the Garden of Gethsemane, in people's homes, in the synagogue, on the mountain.)

Invite participants to identify their favorite places to pray and spend time with God, and share answers with their neighbors.

Tell participants that we are called to make prayer a regular activity in our lives and one of the ways we can do that is by choosing a regular place in our homes to pray. Share with the participants your favorite place of prayer in your home. Remind participants that it needs to be a place where we can be alone, quiet, and where we can focus on God.

Invite participants to name or draw a picture of a place in their home on Handout #2 where they could choose to pray on a regular basis.

Share the following:

The second important element in prayer is posture. There are many different postures, or ways to physically arrange ourselves when we pray. We might kneel, or sit, or stand, or lie down, or sit on a prayer stool, or even sit in a cross-legged yoga position.

What is most important is that it is a position that helps us to be most attentive. We want to be comfortable, but not too comfortable lest we fall asleep. One of the best positions is to be sitting in

a chair, with our feet flat on the ground, and our hands open on our lap, with their palms to the ceiling.

Invite everyone to try that position and ask them what they think about it. Invite participants to write or draw on their worksheet their preferred way to physically arrange themselves for prayer.

#### Preparation

When we begin our time of prayer it is important to prepare our hearts and minds for our time with God. I would like to share with you a few ways to do that. You might start prayer by listening to a favorite song or hymn.

Invite learners to close their eyes and listen to the music you have chosen.

You might start prayer by paying attention to your breathing. Close your eyes and let me help you pay attention to your breathing. Breathe in deeply ...hold it...breathe out slowly and completely. Breathe in deeply...hold it...breathe out slowly and completely. Again, breathe in deeply...hold it...breathe out slowly and completely.

You might start your time of prayer by simply focusing on an object such as an icon (show participants an example of an icon) or the flame of a candle. Let's take a minute to simply focus, in silence, on the candle burning on our prayer table. Watch the flame flicker and dance and think of nothing but the flame.

You may choose to start your prayer time by naming special intentions or needs that you would like to place in God's hands at this time.

Are there other ways to prepare yourself for prayer?

Invite responses from the group. Give learners time to draw a symbol or write on their worksheet a word to remind them of a potential way to prepare themselves for prayer.

Continue:

The other learning activities in this session provide you with some "hows" for your prayer time. For example, one learning center will help you to pray with Scripture, another will focus on praying with the psalms, and so on. It is important to try different ways to pray, for at different times in your life you will be called to pray in different ways.

To conclude this activity, share the following:

We close our prayer time with a profession of gratitude and belief in all that we have experienced. Let's do that now, before we move on to the next prayer center. Simply write or draw on your worksheet something for which you are grateful.

I invite you to join me in sharing with God what you are grateful for in your learning time so far today—Thank you God for....

## Activity 2. Praying with Scripture

This learning activity center explores a process to pray with Scripture. Based on the work of St. Ignatius of Loyola, this path to praying with Scripture involves the use of one's imagination.

### Preparation

Create a quiet space with comfortable seating. Display pictures of Jesus in various ministry scenarios.

Have background music playing, soft enough for the leader's voice to be heard.

Place a Bible in a central place on a prayer table, and beside it set a small loaf of bread suitable for sharing with the participants.

Use the Scripture selection provided below (John 6:1-13) or choose another Scripture passage suitable for this process.

### Materials

- Pictures of Jesus
- Instrumental music
- Bible
- Loaf of bread

## Activity Plan

Begin by sharing the following:

Ignatius of Loyola taught an approach to meditating on the Scriptures. He believed in the value of fully engaging our imaginations and senses in reading and reflecting on the meaning to be found in the Bible. He challenged pray-ers to use their imagination to "hear" the words and sounds of the scene, to visually experience the physical details of the passage, to "smell" the smells, and to simply have an experience of what the people in the passage were themselves experiencing through their senses.

During this learning activity you will be guided through a meditation on Scripture using the Ignatian process.

Take a few minutes to help everyone settle down in the place of prayer. Encourage them to sit with their spine straight, feet on the floor, hands on lap, eyes closed. Ask them to breathe deeply and slowly, to be aware of the sounds around them, to quiet themselves and be still. Play quiet instrumental music to set a prayerful environment.

