

Praying through Lent and Easter

Session Focus

This session explores how to pray during the Lent and Easter seasons. No other season or feast throughout the year calls for deeper, more heartfelt prayer than Lent and the Easter season. Lent calls us to pray as Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, offering humble obedience to the will of the Father. And the Easter season calls each of us to prayerfully consider how to fulfill our baptismal promise of discipleship.

Learning Objectives

This session on praying through Lent and Easter guides learners of all ages to...

- Understand that the Lent and Easter seasons call us to pray in a unique way as we prepare to celebrate Christ's resurrection, and then strive to live them each day
- Value and appreciate what Scripture and tradition teach about praying through the Lent and Easter seasons
- Learn creative and traditional ways of praying through the Lent and Easter seasons

Session Overview

Part 1. (20 minutes)

Gathering and Opening Prayer Service

Part 2. (20 minutes)

All Ages Learning Experience

Part 3. (100-115 minutes)

In Depth Learning Experiences

- Learning Activity Center - participants rotate through selected activities in the same room or in separate rooms.

Part 4. (15 minutes)

Sharing Learning Experiences

Part 5. (10 minutes)

Closing Prayer Service

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

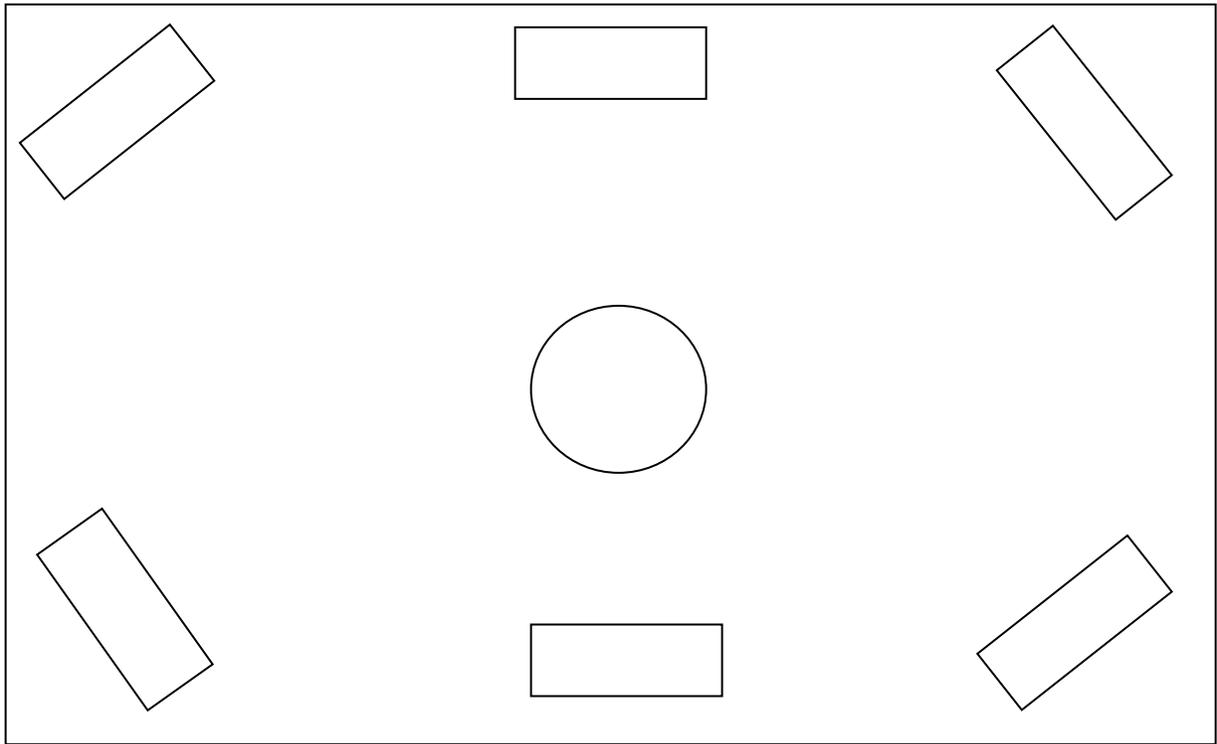
Here is a sample schedule with three rounds of learning centers:

- 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 for the Session

Gathering

- Name tags
- Community building activities
- Opening Prayer Service
- Bible

All Ages Learning Experience

- Handout

In-Depth Learning Experience

- Handouts

Closing

- Closing Prayer Service
- Bible

Session Plan

Part 1. Gathering (15-20 minutes)

Preparation

Prepare a newsprint sheet or handout that lists the order of the activities, or create a PowerPoint presentation that guides people through the session.

Registration and Hospitality

- Welcome people and ask them to sign in for the program.
- Provide name tags or invite people to make their own.
- Distribute any handouts participants will need for the session. (You can also distribute handouts for the activities at the beginning of the activity.)
- Invite people to share a meal; depending on the time of day, the program may end with a meal.

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

This session explores how we can pray during the Lent and Easter seasons. No other season or feast throughout the year calls for deeper, more heartfelt prayer than Lent and the Easter season. Lent calls us to pray as Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, offering humble obedience to the will of the Father. And the Easter season calls each of us to prayerfully consider how to fulfill our baptismal promise of discipleship.

1. Group Formation

This program utilizes a learning activity center format. Five learning centers are developed for your use. Each activity lasts from 25-35 minutes, allowing everyone to participate in three 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

Preparation

Ask five people to be readers, one to proclaim the Scripture passage and four others to each read a short passage of the Response.

Gather

Blessed are you, Lord God of our Salvation.
We thank you for the life, death, and resurrection
of your son, Jesus.

We thank you for the ways we are taught to pray,
through our Sunday worship,
through the Prayer of the Hour of Jesus,
through Jesus' agony in the Garden.

Just as with the disciples on the road to Emmaus,
may our eyes be opened to see you more clearly,
and may our hearts burn within us as we contemplate your love.

Blessed are you, Lord God of our Salvation.
Amen.

Listen

John 17:1-5

Respond

Presider: As we continue our Lenten retreat and prepare our hearts to renew our baptismal promises on Easter, let us pray that we grow in awe and appreciation for Jesus' gift of his life through his passion, death, and resurrection—all so that we can experience redemption and salvation. Our response is "Not my will, but yours be done, O God."

Reader 1: Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done.'

Assembly: Not my will, but yours be done, O God.

Reader 2: For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.' Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.'

Assembly: Not my will, but yours be done, O God.

Reader 3: When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him;

Assembly: Not my will, but yours be done, O God.

Reader 4: They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem;

Assembly: Not my will, but yours be done, O God.

Go Forth

Presider: God, we are growing in our understanding that because Jesus conquered death and brought new life to all, our ritual prayer of breaking bread and sharing the cup are of great importance. During the seasons of Lent and Easter, may our eyes be opened to your gracious love all around, and may our hearts burn within us with the joy of the risen Lord. Amen.

Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience (20 minutes)

The All Ages Learning Experience is designed to help the participants explore what the seasons of Lent and Easter teach us about prayer. This will occur through the sharing of story and experience by a “Lenten Witness Panel.”

Preparation

Invite a “Lenten Witness Panel” of church members of different ages to tell a story of Lent, e.g., a story of conversion or change, a story of personal or family Lenten traditions of prayer, fasting, or service. Here is a list of possibilities. There is time for perhaps three people to share.

