

NRT Guide for Prayer in Response

Matthew 6 (NIV) - ⁵"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

Romans 8:26 (RSVP) Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.

When Do We Pray?

Always – Without Ceasing

Prayer is essential to our work in Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. It is like the air we breathe. Every moment, we are in prayer, tuned in to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, listening for the still small voice within, remembering that the Holy Spirit binds us together with each other and survivors, energizes our work, and gives us wisdom for our work. Such prayers are prayers of the heart and mind.

With Sensitive Timing

When John Robinson, our former Associate for National Response, was asked when we should pray, he responded, "*Prayers are not punctuation marks. We like to begin and end committee meetings with prayer. This is less effective immediately upon meeting a survivor or as a way of saying good-bye. One of the things I was advised to do is that you do a period of*

active listening long enough to really hear a person's concerns and their pain. About the time they hit the bottom of the "schwoop" is a good time to ask, "Would you like to pray?"

When Asked

When we are with the Presbyterian family, we usually offer to pray. However, when we are with persons whose faith orientation we do not know, we usually wait to be asked to pray, or if it feels appropriate, say something like, "In my tradition we pray in circumstances like this. What do you comfort in situations like this?"

If you prepare yourself for the idea that you are going to pray with someone, it's easier to find an opportunity.

How Do We Pray?

In Our Minds and Hearts, without Speaking

While we are always in prayer,
we are in many situations in which we do not pray aloud.

With Our Voices

Spoken prayers are very important too, but only when offered with respect for the culture and faith of the people we serve. When we are in a Presbyterian context, of course we offer prayers common to our faith tradition. When we are working beyond our Presbyterian family, we must be sensitive to the cultural and faith traditions of those we serve. In those situations, we may not want to include "In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray." Know the group and keep prayer respectful and appropriate. Don't use prayer to proselytize.

Who Should Pray?

All of us should pray. PDA particularly encourages lay persons to pray and not always expect the Teaching Elders to pray.

Individual Prayers for Team Members

Breath Prayer

Breath prayers are tied to a person's breathing and are meant to calm and center the soul. Breath prayers can be done individually or in groups. During a breath prayer one prays and listens for God's response.

Take two deep breaths before starting and get as comfortable as possible. Then breathe deeply and slowly allowing the rhythm of your breathing to match the rhythm of your prayer. Think, or say quietly, a word or short phrase with each inhaled breath and a different word or short phrase with each exhaled breath.

Some suggested words/phrases are: Inhale - "Fill me" and Exhale - "Free me", "Jesus" / "Have mercy", "Guide me" / "Give me patience".

In a secular group, this could be called a Breath Chant and used as a stress relieving exercise. More information on Breath Prayers can be found on guidedword.com by Kathleen Shockley.

Journaling

A prayer that begins "Dear God," or whatever your usual beginning is, and then write freely whatever your prayer is. The act of writing often brings to the surface what we did not realize was deep within us and we are surprised by what is on the page. In writing a prayer, we can contain our gratitude and concerns in a concrete way, entrusting them to God for now. In journaling, we can pause to listen to what God would guide and write that on the

page. This kind of writing is free writing, in part because we do not have to worry about spelling or organization or sticking to topic. No one will read your journaling but you.

Another form of journaling is art journaling, in which you doodle or draw with colors, not worrying about the perfection of the drawing but simply express your feelings in color.

Centering Prayer

A prayer of the heart, Centering Prayer is best done when you have time to sit quietly for a time, 10-20 minutes. Sit comfortably erect, feet on the floor, hands on your knees, palms up or down. Allow a word to arise in you that seems to be given by the Holy Spirit. Some use love, peace, grace, God words. Sometimes words like *water* or *deep* or *silence* serve to draw us to that deep place. Repeat the word over and over at a rhythm that feels right to you. Some do one on in-breath, another on out-breath. Repeat the word until it takes you to the deep place where your spirit meets the Holy. Dwell in that place. If your mind starts making do lists and driving and calling, just bless the ideas and sent them away and return to repeating your word. Sometimes the word changes mid-stream. This is a time of going to the center of your place in the heart of God, the place within you that knows your truth, your longings, your connection to the Holy.

Tuning-In Prayer

Prayer is a powerful moment-to-moment personal on-going communication with the indwelling power of Presence. The continuous prayer of the soul is like tuning a radio to the right frequency so that the signal is being sent will be received clearly. One process for doing this is imagining that the out-breath dispels all that does not belong in us and the in-breath brings in holy energy. The key to "tuning-in" is intention, keeping the heart/soul open to connection with the Holy Spirit, practicing this continuous connection so that in stressful situations, in particular, the connection is there. This prayer relies on the promise that when we do not know how to pray, the Spirit prays through us.

Invisible Cocoon Prayer

A prayer of preparation. We are all aware that the Holy Spirit surrounds us, fills us, enfolds us. The Invisible Cocoon Prayer is a prayer of visualizing, imagining. Picture yourself in a bubble of light, an invisible cocoon we're calling it. You can see out; you can send caring energy out, but this holy energy protects you. Ask God to intensify this energy in your cocoon. Ask God to make you aware now and in the field of this holy energy surrounding you, guiding you, tuning you in to Holy Spirit's guidance. Feel the holy energy vibrate around you. Notice how your body feels in this cocoon. Imagine something happening that might be stressful or throw you off balance. Return your focus to the bubble of light in your personal cocoon. Take a deep breath. Dwell in that light until you feel connected to God and your own center to effectively respond. This cocoon is available to you for preparation time before deployment, on the plane, in the moment in the field.