Remind the group that they are in God's presence. As they slowly inhale and exhale, ask the Holy Spirit to help them pray and to hear what the Lord is saying to them. Invite them to close their eyes and to keep them closed until they are invited to open them again.

Read the Scripture passage, John 6:1-14, slowly and meditatively to the participants.

Step into the story and become a part of it. What is happening? What kind of day is it? Where is Jesus? Who is with him? Imagine yourself as one of the disciples traveling with Jesus.

See the crowd gathered around him. Who is in the crowd? Men? Women? Children? Sick people?

What can you hear?

Imagine the disciples asking Jesus about how they are to feed all of the people. What is Jesus' reaction? What is your reaction?

Now imagine that you are the boy with the five loaves and two fishes and the disciples are asking you for them. What do you say to them? What do you do?

Now focus on the crowd being fed. Are they grateful for the food? Are they starting to wonder where it came from? Are they sharing with one another?

Consider the disciples. What do you think they would be saying to Jesus? What would Jesus be saying to them?

Quietly thank God in your heart for your time of prayer and when you are ready, open your eyes and come back to this room.

Invite participants to write their observations about their experience and the Scripture passage in their prayer journal, or to draw a picture.

Invite them to share with one another what they think the story means. Is it about compassion? Sharing? Gratitude? What do they think the main message in the passage is?

Ask them to identify what words are staying with them from the passage.

Now invite everyone to resolve to do something about the insights they have gained. Perhaps they will acknowledge that they are not sharing what they have with others. Perhaps they do not have a grateful heart. Perhaps they will think of a person who has done something for them and will now take an opportunity to make some gesture of thanks to this person. Whatever their resolution, invite the participants to thank the Lord for the moments he spent with them and for any insights they received. Ask them to write their resolution in their journal.

If you use the suggested passage from the Gospel of John, close by sharing a loaf of bread. Invite people to break off a piece and name one thing in their lives that they could be sharing with others.

## Activity 3. Praying with the Psalms

This learning activity center explores how the psalms express many of our feelings to God, and how they can be used to express our own prayers to God.

### Preparation

Develop a prayer center with a Bible opened to the psalms and a copy of the Liturgy of the Hours.

Make copies of Handout #3, one for each family with children, or one for each adolescent and adult participant.

Participants will need Bibles for individual or shared use.

### Materials

- Bibles
- Handout #3

## Activity Plan

Begin by sharing:

In the Old Testament, the book of Psalms is comprised of hymns and prayers of the people of Israel. The psalms contain prayers after victory and defeat, prayers of sadness and great joy, prayers of anger, and prayers of praise. For us, they can be a great way to express what is in our hearts when we pray alone or with others. They can also be used as a guide for writing our own prayers.

Invite everyone to open their Bibles to Psalm 8. Read the psalm aloud together, inviting those who cannot read to listen for some words to describe what they think the writer is trying to say. (NOTE: If people have different translations, use Handout #3 to pray the psalm together.) Invite the participants to name the feelings expressed in the prayer and to identify the psalm as one of praise, lament, or petition. Make sure everyone understands what lament means—to express sadness, grief, or sorrow over something.

Move on to explore together psalm 137. Together, identify all the things in the world that move us to lament. Read the psalm aloud in choral style—half of the group reads the first verse, the other half reads the second verse, and so on alternating verses between the two groups. (Again, use Handout #3 if participants have different translations of the Bible.)

Move on to explore together a psalm of petition, using Handout #3 that contains Psalm 71. Invite participants to underline each phrase that contains the psalmist's petition to God for help. Ask them to count the number of times the psalmist petitions God. Ask them what else they notice about this psalm—for example, this psalm blends petition with praise, the psalmist seeks help while mentioning all the times God has already helped him, and so on.

Share with the participants the following ways to incorporate psalms into prayer time, then invite them to name how they currently pray with the psalms, if they do.