- Ask a newly-baptized church member to share his or her story of conversion, and then share about the focus of his or her prayer this Lent as the journey toward baptism nears its end.
- Ask someone who is approaching his/her first anniversary of baptism to share about the focus of his or her prayer this Lent.
- Ask a devout elderly person to share a story of how Lent and Easter draw him or her into prayer.
- Ask a parent to share how his or her family celebrates and ritualizes Lent and Easter at home.
- Ask a young adult to read and reflect upon a key Lenten story from Scripture—e.g., Jesus’ Agony in the Garden (Mark 26:36-46) or the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35)—and share his or her reflections with the community. Specifically, ask the young adult to talk about how this passage helps him or her seek God’s guidance for living today.
- Ask a teenager to share his or her response to this question: What should young people pray about *this year* during Lent? Why?
- Ask a child to read aloud a Lenten prayer. Here are some examples:
“Blessed are you, Lord our God. You welcome us always with open arms. May we find space in our hearts and in our homes for those in need of welcome and a place of rest. Amen.”
“Blessed are you, Lord our God. You call us to do the best we can. Give us the courage we need to live like Jesus, for others. Help us have the courage to really care. Amen.”

Remind each panel participant that the focus of the session is on prayer, and how the seasons of Lent and Easter teach us to pray. Tell them that we are particularly interested in how their prayer life is impacted by the stories they share. Finally, tell each panel participant that they should keep their story to just five minutes.

Activity Plan

Begin the session by sharing the following information in your own words or the words below.

During Lent and Easter we seek to grow closer to God, and to turn away from sin into the living arms of our loving God. Lent and Easter challenge us to . . .

- hear and follow God’s call.
- take time to pray and seek God’s guidance in our lives.
- turn more fully to God which includes treating our neighbors with love through acts of justice, compassion, and service.
- take time to consider our choices and to look at our relationships for ways to be more loving, more fair, more forgiving, and more compassionate.
- take time to share God’s love through acts of service and justice.

- renew our belief in the Easter promise that we share in Jesus’ resurrection.

There are three traditional ways we can grow closer to God during Lent—by praying, by serving (traditionally called almsgiving) and by fasting. Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, like the legs of a tripod, make up the traditional practices of Lent. Praying nourishes our spirits. Fasting teaches us about sacrifice. And works of service/almsgiving enlarge our hearts as we serve the needs of others.

While the three practices are always interconnected, the focus of our session today is on prayer. We have invited _____, _____, and _____ to share their stories with us about how Lent and Easter draw them into prayer.

Invite participants to listen to the members of your “Lenten Witness Panel.” Each panel person shares his or her story.

After all panel members have shared, invite participants to discuss the following questions in small groups.

- What is one specific thing you learned about prayer from the panel?
- How is God calling *you* to pray this Lent and Easter?

Part 3. In Depth Learning Experience (100-115 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 25–35 minutes, allowing everyone to participate in three learning activities. Select any of the first four for families with children and any of the five for adolescents and adults.

- Activity 1. The Practice of Praying (recommended for All Ages)
- Activity 2. Slow But Sure (recommended for All Ages)
- Activity 3. The Last Supper (recommended for All Ages)
- Activity 4. Washing Feet (recommended for All Ages)
- Activity 5. Dealing With Dread (recommended for Adolescents and Adults)

Activity 1. The Practice of Praying

This learning activity center engages participants in one of the three traditional practices of Lent, which is prayer. This activity is particularly suited for families with children.

Preparation

Make copies of Handout #1 for all participants.

Place a pillar candle on a stand so that all can see it. The candle will be lit at the conclusion of the session.

Activity Plan

Introduce the activity with the following words or use your own words:

The gospels tell us that Jesus went into the desert to fast and pray for forty days. We strive to do the same during the forty days of Lent. Through our Lenten prayers we seek conversion from our sinful ways and we renew our baptismal promises. Lent should inspire us to engage in all forms of prayer from Sunday services to private meditation, from family ritual to small group sharing. And our practice of prayer during Lent should empower us to keep up a regular routine of prayer throughout the year.

Invite participants to think about and then discuss how they pray. Ask them to respond to these questions.

