

# Praying and Making Ritual



## Exploration: Discovery

### About this Setting

Praying and making ritual in daily life helps us begin to explore a deeper dimension of faith. Through prayer practices at home, at work, in school, or wherever we may be, we can begin to expand our expressions of faith beyond our Sunday morning practices to deeper levels of intimacy with God. Through experiences of making ritual we can begin to sense the mysteries of the holy that are woven into the tapestry of everyday life. These practices will introduce you to forms of prayer and ritual that will serve as a springboard to a life of discovering God.

The activities designed for the individual will help a person gain some comfort in sharing one's faith and living out that faith in daily life. The activities designed for the home and family are suggestions for family groups, however you define that, or for small groups who wish to gather to learn more about faith practices. In these suggested activities the participants will practice sharing their experiences of God and the way their faith informs their life with one another. This may help provide greater comfort for venturing out to share those thoughts with others.

The activities for the work place and community are ways you can witness to your own faith in the larger sphere of daily life. They may help you have more confidence sharing your faith beyond the comfort of home or church.

## About this Exploration

Prayer is a way to seek and find God. Rituals mark the time and space where we encounter God, and through those rituals we recall the story and share it with others. Prayer and ritual are expressions beyond ourselves. Prayer and rituals may go beyond words. From a fearful cry in the dark to the joyful laughter of celebration, prayer is an expression of our heart and innermost being. From the reflex of folded or outstretched hands in prayer to the many layers liturgy may have, ritual is a pattern etched into our lives.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:  
*Joshua 4:1-7, 19-24*  
*Psalm 23*

## Household and Family Life

### Exploring & Engaging Activity

#### 1 Greeting the Day (Easy Preparation)

**Supplies:** None

Amid the hustle and bustle of getting ready for work or school, getting kids dressed and fed, and making preparations for the day, prayer time can easily be pushed aside. Begin the day in a spiritually fulfilling way by incorporating a basic ritual into your normal routine. As you and your household wake up in the morning, greet the day with a short prayer similar to this one: *God, thank you for another day to live and serve you. May we see your face in all we meet. And may your Holy Spirit guide our hearts and our thoughts. Amen.* If your household likes to sing, you can also add a song to the ritual.

### Discerning & Deciding Activity

#### 2 Mindfulness Bell

**Supplies:**

- (optional) computer with Internet access
- website: "Mindfulness Bell," <http://www.mindfulnessdc.org/bell/index.html>, or watch, clock, or cell phone with an alarm

A mindfulness bell is a meditation aid that helps people focus their attention and center their lives. A mindfulness bell rings randomly or at set intervals throughout the day. The ringing bell reminds you to bring your thoughts and your focus back to something important. You could choose a relationship, an event, a theological idea, a spiritual word or phrase, or a scripture for your focus. If you are often at a computer throughout the day, visit the "Mindfulness Bell" website and set the tool to ring at your preferred interval or at a random interval. As long as you keep the website open on your desktop, the bell will ring at the interval you desire. If you don't have a computer, your mindfulness bell could be a cell phone, a watch or clock set to ring regularly, a city alert siren that is tested regularly, or any other specific noise that can draw your attention.

## Sending & Serving Activity

### 3 Memory Stones

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- small river stone or pebble for each person in the household
- permanent marker

Read Joshua 4:1–7, 19–24. When the Israelites crossed the Jordan River, Joshua instructed them to make a stone monument to serve as a reminder of what God had done. Making a monument in memory of God’s action can be a meaningful ritual for you, too. Gather your family around a table and invite family members to take turns reading Joshua 4:1–7, 19–24 as they are able. Hand each person a small stone, and invite everyone to think of a time when God helped him or her. Write a word or phrase, or draw a picture, on the stone. Younger children may want to dictate a word for a parent to write, or they may want to draw a small picture or symbol and explain it to you. Gather the stones and stack them somewhere in your home where family members will see them regularly. Tell your family that when you all see the stones, you’ll remember what God has done in your lives.

If you are a one-person household, use several stones and memories of God’s activity in your life to make your memorial.