Here are a few ways you can incorporate praying with the psalms at home:

1. Read a psalm as you rise each day.
2. Read a psalm as part of your evening prayer.
3. Read a psalm or part of a psalm as part of your meal blessing.
4. When you are experiencing strong emotion, like joy or grief or frustration, flip through the psalms and see which one reflects your own feelings then pray it.

How do you, or could you incorporate psalms into your home prayer time?

## Activity 4. Centering Prayer

This learning activity center provides participants with an experience of centering prayer and is best suited for adults and adolescents.

### Preparation

Develop a simple, quiet prayer space, such as a room with a carpeted floor for those who would choose to lie down, with gentle lighting, and free from the noise that might be created by other learning centers.

Select quiet background music and have it playing as participants enter the room.

### Materials

Instrumental music

## Activity Plan

Begin by sharing:

Have you ever had a friend with whom you exchange long intense conversations as well as comfortable periods of silence in which you simply enjoy each other's presence? Meditation is the intense conversation. Contemplation is the ability to be with God and to know that God is with you at the same time. In meditation, the mind is working and actively seeking to understand something. In contemplation, the mind is at rest, simply drinking in the moment. Centering prayer is one path to contemplation, for it helps us to quiet ourselves to just listen and be with God. In this learning center we are going to have a brief experience of centering prayer.

Guide the participants through the following steps, explaining each step using the information below and giving participants time to complete the instructions.

Choose a sacred word (or mantra) as a symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within. A short one- or two-syllable phrase without strong emotional content works best. Possible choices might be Abba, Jesus, Spirit, Wisdom, Peace, Home, or Shalom. Pick your own. There is nothing magical about this and no "best word." Use your intuition and choose a word. Or choose a mantra, which is a phrase or simple sentence like "Jesus, I trust in you."

Sit comfortably with your eyes closed. Keep your back straight, not slumped. Let your head remain free—leaning against the back of a chair or other back support is fine, but do not lean your head against anything. Remain reasonably comfortable so you can maintain the position effortlessly and not be distracted by it. Your hands can be in a palms-open position as a sign of receptivity, or folded in your lap, or open and extended. You may also choose to lie flat on the floor with your arms resting beside you.

Silently repeat in your mind and heart the word with which you have chosen to center yourself. The goal is to focus on the repetition of the word so that you are no longer paying attention to your thoughts or feelings. Sit (or lie) with a straight back and head free. Close your eyes and let go of what is

going on around you.

When you become aware of thoughts, return ever so gently to the sacred word.

After a suitable amount of time has passed (pay attention to when the group as a whole seems to be getting restless), about ten or fifteen minutes, gently invite the participants to return to the room by opening their eyes when they are ready.

Invite the participants to share with the group what the experience was like for them. Was it hard to be quiet? Did the sacred word/mantra help them to stay centered? Is this a path of prayer that appeals to them or seems easy for them?

Close the prayer time by inviting the participants to jot down a phrase or two describing their experience in their prayer journals.

## Activity 5. Intercessory Prayer

This learning activity center explores a formula to help participants create and pray intercessory prayers. Intercessory prayer can be defined as requesting something on behalf of someone else.

### Preparation

Develop a prayer space using a Bible, cloth, and a completed prayer intercession box.

Outline the formula for writing intercessory prayers on a PowerPoint or flip chart.

Decorate a prayer box to show the group as an example.

### Materials

- Purchase from a craft supply store (or see if a local jewelry store will donate) small boxes about 3 x 4 inches in size, with which to create prayer intercession boxes.
- Markers or stickers can be used to decorate the boxes with faith-based words such as hope, faith, patience, trust, and so on.
- Have pen and slips of paper for participants on which to write their prayer intercessions.

## Activity Plan

Begin by sharing:

Intercessory prayer is asking God for help on behalf of someone else, even someone who is not very nice to us.

Abraham offers us a great example of intercessory prayer when he intercedes for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, asking God to save them from destruction if God is able to find some righteous people in the city (read Genesis 18:22-33).