- Is prayer a part of your everyday life?
- What sorts of experiences prompt you to pray?
- What do you pray about? Or for?
- Why is prayer an important part of life?

Then continue:

Prayer is a discipline, reflecting the habits and practices of discipleship. Consider the four P's of prayer.

Place. There are many places favorable for prayer: we can pray at church, we can pray in a prayer corner at home, we can pray in nature (God's creation), we can pray as pilgrims at shrines. We can create places for prayer in our homes by carving out a space just for ourselves, or to share with others.

Posture. Choose a prayer posture that works best for you: kneeling, sitting, lying down (don't be so comfortable that you fall asleep!), using a small prayer stool, and so on. Position yourself in such a way that you are comfortable yet remain attentive as you pray.

Prepare. Even though we know prayer is gift from God, we need to make an active decision to engage our whole being in the time of prayer. Some people use a journal to write down what is on their mind as they start their time of prayer. Others use their imagination to place their distractions

in their hands, and then raise their hands in offering to God. What will you do to prepare your heart for prayer?

Process. What process will you use to pray? Will you choose a Scripture passage? Will you pray contemplatively, quietly repeating the same phrase as you center your mind and heart and sit quietly with the Lord? How will you pray? Everyone has their own path in prayer, and different times in our lives call for different ways to pray.

Divide the group into four smaller groups. Tell each group that they will be given a type of prayer with which they are to work together to determine the four P's for that type of prayer. Also instruct them to write a brief prayer of that type. Ask them to use the worksheet on Handout #1.

The four types of prayer are:

1. **Contemplative:** conversing with God as though God is one of your best friends. Contemplation is the ability to be with God and to know that God is being 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.
2. **Praise:** telling God how you stand in awe of who God is, and all that God does for you. Many of our traditional prayers begin with praise using a simple formula such as "Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, your goodness surpasses all other good . . ." and the prayer may go on from there.
3. **Petition:** asking God for the things you need and desire and trusting that God knows what is best for you.
4. **Intercession:** asking on behalf of another, praying for others, or asking others (even saints) to intervene for you. Jesus is the ultimate interceder, pleading with God on your behalf. So too are you called to prayerfully intercede for others. A simple formula for creating an intercessory prayer is: a) name the person or persons or situation for whom you are praying, b) articulate the need of those for whom you are praying, c) articulate the intercession needed for those for whom you are praying, d) end the intercession with, "We pray to the Lord."

Ask each group to write on their worksheet the type of prayer they have been assigned. Then ask them to work as a group to complete the remainder of the worksheet.

Our group has been assigned the following type of prayer: _____

Place. One or more good places to engage in this type of prayer are:

Posture. This type of prayer lends itself to these postures:

Prepare. One good way to prepare for this type of prayer is:

Process. This type of prayer lends itself to the following process:

Write. Write a prayer of this type:

When groups have completed their work, ask them to select one or two representatives to give a brief report to the whole group on the four P's of their type of prayer. Invite comments or suggestions from others.

Conclude the session by asking everyone to become quiet and take on a posture of prayer. Light the candle for all to see. Ask one person from each group to read the prayer they have written beginning with **praise**, followed by **intercession**, followed by **petition**, followed by **contemplation**.

Activity 2. Slow But Sure

This learning activity center engages participants in planting a spring bulb and watching it grow throughout the season of Lent. They will also compose a prayer that they will use throughout Lent to nurture their own growth. As the bulb emerges from the darkness of the earth into the light of day, so too are we called out of our darkness and into the light of Christ. As the bulb slowly but surely grows into a plant, we take time now and throughout Lent to see how we are growing into maturity with Christ.

Preparation

This learning activity center works best when your intergenerational learning session is conducted early in Lent, as it will take about six weeks for the bulbs to show significant change.

This activity works best if participants can work at tables while standing up.

Select one person to proclaim the reading: Ephesians 5:8-17.

