

PREPARING FOR PRAYER & WORSHIP

•Preparing for Prayer and Worship

A significant part of any retreat is the opportunity for prayer and worship. The building of community through other types of sharing and interaction can lead to very positive prayer experiences for youth. Participants pray and worship with peers who assist them in making the connection to their relationship with God. Prayer and worship on retreats isn't necessarily more creative. It is often more powerful because the young people are more receptive.

Preparing for prayer and worship has both short-range and long-range aspects. For example, some prayer services which are part of the retreat "content" may need to be prepared well in advance. Other prayer or liturgical experiences might be prepared with participants during the retreat itself. Such opportunities are very effective in building a sense of ownership for the prayer and a heightened sense of being the assembly that gathers to worship. Several articles and worksheets are included in this chapter to assist you in your preparations. The remainder of this section includes resources to assist you in preparing prayer and worship in retreat settings.

•The Art of Preparing Prayer and Worship

"Faith grows when it is well expressed in celebration. Good celebrations foster and nourish faith. Poor celebrations may weaken and destroy it."

--Music in Catholic Worship, #6

Faith grows when it is well expressed in celebration... Can you remember a prayer service, Mass or liturgy which really affected you in a deeply spiritual way? The kind of moment that helped to define your faith? What was special about it? Can you name the *elements* which contributed to making *that* experience different from many others in your life?

Poor celebrations may weaken and destroy (faith)... You can probably also remember other prayer services or Masses which did just the opposite. These moments were frustrating, disappointing or enraging. They left you feeling empty and perhaps even doubting your faith. What were the *elements* which made *that* experience such a difficult memory?

Good celebrations foster and nourish faith... The most significant element of prayer is God. Good prayer celebrations leave room for God to speak to us! They assume that God's grace is at work in human lives--that's what we mean when we say we believe in the Incarnation. God is always active in human events and how we pay attention to God's presence is an act of prayer.

Principle One: Pay Attention to the Context of Prayer

All prayer events take place in a context of *human* experience. That context includes the people involved, the location, the occasion, the time, local and world events, as well as personal feelings and circumstances. The human context of a prayer shapes the event and how people respond. The difference in contexts is why the same planned prayer service will be different every time it is used. Paying attention to the mix of those elements, that context, is the first principle in *the art of preparing prayer*. Just as a good artist knows the effect of the medium which he/she is using, so too, a liturgical artist is aware of how the context will shape the prayer experience.

There are elements of the context over which you have less control. For example, teens who have just experienced the accidental death of a classmate will be in a much different mood for prayer than if they were gathering for prayer during finals week or right before a vacation. Teens attending a Mass with other family members will feel different than if they are with a group of peers. A youth who has just had a fight with a best friend or parent will approach the time for prayer differently than the teen who just “aced” a test.

There are other elements of the context over which you may have choice, but are still quite variable. For example, praying in the morning will provide a context of different psychological energy than that of praying in the evening. However, anyone who has planned prayer for the morning after an all night lock-in knows it's not quite the same experience as the morning prayer which opens a retreat. Choosing to hold a prayer service outdoors may add a very creative touch to the experience -- except if the grass is wet with dew or the mosquitoes are ravenous! Some things you can only learn through experience. The art of preparing prayer involves allowing for a *diversity* of attitudes and situations to be present when we gather to pray. The preparation needs to provide a setting for all those experiences to be touched by God's love and presence.

Principle Two: Prepare, Then Plan

Since there are many elements which shape a prayer experience beyond its context, and because those elements are always different, our experience of prayer is always different. We can't know or predict all the elements which will affect a prayer we are planning -- which is why *planning* may be the wrong word to use. It's probably more accurate to say we are *preparing* prayer, which is a process that includes assessing the elements we are given and accounting for other variables which are part of the prayer context.

Preparing prayer and worship experiences is an art form because the persons who are preparing prayer have choices in mixing the right set of elements together, but also *allow for and expect* the spontaneity of the moment to create the experience. Like any artist, the prayer preparer takes basic elements (i.e. words, music, actions and time) and shapes them into a pattern of relationship. The final element is the people gathered which creates the dynamic of reaction and involvement. Most importantly, the preparer *allows for and expects* that God's grace will also shape and create the experience.

