

Prayer Service *companions on the journey*

Rather than merely supplying a ready-made prayer service, I felt it better for you and your CWL council to be given the **framework** for cobbling together your own prayer service. You know your people, time limits and resources. This generic prayer service has topical suggestions; however, you can use its “bones” in the future as a guide to putting together other services based on other topics.

The theme offers a **great opportunity for creativity** for your liturgy planning committee. Consider the following:

- Pray to the Holy Spirit to lead and guide you.
- Use a theme song to open and close the session e.g., “Companions on the Journey.”
- Reflect upon: Who are our companions? How do they behave toward one another? What do they do? Who were Jesus’ companions? How did He interact with them? *Com-panis* means to share bread together; would you like to focus on bread in this Year of the Eucharist? What is the journey?
- How can we help those present to experience the celebration?
- What hymns, scripture readings, prayers, rituals and symbols would bring home the message? (Have something for their hand, heart and mind, thus something that can be tangible, soul-touching and challenging)
- How can people participate in the event or ritual? What will make this celebration memorable for them?

Usual **format** for a prayer service or Liturgy of the Word:

1. Opening song
2. Greeting
3. Opening prayer
4. Scripture reading
5. Response to reading
6. Reflection
7. Prayer of the Faithful
8. Ritual action
9. Lord’s Prayer
10. Final prayer, blessing and dismissal
11. Closing hymn

Depending on the time allotment, your service can be shorter or longer.

Resources: Joyce Rupp and Edward Hays have written many spiritual reflection books, which are full of ideas that can be interpreted into effective prayer services. Check your diocesan library or local religious bookstore.

Plan on using various “**voices**” for prayerful variety i.e. have:

- leader of song
- service leader
- scripture reader
- left side/right side prayer
- reflector
- intercession readers
- ritual assistants

Whatever seems to fit your Christian community, the more people who participate, the more the message will be “owned.”

After the plan is made, make a “who does what?” list so you can make sure everyone knows his or her role and things run smoothly.

Create an **atmosphere**. Symbolic decorations of the sacred space can set the mood and tone. Simplicity speaks volumes.

Inclusive language is important.

The **service leader** (she doesn't have to be you – delegation is the key!) leads the prayer service by doing the greeting, keeping the silences and listening to the scripture. She speaks distinctly and at a natural pace. She tries to make eye contact to include the whole assembly. She handles the prayer book or program sheet with respect. She does not rush through the service, but allows time for private prayer. Her movements are dignified and natural and she is dressed appropriately.

Music gathers the people together to praise God. It should mirror the theme and enhance the message. It unifies the group, so it should be sing-able and familiar. The closing hymn strengthens the message and sends forth the people to share the news. Music is used to open the service, as part of the ritual, in conjunction with a meditation and at the end of the service.

Greeting: *Living with Christ* missalette and *Shorter Christian Prayer* (the Liturgy of the Hours) have a good variety of greetings and opening prayers you might use. The reason for the gathering might be incorporated into this opening greeting.

Opening prayer: addresses God; invites people into the presence of God and may include a petition (check missalette for examples).

Use the following ideas as a formula for a prayer.

- address God by name; e.g. Lord God, Almighty and eternal God, God our Father
- say something about God, e.g. source of all unity, who desires to be with us
- ask God to do something (make a petition)
- for the ending, use “through Christ” and in the Holy Spirit

Remember:

- prayer is Trinitarian – to the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit
- usually addressed to God, occasionally to Mary, as in Hail Mary
- can end by asking a saint or Mary to intercede but always includes “through Christ”
- KISS principle – Keep It Short and Sweet

Scripture reading: could be various incidents in the bible, e.g., the Visitation, choosing of the disciples, the Last Supper where Jesus calls the disciples His friends, the woman at the well, the disciples on the road to Emmaus, the breakfast on the beach after the resurrection, Mary in the garden after the resurrection when she thinks Jesus is the gardener and/or commissioning of the apostles.

How do you or your women see Jesus and/or Mary or the disciples as companions? What is the Holy Spirit trying to tell you is right for this group at this point in time?

The **scripture reader** “proclaims” the Word, therefore, should spend some time beforehand thinking about the context and the main theme of the reading. What words need emphasis? Practice reading aloud. Allow the words to sink into the ears and hearts of the listeners; these words are God's jewels!

Response: How will your people respond to this first reading?

- by song, psalm, sung or recited, related to the theme, can be very short, i.e., another verse of the opening song or with a left side/right side response

Reflection: approximately five minutes long – allows listeners to make the reading their own, helps them to see that God is working in their lives, calls them to action and shows God’s love.

The reflection can have a variety of forms:

- a shared reflection, “How does this reading speak to my heart?”
- preaching by one person
- silent meditation
- quiet music
- reflective questions that people can ponder

Prayer of the Faithful (Intercessions)

- can be developed by your committee, yet delivered by others
- based on readings and theme
- service leader offers the opening and concluding prayer while the intercessions (numbered) can be read by several people
- people may read from their place or come to the front, whatever adds dignity to your service

Progression of intercessions:

1. for the church
2. for the world and society
3. for the sick and suffering
4. for the deceased
5. special intention

Response can be varied and/or sung, e.g. “Lord, hear our prayer,” “O Lord, answer my prayer” or “Show us your mercy Lord.”

Ritual action: liturgy is more than just words, it is action. Ritual helps to bring the meaning of the words together for us. Symbols help us to understand the deeper meaning of words. Jesus often used images and symbols to teach His Word. What can you do during your celebration to make the theme alive for the participants? This will be what they remember about this service.

Possible rituals: (keep in mind the KISS principle)

- greeting one another
- sharing a cup of tea
- exchanging telephone numbers
- sharing a common loaf of bread
- lighting a candle
- skit, mime or liturgical dance
- washing the feet

The Lord’s Prayer: the service leader invites all to pray as Jesus taught us.

Concluding prayer: can be a short scripture text, a composed prayer of petition, thanksgiving or praise.

Why not read the *Companions on the Journey* prayer as a left side/right side prayer? For example:

LS: We are all *companions on the journey* and God is with us each and every day.

RS: We are being led by the Spirit in many hidden ways

LS: We share in God's revelation to His beloved Son.

RS: Sharing and teaching the faith of God is a great spiritual journey.

LS: God gives us the light of wisdom as we confront the struggles.

RS: Lord help us to pray for the companions which You have given us.

LS: We thank God, that He has blessed us so much.

RS: For when our journey ends, the darkness of sin will be no more.

All: Thanks be to God! Amen

Blessing: ask God to bless and strengthen the people who have gathered
(check missalette or Liturgy of the Hours for examples)

Dismissal: a sending forth to be disciples of Jesus in the world.

Closing: a song or sign of peace.

Good luck! May God bless you as you enter into the planning of your prayer service. Give yourself the quiet time to pray and seek guidance. This is a privilege, a precious gift to yourself and your committee; this is another way that Jesus is inviting you into relationship with Him. This is another way in which your own personal spiritual life will deepen and be enriched.

“Smile, don't you know God loves you? Come to think of it, I love you too!”

(Carey Landry)

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March, 2005