Materials

- Candle
- Bible
- One small flower pot for each household
- One spring flowering bulb for each household
- One 4 x 6 index card for each household
- Pens, crayons, and markers to decorate the index card
- Potting soil

Activity Plan

Ask participants to gather around tables and remain standing. Light the candle for all to see.

Introduce the activity with the following words or use your own words:

In the early days of Lent we still encounter the dark days of winter. Yet we know that once the Easter season comes, so too will come light and warmth and growth. Each one of us is like a spring flowering bulb, on a journey of growth, seeking to emerge from the dark earth into the light of the Son, into the light of Christ. As we journey through Lent, we seek to grow in our faith and mature in our prayerful response to God's activity in our lives. Today we will plant flowering bulbs, take them home, nurture them and care for them, with the full expectation that they will emerge from the darkness toward the light in due time.

Ask the reader to take the Bible and proclaim the reading: Ephesians 5:8-17

“For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

‘Sleeper, awake!

Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.’

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”

Continue:

It is a slow and long process for a bulb to turn into a flower. For a while it might seem like nothing is happening since change comes first from the inside and only gradually becomes visible.

We humans are part of nature too. When we try to make changes in our lives during Lent, like giving something up or doing something positive for those around us, it may not seem at first like much is happening. It takes time and faithfulness to our commitments before we might see real growth in ourselves.

The project we start today will hopefully show some exciting results by about Easter time. The changes we make in ourselves during Lent may also make us feel like new persons at Easter.

Have participants plant their bulbs in the pots using the potting soil. Tell them to take the pot home and place it in a quiet spot accessible to all. Encourage participants to take regular quiet times of prayer. Tell them that as they watch and ponder the pot of soil, they should also reflect upon what changes may also be happening in them as they journey toward Easter.

Ask participants to compose a prayer that expresses their confidence in nature to transform the bulb into a beautiful flower and expresses their confidence in God to transform each one of us into bearers of the light of Christ. Have them write the prayer on the index card, and if time allows, decorate it with pictures of flowers.

Conclude the session with these or similar words:

As we care for our potted bulbs we are reminded to care for our own spiritual journey through prayer, ritual, works of mercy, and faith conversation with others. In our confidence, we know that one day a plant will emerge from the dark soil and yield a beautiful flower. So too, are we confident that God will hear our daily prayers, nurture our spirit, so that we too will one day emerge from darkness and reveal Christ’s light to those around us.

Activity 3. The Last Supper

This learning activity center explores a process to pray with the words of Jesus that are the heart and soul of Christian prayer. Based on the work of St. Ignatius of Loyola, this path to praying with scripture involves the use of one's imagination.

As we remember the actions of breaking bread, taking the cup, and doing all in remembrance of him, we seek to fully appreciate that Jesus' own *words* are the source of our core communal prayer.

Preparation

Print Handout #2 for all participants.

Have a Bible marked with this passage: Matthew 26:17-29.

Create a quiet space with comfortable seating. Display a picture of the Last Supper, and if possible, a picture of your community sharing communion. Place a Bible in a central place on a prayer table, and beside it set a small loaf of bread and a cup suitable for sharing with the participants.

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

Activity Plan

Share 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.

Perhaps we take for granted that from the accounts of the Last Supper it is the words of Jesus that form the heart and soul of Christian prayer. In this prayer activity we will remember the actions of breaking bread, taking the cup, and doing all in remembrance of him, and seek to fully appreciate that Jesus' own *words* are the source of our core communal prayer.

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, and to quiet themselves and be still.

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 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, Matthew 26:17-29, slowly and meditatively to the participants.

“On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?’ He said, ‘Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, “The Teacher says, ‘My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’” So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

“When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; and while they were eating, he said, ‘Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.’ And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, ‘Surely not I, Lord?’ He answered, ‘The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.’ Judas, who betrayed him, said, ‘Surely not I, Rabbi?’ He replied, ‘You have said so.’