Does this mean that prayer can't be planned? Not at all! But good prayer experiences don't just happen. They're the result of paying attention to the context and to each other and then setting solid plans into place based on that awareness. Prepare, then plan.

Principle Three: Know the Requirements of Liturgical Prayer

All liturgies are prayer, but not all group prayers are liturgical. Liturgies involve ritual symbols and symbolic actions and are part of the regular celebrations that define faith communities. The Mass (Eucharistic liturgy) and other sacraments are forms of liturgical prayer. They have set rubrics (directions), patterns, prayers, readings and other elements which are required for their celebration and therefore, become part of the “context”. Persons who regularly prepare liturgies need additional training and formation in liturgical principles and practice. Preparing liturgies requires attention to the norms and guidelines established for their celebration.

Preparing liturgies for youth retreats can be problematic for persons not experienced in liturgical norms. The bottom line in this: Know Thy Stuff. If you are unfamiliar with liturgical preparation, seek assistance from someone who is competently trained. **No** liturgy is better than poor liturgy.

•Guidelines for Preparing Prayer

Here are a few basic steps to help you focus on the way to *prepare* non-eucharistic liturgies and worship. Preparation doesn't always happen in exactly this sequence, but the individual steps need to occur. You may have to adapt them to fit your local circumstance.

1. Gather Resources

The person responsible for preparing prayer needs to make sure that the necessary planning resources are available. Sometimes this is simply a matter of meeting to prepare in the place where all these things are naturally kept. Other times, this means gathering the resources and bringing them to the place where planning will take place. Lectionary, books of poetry or reflection, CD's/ tapes, instruments, hymnals or song collections, planning sheets, pens, etc. are some of the items needed.

2. Form a Team

It is sometimes easier to prepare prayer by yourself, but the resulting preparations won't be as inclusive as a team approach. A team effort allows more than one person's point of view, style of prayer, and awareness of elements to shape the prayer. Another positive aspect of a team approach is that more persons will feel a sense of *investment* in the prayer.

Choose A Planning Leader. The Planning Leader's role is to lead the group through the next steps of preparing the prayer. If it's not clear who the planning leader is, then the group should choose one of its members to take this responsibility. (This does not have to be the person who will be "up front" as presider during the prayer time.) Even though there is a Planning Leader, *everyone* involved in preparing the prayer should take responsibility for keeping notes of the overall plan and their own tasks.

Choosing a Presider. The Presider is the "up front" leader during prayer time. At a Mass, this person is a priest. In other types of prayer, any competent member of the community can serve in this role. The presider is the person who visibly leads the prayer, directs the action, and sometimes prays on behalf of the group. Have the group choose someone to serve in this role.

3. List the "Givens"

There are always certain elements for prayer which are given -- things that you must work with and cannot change. Make a list of which elements are set and which ones have some flexibility. These elements might include the place or time for prayer; how much time you will have; certain groups or persons who will be present; or the focus of the event itself. To ignore the givens or try to *change* them through prayer is risky and usually leads to disaster. To state the issue more positively, accepting the givens is a way of understanding that God is present in *every* moment and, therefore, *every* moment is an opportunity for prayer.

4. Assess the Context of This Prayer

The first job of your team is to talk about the **context** of this prayer. Some of these elements are included in the "givens" you named above, but other elements will also shape this opportunity for prayer. Below is a list of questions to ask. Have one member of the group take simple notes so that you can go back and refer to them in later preparation stages.

Who will be present for this prayer? What is their energy level likely to be? How mixed of a group will it be? What predominant reason is there for *this* group to be together? How well do they know each other? Have they ever been together before?

What is the occasion for this prayer? Are there other local or world events which have occurred in the recent past or are about to happen which will influence the mood or thinking of those gathered? What does this group need to say to each other? To God?

Where will the prayer be held? What are the physical limitations of the space? What makes it a good place to pray? Is the light and comfort level good for prayer? How will this space become a place where the group can become more aware of themselves and their relationships with God?

When will the prayer be held? What season of the liturgical year or secular calendar is being celebrated? What will the group be doing right before or after this prayer? Is this prayer part of a larger event? If the prayer is set to happen some time in the future, are there other events which might affect the outcome?

