
LEADING GROUP PRAYER AND REFLECTION

Prayer Leadership is genuine leadership. One who leads prayer or reflection well brings a quality of personal presence that creates a sense of welcome, safety and sacred space that enables participants to be fully present and open to the presence of the Holy in our midst. Without calling attention to him or herself, a good prayer leader helps the group to see their own connection to the divine within them and all around them.





REFLECTION, PRAYER: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

We often say within Ascension, “Let’s begin the meeting with a reflection.” What do we mean by this?

Reflection is an opportunity to pause, quiet ourselves and review what is before us and what is inside us. It is a non-judgmental way of perceiving in which we become more present to our experience. In reflection we listen to our experience, paying attention to how it is speaking to us and to what is occurring within us.

Reflection may incorporate a poem, story, paragraph, a letter from a patient or associate, song or other “content” to consider. (We may also call this content itself “a reflection”.)

Reflection may in itself open us to an encounter with a reality beyond us, even if God is not directly named or addressed. Or, reflection may include formal or group prayer.

Prayer is a turn toward God in some way—through words or conversation, through meditation or contemplation or even simply through an open heart. In prayer we become more aware of God’s presence in our lives. We seek a deeper understanding. We give thanks, or we seek guidance and grace. Praying as a group also opens us to a greater appreciation of God’s presence in our ministry, and inspires us to act as a community. Prayer can be an integral component of our personal and professional lives, and our provision of care.

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Leading reflection before a meeting should be considered as a part of the meeting, a way to be led into the meeting and a way the meeting is led. A reflective or prayerful disposition should be a continued quality within the meeting.

Before the meeting, ***consider the nature of the group and the purpose of the meeting.*** What has their journey been as a group? Where are they now as a group? Where are they being called beyond themselves? What disposition needs to grow in the group? What faith traditions and cultures are represented? What is the purpose of the meeting? Now choose a source for your reflection based on these questions.





In leading reflection, the first step is ***slowing down*** and refocusing attention. Consider asking the group to quiet themselves and be present before you speak. Speak slowly and meaningfully, pausing at commas and stopping at periods. The slow speaking helps facilitate a reflective spirit.

Pause for about seven seconds after you have finished reading any content to give the group time to ***be still and reflect*** on what they have heard. This may be uncomfortable at first for both the presenter and the group; however, if the presenter is comfortable with silence, the group will also be.

At the end of this silent pause ***a question may be presented*** such as, “What struck you in this selection?” or “What stood out for you in this story?” After you ask the question, be still and allow the group time to think.

You may invite the group to think quietly, write or share aloud in response.

The reflection may end here, or it could continue with silent or spoken prayer.

LEADING GROUP PRAYER

You can begin your preparation for leading group prayer with a ***personal prayer***, asking to be God’s instrument.

Review resources of existing prayers, including those listed in this document. The Mission Integration and Pastoral Care departments may provide resources as well, which are appropriate to the group, to the purpose of the meeting and to your comfort level with leading prayer. Or, you may choose to develop a prayer yourself to meet your group’s



specific needs. Using our own words, especially if they come from our heart, is often the most powerful form of prayer.

All of the practices described for Leading Group Reflection are also recommended for Leading Group Prayer.

In addition, when you lead formal prayer, pay close attention to the following:

Since prayer is addressed to God, ***how you address God*** can be guided by the composition and purpose of your group. Be attentive to the faith commitments of persons in the group; “Loving Spirit,” “Holy One” and “Spirit of Truth” are names for God that welcome all.

Create a ***welcoming environment*** by avoiding overly theological language or terms which are specific to one faith tradition, unless the entire group is of that tradition.

Music, art, symbol and gesture are all evocative elements that speak to the human spirit conveying meaning without words. Consider how music may set a tone or mood. Natural symbols, such as light or water, as well as religious or seasonal symbols, such as wreaths, can be used to focus the group. Consider how the group—in its diversity—may respond to the symbol as well as how the symbol will “speak” to the group.

Be open to the Spirit. Be open to being guided into this by the Spirit. Pay attention to your intuition, a hunch or a last-second feeling. The goal of prayer is to open us to discern and respond to what God is doing and how God is calling us to respond.

RESOURCES

- <https://communities.myascensionhealth.org> – Mission Integration > Workplace Spirituality > Prayer and Reflection Resources
- www.bhshealth.org/index.cfm?pageID=8 – Benedictine Health System
- www.chausa.org/prayers – Catholic Health Association
- *Daily We Seek You* – Sr. Jane McConnell, OSF
- *The Fire of Silence and Stillness* – Edited by Paul Harris
- *Healing with Heart* – Martin Helldorfer
- *Inviting God In* – Joyce Rupp
- *Leadership Promises for Every Day* – John C. Maxwell
- *Leadership Prayers* – Richard Kriegbaum
- *Making All Things New* – Henri Nouwen
- *A Minute of Margin: Restoring Balance to Busy Lives* – Richard A. Swenson, MD
- *Perseverance* – Margaret Wheatly
- *Prayers for Caregivers* – Patti Normile
- *To Bless the Space Between Us* – John O'Donohue
- *Workday Prayers* – Timothy Jones