“While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.’”

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 at the Last Supper with Jesus.

Put yourself in the room with them all. What do you see? What do you hear? What is the mood?

Imagine their shock when hearing about his betrayal. What do you imagine lies in the mind and heart of Judas?

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

Now imagine the disciples asking Jesus what he means by “this is my body” and “this is my blood.” What questions would you be asking?

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 on Handout #2. 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. Imagine what our worship would be like if we truly entered into the experience of the Last Supper. These questions may help them:

- How will this reflection help you worship and pray when you go to Sunday services?
- How will this reflection help you pray during Lent?

Close by sharing a loaf of bread. Invite people to break off a piece and name one way that they hope to pray more earnestly the next time they attend Sunday services.

Activity 4. Washing Feet

This learning activity center engages participants in a reflection on the cross and on Jesus washing his disciples' feet. This prayerful activity is designed to help participants see that while we may not be called to give our lives in death as Jesus did on the cross, we *are* called to give of our lives to others, just as Jesus demonstrated in washing the feet of his friends.

Preparation

In advance of the session, Share Handout#3 with any leaders who will be conducting this activity.

Print a copy of Handout #4 for each participant.

Select two participants to be part of the opening procession. They will carry a processional cross and a Bible.

Select one participant to proclaim the reading, John 13:1-14.

Select quiet, meditative music to play while participants venerate the cross.

Materials

- Bible
- Processional cross
- Music and device for playing it

Activity Plan

Introduce the activity with the following words or use your own words:

Welcome. In this learning activity center, we will reflect on and pray through the experience of Jesus' washing his disciples' feet at the last supper. We will see the connection between this activity and the cross, recognizing that we are not likely to be called to give of our lives in death as Jesus did, but that we are all called to acts of care and compassion for others as Jesus demonstrated in washing his disciples' feet. Please join me in full participation of this ritual.

Invite participants to stand.

Conduct a small procession from the back of your space to the front. Use the pre-selected volunteers to carry the processional cross and Bible. Have them place the items in the front of your space in such a way that all can see both items.

During the procession, play and sing the song that you have selected.

Ask participants to be seated and to take a moment of silence. Ask them to silently reflect on these questions:

- What does the cross mean to you in your life today?
- What does the cross teach you?

Have participants write their response, or draw a symbol of their response, on Handout #4.
Continue:

An ancient Christian ritual is the veneration of the Cross. In this action, persons come forward and present themselves to the cross. They might bow, or touch the cross, or kiss the foot of the cross, or do a combination of these actions to show their reverence for what the cross symbolizes—Jesus giving his life by dying on the cross so that we may live. You will now have an opportunity to venerate the cross.

Invite participants to come forward and venerate the cross in whatever manner suits them, and then return to their seats. Ask them to maintain a spirit of quiet prayerfulness while all come forward. Play quiet, meditative music during this ritual.

When all have returned to their seats, ask participants to stand.

Have the reader proclaim the story of Jesus Washing His Disciples' Feet (John 13:1-14).

Pause, then share:

The washing of the feet is a symbol of service, humility, and purification. It is a prayer of action that both honors and humbles. It is as if Jesus recognizes that few of us will be called to the same sacrifice of the cross as he, shedding body and blood. But this intimate action of washing one another's feet is something to which we are all called.

Interject your own personal thoughts and feelings about foot washing here.

Ask participants to reflect for a moment on this question:

- What is one word that summarizes the reading for you and also connects to the meaning of the cross in your life today.

Have participants write their response, or draw a symbol of their response, on Handout #4.

Invite participants to share their word with just one other person and to explain why they chose that word.

When all have had a chance to share, gather the group and invite them all to stand and pray together the Lord's Prayer. At the conclusion of the prayer, invite participants to exchange a sign of peace.