Jesus is the ultimate interceder, pleading with God on our behalf. So too are we called to prayerfully intercede for others. Sometimes it is helpful to remember our call to intercede for others by creating a visual symbol to remind us. Perhaps we place a bowl in the middle of our dining room table in which we place our written prayers of intercession. Maybe it is a prayer tree posted on a bulletin board on which we place our intercessory prayers, or a simple box decorated with words of hope and faith. We will be decorating a simple box later in this activity for you to take home with you.

A simple formula for creating an intercessory prayer is:

1. Name the person or persons or situation for whom you are praying.
2. Articulate the need of those for whom you are praying.
3. Articulate the intercession needed.
4. End the intercession with, "We pray to the Lord."

For example:

- 1) We pray for the people of Ukraine, 2) as they search for peace, 3) that strength and consolation may be theirs, 4) we pray to the Lord.

In your prayers of intercession remember to include the needs of your family, your friends, your local community, and the needs and concerns of people in the world.

I invite you to take a few minutes to write a prayer of intercession using the formula.

Once participants have written their intercessions, give them the small boxes to serve as holders for their prayer intercessions at home. Invite them to decorate the box with words such as faith, trust, hope, love, light, patience, and so on, or with symbols of faith and hope.

Once the boxes are complete, close the learning activity with a simple blessing:

God of all possibilities, bless these prayer boxes. May they remind us to place our needs and the needs of others in your hands. Amen.

## Activity 6. Jesus Prayer

This activity explores a simple centering style of prayer called the Jesus prayer and invites participants to create a Jesus prayer bracelet.

### Preparation

Place a bible, candle, and icon or painting of Jesus in a prominent place.

Quiet background music is helpful, as is adjustable lighting.

### Materials

- Candle, icon of Jesus
- Bracelet length cording and 33 beads, preferably all white or all black, for each participant.

## Activity Plan

Begin by sharing:

The Jesus Prayer was developed by desert monks and mystics. You pray the words, over and over, in tune with your breathing. The prayer helps you to focus on Christ, on his mercy, on your dependence upon God. Eventually, your breathing and heartbeat become a prayer, an intimacy with Christ.

When you pray the Jesus prayer, you may want to light a candle as a symbol of Christ's presence, close your eyes, take some deep breaths, and pay attention to your breathing while letting go of any tension you are aware of in your body. Then slowly, as you breathe in and out, think or say the words of the Jesus prayer:

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

Many people who pray this prayer simplify it and just use the word “Jesus” in order to focus on Christ.

I invite you now to pray with me for a few minutes by closing your eyes and quietly saying to yourself “Jesus” or “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner” as you gently breathe in and out.

After a few minutes invite the participants to thank Jesus for their time of prayer and to return to the group. Then share:

A helpful tool is Jesus prayer beads. Similar to rosary beads, they are used to help you stay focused on what you are doing. Jesus prayer beads are sometimes arranged in a collection of 33, in honor of the 33 years of Jesus’ life. We are now going to create Jesus prayer bracelets that you can wear to remind yourselves to pray always and everywhere simply by speaking the name of Jesus in your heart.

Give participants the cord and beads to create for themselves the Jesus prayer bracelet.

# Conducting the Activities with the Whole Assembly using Small Groups

## Activity Plan

### Activity 1: A Space for Prayer

(See Activity 1 in the Learning Center Activities above.)

### Activity 2: Choose one or two of the following activities

- Praying with Scripture
- Praying with the Psalms
- Intercessory Prayer
- The Jesus Prayer

(See these activities in the Learning Center Activities above.)

### Activity 3: Luke's Two Prayer Parables

This learning activity explores two parables from the Gospel of Luke often referred to in discussions about prayer.

Begin by sharing:

Luke's Gospel is sometimes described as the Gospel of Prayer. He often mentions Jesus praying and his Gospel includes several parables about prayer. This learning activity focuses on two parables found in Luke Chapter 18. The first is the Parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge; the second is the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector.

Invite participants to find Luke 18:1-8 and to read it aloud in their table groups.