Prayers within the Presbyterian Family

The Lord's Prayer

Psalm 23

Litany

A Litany is prayer that consists of a series of invocations and supplications by the leader with alternate by the congregation. Some examples of Litanies can be found on the pcusa.org/pda web page. More specific web link. Look for Resources - Worship

Lectio Divina

http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/site/DocServer/lectio_divina.pdf?docID=451

Lectio divina is a slow, contemplative praying of the Scriptures. Time set aside in a special way for lectio divina enables us to discover in our daily life an underlying spiritual rhythm.

Experiential Prayers: <http://www.embody.co.uk/archive/safe/list.html>. This site features 25 experiential prayer exercises.

Popcorn Prayer*

This is a group prayer technique to be used after a small group of 5-7 individuals has met for personal discussion. This discussion might include anything from thoughts and feelings about how the day went, something everyone is grateful for tonight, or a special concern. The period of sharing might be as brief as a few minutes or as long as an evening meeting.

After a period of sharing, everyone is invited, but not required, to “pop up” with a prayer for *someone*, referring only to the thoughts/feelings the person expressed. Usually the group leader will open and close the prayer. This technique is like active empathic listening in prayer form.

Pray to the Right (or Left)*

As with popcorn prayer, a small group discussion of some personal focus and variable length preceded the actual shut-your-eyes-and-pray time. This technique is a little more challenging, because each person is asked to pray for a prayer concern voiced earlier by the person on his/her right/left. Again, the voiced prayer refers only to the information shared verbally/non-verbally by the individual during the group meeting. Usually the group leader announces the direction, then starts and ends- after he/she has been prayed for. In other words, the prayer goes around the circle. This is slightly tricky to explain but people catch on quickly once they see or experience it. Same guidelines as above apply.

[* This technique requires some level of trust, expect self-disclosure on some level, and build good listening and compassion for our sisters and brothers. Often people who use these techniques will either sit or stand in a circle, whichever is more comfortable. Good group size is 5-7. Often people who say they would never pray in public can learn and develop comfort with these techniques. Useful to start or end committee meetings at church, sometimes suggesting a particular focus.]

Candle Prayer

Large or Small Group. Have everyone stand, or sit, in a circle. Pass out candles to everyone. Explain to the group they may say, or pray, one word, or one short phrase after their candle is lighted, or simply remain silent. Prayers / words can be directed toward a specific event or not, as the leader determines. Leader lights her/his candle, says/prays their word or short phrase. Then the leader turns and lights the person’s candle next to him (left or right). When their candle is lit, they will say/pray and so on. When the flame completes the circle, the leader will close with Amen or other closing word or short phrase.

Prayers beyond the Presbyterian Family

It is common on a deployment to interact with survivors from faith traditions outside the Presbyterian family. It is important to be prepared for these encounters so that you can engage with sensitivity and compassion. A guiding principle in providing appropriate and respectful disaster spiritual care is to provide that care with the tradition of the survivor in mind. This includes a genuine interest in their faith tradition and offering prayers from the survivors' faith tradition. For a more detailed discussion and list of resources refer to the, 'Prayer in NRT Disaster Response' handout. The following resources offer helpful information about various faith traditions and sample prayers and rituals; 'Responding with Compassion' by Judith C. Joseph, 'How to Be a Perfect Stranger' by Arthur J. Magida and the Religious Tolerance website (www.religioustolerance.org).

Universal Prayers

Moment of Silence

A moment of silence offers a time for silent contemplation, silent prayer or silent reflection. Some say this is the only true non-sectarian prayer. It can be introduced and used in several ways and in many situations. Some of the ways to introduce a moment of silence include: "I would like to ask you to offer up a moment of silence for ...", "May we observe a moment of silence for those who ..."; "Let's begin/end with a moment of silence for ..."

Open Eye Blessing

A minister, during a disaster response, sat down at a table in a restaurant to eat with a group of other folks who may, or may not, have known each other and certainly didn't know their religious preferences. When the server brought the food, the minister said: "Bless this food." The food was blessed. The people ate.

Other times we look at our friends/colleagues and offer an expression of gratitude for them and this opportunity, for those we serve, and thanks and blessing for the food. These are simple prayers.

Universal Prayer (examples)

For earth and sky, wind and water, we are thankful.

For friends and family, for life and hope.

May we be as one as we work together.

May those who lost loved ones be comforted.

May those who lost their homes have find safe, peaceful shelter.

May all survivors and those who serve be blessed with energy and wisdom for the tasks ahead.

May we all remember that we are stronger together.

May we be bound together in hope and love.

Blessing Prayer from 9/11 and Katrina (from *Disaster SpiritualCare: Practical Clergy Responses to Community, Regional and National Tragedy*, eds. Rabbi Stephen B. Roberta, BCJC and Rev. Willard W. C. Ashley Sr., Dmin, DH)

We give thanks for this person's life.

We give thanks that this person was found.

We give thanks for the persons that found them.

We ask that they may be made whole in God's arms.

And that they know peace.

Apache Blessing

May the sun bring you new energy by day,

may the moon softly restore you by night,

may the rain wash away your worries,

may the breeze blow new strength into your being,

may you walk gently through the world and

know it's beauty all the days of your life.

Universal Prayer with Those Who Serve

Slow me down!

Ease the pounding of my heart by the quieting of my mind....

Help me to know the magical...power of sleep.

Teach me the art

Of taking minute vacations...

slowing down

to look at a flower,

to chat with an old friend or make a new one;

to pat a stray dog;

to watch a spider build a web;

to smile at a child;

or to read a few lines from a good book.

Remind me each day

That the race is not always to the swift;

That there is more to life than increasing its speed....