Activity 5. Dealing With Dread

As we read about the Agony in the Garden (Matthew 26:36-46, Mark 14:32-42, Luke 22:39-46), it seems clear that Jesus dreaded facing the cross. Yet he did not deny his anxiety; rather, he lifted it to the Father in prayer, and then proceeded to endure the hardest of all hardships. Jesus' worst fears came true when he endured his passion and death. This learning activity center engages participants in prayerful reflection on their own experiences of dread and anxiety and offers four concrete steps for dealing with it.

Preparation

Make copies of Handout #5 for all participants.

Select one person to proclaim the reading: Mark 14:32-42.

Activity Plan

Introduce the activity with the following words or use your own words:

When our anxiety level rises and our anticipation becomes unbearable, we must turn to God and pour out our hearts with whatever emotions are there, be they anger, resentment, fear, or any combination of dark feelings. God receives our emotional, even hysterical, unintelligible outbursts, as well as our carefully crafted and reasoned prayers. In this learning activity we will explore four steps for dealing with dread and anxiety. Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane is our model and guide.

Ask participants to recall an experience of major dread or anxiety, like anticipating an event or task that they knew would be extremely difficult. Provide a couple of examples such as a scheduled major surgery, or the death of a chronically ill loved one, or an exam that determines one's immediate future, or share a personal story of your own.

Direct participants to share their experience of dread with one other person.

After sufficient time, call everyone back and ask the reader to proclaim Mark 14:32-42.

"They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, 'Sit here while I pray.' He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, 'I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.' And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, 'Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.' He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, 'Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. He came a third time and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.'"

Pause for a moment and then share:

Imagine how Jesus must have felt in the Garden of Gethsemane. His time in the Garden is filled with trepidation. Jesus says to Peter, James, and John, "I am deeply grieved, even to death." His response? He brings his anxiety to the Father in prayer. "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want."

How do you handle something you dread, particularly as the anxiety builds and the tension rises? When you know you must endure something extremely difficult that you simply cannot avoid, what do you do? Let's consider these four steps:

- **Find a "safe" place to share your fears and anxieties.** Along with talking to a trusted friend, you can always bring them to God in prayer, just as Jesus did.
- **Surrender to the experience** and trust that God carries you in the shadow of his wing. Surrender does not mean giving up. It simply means giving in to the experience.
- **Resolve to be strong and stay present.** When the time comes, when your "hour" has arrived, do all you can to stay in the present moment. You cannot get around the dreaded experience, so go all the way *through* it.
- **Trust in God's love and providence.** Without knowing the outcome, all you can do is trust that God will not abandon you no matter how difficult the journey.

Let's explore these steps further.

Share your burden. Using Handout #5, list the people to whom you can turn when anxiety begins to overwhelm.

Reflect on the following questions and jot your responses.

- Jesus first shared his burden with Peter, James, and John, who were among his closest friends. Is it difficult for you to turn to someone for help, or to simply share your burden? If so, why?
- Jesus then took his burden directly to his Father in prayer. When your anticipation of something leads to dread, do you take it to God in prayer? If so, how do you pray at those times?

Surrender to the experience. In his agony in the garden, Jesus surrendered to the will of his Father, knowing full well that he must endure the hardest of hardships. When the inevitable is upon you, it is perhaps a waste of energy to resist. Reflect on the following questions and jot your responses.

- In our culture, "surrender" is typically a sign of weakness. Do you subscribe to that line of thinking, or are there times when "surrender" is the best choice? Explain.
- When you anticipate hardship, or find yourself in the midst of it, well-meaning people will often say something to the effect of "Hang in there. You will learn a lot from this experience." How do you feel when you hear words like this? Do you think these words are generally true?

Resolve to be strong and stay present. In the midst of hardship and anxiety, the greatest temptation is to "check out" and leave the situation behind, if not physically, then emotionally and mentally. In the Garden of Gethsemane, the disciples could not stay awake. Sleep overcame them. They "numbed" themselves to the impending pain and doom. Meanwhile, Jesus stayed awake, and,

in prayer he confronted the situation head on. Reflect on the following questions and jot your responses.