5. Share the Story and Make Connections to Real Life

It is within the above described context that we hear the Word of God. Sometimes that Word comes to us in the scriptures. Sometimes we have to listen to each other to understand how God is active in our world. Jesus told stories. In order to pray well, we need to listen to the scripture stories as well as contemporary stories of how God continues to be active in our lives.

Scriptures. What passages from the scriptures come to mind as you assess the context of the prayer? Is there a particular story or passage which relates to this gathered group?

Current “Stories”. What are the contemporary stories which help us to understand how God loves us? What are the personal faith stories which need to be told?

6. Decide Upon A Focus for Your Prayer Preparation

Prayer helps us to realize that every moment is an opportunity to become more aware of how God is present in our lives. Your team needs to discuss how this prayer moment can incorporate the ordinary and real events of daily life into prayer. Summarize those ideas into several words or a short phrase that can be used to focus the rest of your planning and preparation.

7. Brainstorm and Choose Prayer Ingredients

The focus statement gives you a good idea of what the prayer needs to accomplish. Now the team needs to suggest specific ingredients--religious songs, contemporary songs, poems, composed prayers, actions, or gestures. **Don't be too concerned about a theme!** If you've paid attention to the context, the right ideas will emerge naturally. More importantly, you must focus on the *function* of the various elements instead of whether they precisely match a theme. Below is a list of ingredients to consider:

Words and Readings: Consider the following: readings or prayers assigned in the sacramentary or Lectionary for that particular day; scriptural passages that reflect on the ideas you raised; poems or personal reflections; quotes or readings from other writers; composed prayers for the whole group or the presider to pray; moments for spontaneous prayer or intercessions; times of silence; and composed or spontaneous litanies.

Music and Song: Consider songs for the whole group to sing and music or songs for reflection/listening during other parts of the prayer time. Choose from music written for prayer and liturgy, or current songs which are appropriate for this prayer time.

Actions and Gestures: Consider actions, movement or gestures which will be part of prayer time. This can be as simple as the Sign of the Cross, or gathering in a circle and joining hands, or as artistic as dance or mime. The way we sit, stand, kneel, and move is part of the prayer. How will the whole group be involved? How will our bodies (not just our minds and mouths) pray?

Environment and Set-up: Consider the physical space where the prayer will be held. Think about how pieces of art, pottery, pictures, incense, decorations, light, seating, plants and other items might help those gathered to pray. Determine how the praying community will be greeted as they enter the worship space.

8. Review the Assembly's Role

Before you finalize your plans, review the ways that the whole group, not just the leaders, will be involved in the prayer. How will the people gathered be able to pray through words, singing or actions? Remember that your team is not responsible for the prayer--only the preparation. The prayer is the responsibility of *everyone gathered* so don't leave them out! Make sure your preparations allow for people to *pray together*, not be *prayed at!* Most importantly, make sure to leave room for God to speak to you, so that it can be *your* prayer as well.

9. Organize and Prepare the Movements of Prayer

Now you're ready to organize your choices into a pattern for prayer. A regular format helps people to become more comfortable with prayer and to pray with more confidence. It's hard to get fully involved in prayer if you don't know what's coming next. A recommended format for prayer is: **GATHER, LISTEN, RESPOND, SEND FORTH.**

GATHER. The first part of prayer needs to help the community to gather and become aware of their relationship to God and each other. As the group comes together to pray, what actions, gestures, music, proclamations, litanies or other preparations will help this to occur?

LISTEN. The next movement of the prayer gives those now gathered a chance to hear scriptures or current stories which allow us to reflect on how God is active in our lives. Readings, drama, videos, personal stories, witness reflections, music, psalms, gestures, litanies and silence are some elements which might be included.

RESPOND. The third movement of prayer reminds us that it's not enough to just hear the Word of God, we must become it. How will we respond to our awareness of God's unconditional love? Spontaneous and composed prayers, intercessory prayer, the Lord's Prayer, psalms, music, actions or gestures are options.

SEND FORTH. The final movement of prayer sends us forth with a renewed sense of our mission to live the Gospel everyday. Prayer helps us to focus on the big picture but also the simple ways that each of us needs to be a disciple to those around us. Spontaneous and composed prayers, music, actions, blessings, commissioning, and exchanging a sign of peace are some of the ways this can occur.

Once you have your prayer organized, the team can begin to prepare the specifics, set up, and set a time to evaluate. A **Planning Worksheet** is included in this section to assist you.

