

WHY A PRAYER GROUP?

A prayer group offers a means for people to live in community the Christian prayer life as found in Ephesians 6:18, Philippians 4:6 and James 5:13-16 .

Prayer in is an important ministry. In our tradition prayer is often considered a personal matter. Prayer, however, is also a part of our communal life together as church. For the church to be faithful and healthy, prayer must be woven into our spiritual essence.

For many congregations it is helpful to have a visible and covenanted prayer group. This group is usually accessible for people desiring of prayer for themselves or others. Such a group demonstrates the intentionality of the community to hold each other in life's challenges and share in life's joys.

It is also important to acknowledge that there are people who experience a call to pray for others and the world. A covenanted group affirms this important ministry and offers community for this work.

We traditionally speak of a number of kinds of prayer: prayer of thanksgiving and praise, prayer of supplication and petition, and prayer of intercession. There are, however, many other ways to pray... including prayer without words.



Traditionally a prayer group is different from a meditation group. Many prayer groups, however, would benefit from a time of silent or guided meditation. Broadening our understanding of prayer can only help us to enter into deeper relationship with God and with one another.

Resources

- ◆ The World Community for Christian Meditation: http://www.worldprayers.org/archive/index/meditations_index.html
- ◆ Open Heart Meditation Prayer: <http://www.heartsanctuary.org/open-heart-meditation>
- ◆ Unbinding Your Church (Heart, Soul, Gospel— a series of 4 books) by Martha Grace Reese. A resource for churches for prayer and faith sharing. http://www.gracenet.info/documents/071109_Unbinding_Church_sampler.pdf

Audio Guided Meditations: (approx. 30 min)

- * Opening the Heart Meditation- <http://goo.gl/LySiD2> transcript—http://www.open-your-heart.org.uk/downloads/Open_Heart_Meditation_Script.pdf
- * Loving Kindness Meditation—<http://goo.gl/k5kNSS> transcript—<http://www.beliefnet.com/Health/2000/07/Opening-The-Heart.aspx>

O God, open to us today the sea of your mercy and water us with full streams from the riches of your grace and springs of your kindness. Make as children of quietness and heirs of peace: Kindle in us the fire of your love; sow in us your fear; strengthen our weakness by your power and bind us close to you and to each other.

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FROM THE DESK OF
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WHAT IS A PRAYER GROUP?

A Prayer Group is a group of people from the congregation who will commit to meeting regularly and intentionally to pray. Normally these groups focus particularly on Intercessory Prayer — prayer for others and for the world.



A Christian community either lives by the intercessory prayers of its members for one another, or the community will be destroyed. I can no longer condemn or hate other Christians for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble they cause me. In intercessory prayer the face that may have been strange and intolerable to me is transformed into the face of one for whom Christ died, the face of a pardoned sinner. That is a blessed discovery for the Christian who is beginning to offer intercessory prayer for others. As far as we are concerned, there is no dislike, no personal tension, no disunity or strife that cannot be overcome by intercessory prayer. Intercessory prayer is the purifying bath into which the individual and the community must enter every day. — **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** <http://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2013/05/dietrich-bonhoeffer-on-the-power-of-intercessory-prayer/>

Prayer Group Mandate

Discuss expectations of the members and of the group at least once a year.

Formal structure in the group is probably unnecessary, but one main contact person should be identified for, and accessible to, the congregation.

Commitment expected of members:

- ◆ Attendance at regular meetings
- ◆ Maintaining strict confidentiality
- ◆ Respect for different prayer styles
- ◆ Personal bible study, spiritual practice, commitment to prayer and spiritual growth



Because confidentiality is a high priority and there is an expectation to attend meetings, not all people who are interested in this ministry may fit the requirements. The group might have affiliates in the congregation who can be called upon to hold people and circumstance in prayer when confidentiality is not an issue. These people may also be tasked with a special ministry in prayer for the world.

Decide what happens at the meeting:

Will the meeting time consist mostly of shared prayer time ?

Is the main function of the meeting support, updating of prayer lists and congregational need?

Perhaps is it a combination of the two?

It will be important for the group to pray together, it will also be important to have common understanding of the main function of your time together so that people are not frustrated.

It is necessary also to discuss what is understood as confidentiality in the context of group sharing.

How will the people of the church relay their prayer requests to the group? Prayer box? Prayer wall? Prayer Book? A technological means? (be aware of confidentiality issues)

Helpful suggestions

- ◆ Maintain a regular meeting schedule, whether this is weekly or monthly by phone, internet or in person.
- ◆ Begin and end with prayer and / or meditation.
- ◆ Include a personal check-in. It is a helpful way to build trust, community, and share in the ministry together. Pray for each other, perhaps in teams of three.
- ◆ Do not be preoccupied with the functioning of the group. Resist worrying about officials and structure.
- ◆ Appoint a main contact person for the congregation that is **not** the minister, but who is willing and able to be in confidential consultation with the minister.
- ◆ Appoint someone to take responsibility for leadership in the meetings, or agree ahead of time who will take responsibility for a given meeting.
- ◆ Communicate with the minister about the work of the group. The minister might be a part of the group, but the group should not rely upon the presence of the minister.
- ◆ Covenant the ministry in a worship service so that the group and members are visible and known to the congregation, and prayer is elevated and integrated into the life and work of the church community. (adapt Celebrate God's Presence p. 578)
- ◆ Consider how the group might help enrich the prayer life of the church and its people. Understanding different spiritual needs and prayer forms may help the congregation toward a fuller prayer life and closer walk with God.
- ◆ Pray together a version of the Prayer of Jesus (Lord's Prayer) which is meaningful to the group.
- ◆ Consider organizing and leading a prayer vigil for the congregation in times of congregational decision, discernment, grief or relevant spiritual occasions.
- ◆ Be open to and willing to talk about other understandings and experiences of prayer. Realize that each of us come to God differently. Be willing to learn from one another.
- ◆ God knows God's own identity and the details of the person's need. You don't have to be wordy about it for God.
- ◆ Review periodically the means you are using to enable people to communicate prayer requests to the group. Is it working?

Group Prayer



Extemporaneous (off the cuff) prayer is not easy for everyone. People in the group may have varying degrees of comfort with this. It may be helpful to have available a few starter-prayers, such as the following:

- ◆ **OPENING** -Let us quiet ourselves now, let go of the whirling thoughts of our minds, and open ourselves to God in silence. (*a time of silence for meditation may be inserted here*)
We thank you God that you are present with us in this time and in this place. May we draw closer to you, that you may draw closer to us. May your Spirit move among us, awakening within us the power of love and hope as we gather in prayer before you.
- ◆ **THANKSGIVING** -We remember your goodness, O God of Grace, and we bring our *prayers of thanksgiving* to you... (people share their prayers)
- ◆ **SUPPLICATION** -Trusting in your loving care, O Merciful God, we bring our *prayers for ourselves* in word or in silence ...(people share their prayers)
- ◆ **INTERCESSION** -O Loving God, be with us as we *bring prayers for others*, offering names of persons and situations for whom we seek your blessing and healing... (people share their prayers)
- ◆ **CLOSING** -Now, O Holy One, we offer any remaining prayers to you...(people share their prayers) we entrust our prayers, spoken, silent, or cried from the heart, to you. We thank you that you know them before they are even on our lips. We pray that we may be transformed as a praying community to be as Christ in the world. (Prayer of Jesus may be offered)
- ◆ **MEDITATION** - See resources on back panel.