- When confronted with impending "doom" how do you resist the temptation to "check out" and "numb" yourself to the experience?
- Do you believe that prayer can give you inner strength to stay present to the situation, even when the situation is particularly dreadful? Have you ever had such an experience?

Trust in God's love and providence. It's easy to trust God when all goes well, but can you do so when confronted with a challenge more difficult and more fearful than you have ever before encountered? Reflect on the following questions and jot your responses.

- What does the word "providence" mean to you?
- How can you grow into the ability to give greater trust to God? Do you think prayer has anything to do with it?

Let us conclude this learning activity by reading again the account of Jesus' Agony in the Garden.

Have the reader proclaim Mark 14:32-42.

Let us pray together: Jesus, you showed us the ultimate way to handle fear and anxiety. Help us to remember your agony in the garden the next time we are confronted with dread. Help us to remain confident that you will not abandon us and give us strength to surrender to the experience. With this confidence, we place our complete trust in you. Amen.

Part 4. Sharing Learning Reflections (20-25 minutes)

Ask participants to gather in intergenerational groups to share what they have learned and created. Invite them to take several minutes to share their responses to the following questions:

- What is one new thing you learned about prayer during the Lent and Easter seasons in this session?
- If you participated in the “Practice of Prayer” learning activity center, what specific ways will you pray throughout the seasons of Lent and Easter?
- If you participated in the “Slow but Sure” learning activity center, share the prayer that you composed.
- What did you learn about Lent as a season of renewing your baptismal promises during this session?

Part 5. Closing Prayer Service (10 minutes)

Preparation

Ask five people to be readers, one to proclaim the Scripture passage and four others to each read a short passage of the Response.

Gather

Blessed are you, Lord God of our Salvation.
We thank you for the life, death, and resurrection
of your son, Jesus.

We thank you for the ways we are taught to pray,
through Jesus’ agony in the garden,
through washing one another’s feet,
through waiting for the bulb to become a flower,
and through the Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, almsgiving.

Just as with the disciples on the road to Emmaus,
may our eyes be opened to see you more clearly,
and may our hearts burn within us as we contemplate your love.

Blessed are you, Lord God of our Salvation.
Amen.

Listen

Luke 24:13-35

Respond

Presider: As we conclude our reflections on prayer through the Lent and Easter seasons, let us pray in thanksgiving for how Jesus opened our eyes and our hearts through his resurrection, conquering death and offering everlasting life to all who believe. Our response is “Are not our hearts burning within us?”

Reader 1: As Christians our prayer is rooted in our belief in Jesus' resurrection.

Assembly: "Are not our hearts burning within us?"

Reader 2: At the Last Supper with his twelve disciples Jesus also broke bread and gave it to them. He took the cup and shared it with them. And he commanded, "Do this in remembrance of me." The ritual prayer of breaking bread and sharing the cup now has meaning, for Jesus has conquered death and brought new life to all.

Assembly: "Are not our hearts burning within us?"

Reader 3: When we enter into the prayer of remembrance our eyes may be opened. When we break bread with one another, perhaps we can see the face of the risen Christ in each other, and even reconcile the hurts between us.

Assembly: "Are not our hearts burning within us?"

Reader 4: This Easter season, take time to read, meditate, and dwell on the Walk to Emmaus. Open your heart to that which your mind cannot fully comprehend—the *risen* Jesus—and you may find that your eyes are opened and your heart is burning.

Assembly: "Are not our hearts burning within us?"

Go Forth

Presider: God, we are growing in our understanding that because Jesus conquered death and brought new life to all, our ritual prayer of breaking bread and sharing the cup bring deep meaning to our lives. During the seasons of Lent and Easter, may our eyes be opened to your gracious love and may our hearts burn within us with the joy of the risen Lord. Amen.