10. Make Final Preparations and Assign Responsibilities

Some additional preparation would include:

Creating a **Worship Aid**--a program with songs and prayers for the assembly. (See end of this section for **copyright information**.)

Writing out a **Prayer Script**.

Walking through the sequence with everyone involved.

Setting up the physical environment for the prayer.

Practicing readings, music cues, dramatic presentations, etc.

Getting ready to greet those who will pray.

11. Evaluate the Prayer Experience

Evaluation is the last important step because it helps you to know how to be better prepared the next time. Before you finish your planning meeting, decide upon a time when you will gather to evaluate this prayer service. Prayer evaluation should always ask the question, “**Did our preparations help the people to pray?**”. Describe evidence of how your preparations were successful. Determine what you learned which might help in the future. Avoid listing the things that went wrong or not as planned. Sometimes different elements don't go as well as planned, but nevertheless assist prayer.

PRAYER PREPARATION WORKSHEET

Occasion/Season/Feast: _____

Date/Day/Time: _____

Planning Leader: _____

Presider: _____

Other "Givens" to Note: _____

•DISCUSS THE CONTEXT OF THE PRAYER

Who: _____

What: _____

Where: _____

When: _____

•SHARE THE STORY: Notes and ideas for Scriptures and current stories

•BRAINSTORM ELEMENTS AND IDEAS FOR PRAYER

Words/Readings: _____

Music & Songs: _____

Actions/Gestures: _____

Environment/Set-Up: _____

PRAYER PREPARATION WORKSHEET

GATHER. The first part of prayer needs to help the community gather and become aware of their relationship to God and each other. As the group comes together to pray what actions, gestures, music, singing, proclamations, litanies or other preparations will help this to occur?

LISTEN. The next movement of the prayer gives those now gathered a chance to hear the scriptures or current stories which allow us to reflect on how God is active in our lives. Readings, drama, videos, personal stories, witness reflections, music, songs, psalms, gestures, litanies and silence are some elements which might be included.

RESPOND. The third movement of prayer reminds us that it's not enough to just hear the word of God, we must keep it. How will we respond to our awareness of how God continues to love us unconditionally? Spontaneous and composed prayers, intercessory prayer, the Lord's Prayer, psalms, music, actions or gestures are options.

SEND FORTH. The final movement of prayer sends us forth with a renewed sense of our mission to live the Gospel each and everyday. Prayer helps us to focus on the big picture but also the simple ways that each of us needs to be a disciple to those around us. Spontaneous and composed prayers, music, actions and gestures, blessings, commissionings, exchanging a sign of peace are some of the ways this can occur.

EUCCHARISTIC LITURGY PREPARATION WORKSHEET

GATHER

- Preparation Time for the Assembly: _____
- Call to Worship/Greeting: _____
- † Opening Song (or reversed with Greeting): _____
- Penitential/Sprinkling Rite: _____
- † Music during this Rite (opt.): _____
- † Glory to God (Song of Praise): _____
- Opening Prayer: _____

LISTEN

- First Reading: _____
- † Psalm Response: _____
- Second Reading: _____
- † Gospel Acclamation: _____
- Gospel: _____
- Homily/Reflection: _____
- Creed (Sundays and Feasts): Prayer: _____
- Intercessions: _____
- † Music for Intercessions (opt.): _____

RESPOND

- Preparation of Gifts/Table: _____
- † Music during Preparation: _____
- Preface Text: _____
- Eucharistic Prayer: _____
- † Preface Acclam. (Holy, Holy): _____
- † Memorial Acclamation: _____
- † Amen/Doxology: _____
- Lord's Prayer: _____
- Sign of Peace: _____
- † Lamb of God: _____
- Communion Distribution Plan: _____
- † Communion Songs: _____
- Prayer after Communion: _____

SEND FORTH

- Final: _____
- Blessings/Commissions: _____
- Dismissal: _____
- † Closing Song/s: _____

= Words/Readings Task Group

† = Music Task Group

= Environment and Ministers Task Group

The Lord's Prayer

Gather

Our Father, Who art in heaven,

Listen

Hallowed be Thy Name.

Thy Kingdom come.

Respond

Thy Will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,

Send Forth

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil. Amen.

•Copyright Information

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