Invite table groups to discuss the following questions:

Families with Children Table Groups

1. What do you admire about the widow in this parable?
2. What can we learn about prayer from this parable?

Adolescent and Adult Table Groups

1. What do you admire about the widow in this parable?
2. What can we learn about prayer from this parable?
3. What do you think Luke means by the final line of this passage, "And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Continue:

We need to remember that this parable is not simply saying, "be persistent in your prayer and your prayers will be answered." It is really about faithfulness. It is about our call to live just lives and be in faithful relationship with God. God does not need reminders from us to respond on our or others'

behalf. What God seeks from us is a lived response to be his hands and heart and feet in the world around us. Being persistent in prayer is not about changing God's heart; it is about changing our own to be the best we can be.

One insight into this reading is that our faith or lack of it will not hasten or postpone God's justice in the world. What persistent prayer does is keep us rooted in the hope that God offers us and saying yes to hope empowers us to live our lives as justly as possible. Prayer changes us, not God.

Continue the learning activity by inviting participants to read aloud Luke 18:9-14 in their table groups.

Invite table groups to discuss the following questions:

1. Who are you most like when you pray—the Pharisee or the Tax Collector?
2. What can we learn about prayer from this parable?
3. The word *humble* comes from the Latin word *humus*, which means "earth." Humble people have their feet firmly planted on earth, seeing themselves as they really are: gifted and growing. They do not compare themselves to others but celebrate the gifts of others. Humble people bring all that they are to prayer—their gifts and their areas of growth. What gifts has God given you? Name one gift for which you are grateful to God.

Close this learning activity by inviting each table group to write or draw a reflection of these two parables on prayer in their prayer journal. What key words or images do they want to remember about these two parables and their conversations about them?

## Part 4. Sharing Learning Reflections (5–15 minutes)

The whole group sharing experience provides an opportunity for each age group to share something they have learned with the entire group. Ask the participants to join intergenerational groups.

Ask each person in the group to share several things they learned and/or created in their learning activity centers.

Think of everything you have done in this session to understand that all of us are called to pray. To help you take your learning from this session and apply it in your lives, reflect on the following questions and share your thoughts with your group.

- What insights about prayer and your relationship with God did you gain through this session?
- Do you need to revise or expand your understanding of prayer because of your learning at this session?
- How will your learning influence your faith in God and your ability to see God at work in your life, in the Church, and in the world?

Invite participants to take several minutes for small group sharing.

Then invite participants to write in their prayer journals one way that they will try to be faithful to prayer in the next few weeks. Ask them to respond to questions such as: Will you begin your day in prayer? Will you read a psalm before meals? and so on. Invite them to share their prayer action with another participant or household.

Invite the participants to create a heart-shaped link of a prayer chain on which they write one or several of the following:

- a prayer need that they have
- the need of someone that they are praying for
- a way that they will be faithful in prayer—for example, to pray before meals or spend a few minutes in quiet prayer with Scripture each day.

After they have written on their link for the prayer chain, invite them to fold it in half and to link it to the other prayers from their table by stapling the ends of their links together. Then invite the tables to link their chains together until all groups are connected. Use the prayer chain as decoration for the Closing Prayer.

## Part 5. Closing Prayer Service (5–10 minutes)

### Gather

Father, may we be nourished through prayer to be faithful in our relationship with you.  
May our prayer challenge us to be people of faith, hope, and love in our world.  
Amen.

### Listen

“When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.” (Jeremiah 29:13-14)

### Respond

And so, we pray:

Placing our hands over our hearts, we pray:

For an open heart, to know God’s love and to love others as God has loved us.

Response: Bless Us, O Lord!

Placing a hand on our forehead, we pray:

For an open mind, to know God as he reveals himself to us in all the moments of our lives.

Response: Bless Us, O Lord!

Opening our hands, as if to receive a gift, we pray:

For open hands, to receive all that God wishes to bless us with.

Response: Bless Us, O Lord!

Raising our hands to the heavens, we pray:

For a grateful heart for the beauty of all that surrounds us.

Response: Bless Us, O Lord!

In the name of the Father, who called us into being,

In the name of Jesus, who loves us into being,

In the name of the Holy Spirit, who sustains our being,

Response: Bless Us, O Lord!

### Go Forth

Select an appropriate song to conclude the prayer.