## Individual and Personal Life

### Exploring & Engaging Activity



### 4 Praying the Psalms (Easy Preparation)

**Supplies:**

- Bible

Sometimes words escape us. The experiences of our lives are often beyond words. This can present a challenge to prayer when there is something we want to say to God, but don’t know how to say it. The psalms can be a particularly helpful resource for informing and guiding our prayers. Many people memorize certain psalms to assist in this process. Psalm 23 is one of the most commonly memorized and prayed psalms in the Bible. Read this psalm slowly and deliberately. Pause between each line and each stanza, thinking about the words and topics, and begin to merge them with your own prayers. For instance, if you are not familiar with shepherds, what other metaphor would you use for God? In what ways does God provide for your daily needs? (Still waters, green pastures) In what ways does God provide for you in difficult or emergency situations? (Darkest valley, rod, staff) In what ways does God promise to be with you in the future? (All the days of my life) Use this exercise with other psalms based on your familiarity or the particular situation about which you are praying.

## Discerning & Deciding Activity

### 5 Holy Smoke

**Supplies:**

- candle or incense
- lighter or matches

For many people, prayer is aided by having a tangible or visual aid. By lighting a candle or burning incense while you pray, you can bring a relational and symbolic depth to your prayers. If you use a candle, you can imagine the flame is the living presence of God with you. Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.” A candle sheds light in darkness, either of the day or of your mood. When the candle is extinguished, imagine the flame of God’s presence has entered your heart. The smoke rising from the extinguished candle is God’s presence going everywhere. Whether you use a candle or incense, you can allow the rising smoke to symbolize your prayers rising to God.

## Sending & Serving Activity

### 6 Praying with Icons

**Supplies:**

- artwork: poster: “Guatemala: Processions” by Betty LaDuke, [https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW\\_PRODUCT=true&product\\_id=15626&store\\_id=1401](https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401)

Christians in many parts of world find icons to be a transformational aid for prayer. Through looking at a God-inspired work of art we can begin to discern ways God might be inspiring us. Spend time gazing at the picture. Ask yourself the following questions.

- What might God be trying to say to or through this artist?
- What might the various symbols mean?
- Who are the people in the picture, and what is going on in their lives?
- What might God be calling me to do or to be?
- Where would I be in this procession? Why am I involved?

## Work Place and Communal Life

### Exploring & Engaging Activity

#### 7 Setting a Prayer Alarm (Easy Preparation)

**Supplies:**

- watch, cell phone, or clock with an alarm

Prayer can be understood simply as spending time with God. In order to spend time with God, we have to set aside time. This practice can help you become more intentional about spending time in prayer with God. Use a watch, cell phone, or clock with an alarm. Set the alarm to go off at the time of day you normally are on a break from work or study. The ringing alarm serves as your reminder to put aside everything else and spend time with God now. If your clock, watch, or phone will allow you to set the alarm to go off every day, it can help you bring regularity to your prayer life.

### Discerning & Deciding Activity

#### 8 Send God an E-mail

**Supplies:**

- computer or smart phone with Internet access and email capabilities
- website: "Email 2 God," <http://email2god.com/>
- website: "Send Email to God," <http://sendemailtogod.com/>

As Internet technology increasingly becomes the main medium of expression in our culture, the distractions from prayer life increase. But we can also use technology to enhance and build up our prayer lives, too. Whether you're using a computer or a smart phone, you can pray by sending God an e-mail. Simply type your prayers and send them to God. Now, God doesn't necessarily have an e-mail address, but there are ways to send God an e-mail. You also can send the e-mails back to yourself knowing that God has seen your prayer. You can send them to a trusted friend, a prayer partner, or a pastor, knowing that they will pray for you, or you can send the email through a website designed for prayers, such as "Email 2 God" or "Send Email to God."



## Sending & Serving Activity

### 9 Marketplace Prayers

**Supplies:** None

The next time you go to the grocery store, the mall, or a department store, look at the trip as an opportunity for prayer. Traveling up and down the aisles of the grocery store and placing your items in your cart is a perfect opportunity to give God thanks. Thank God for the food you and the other people in the store have the ability to purchase. Thank God for the variety of nourishment that has been provided. Thank God for all the people who are involved in bringing this food to the store. Pray to God on behalf of other people who cannot afford to eat as well. Buy one or two items to donate to a food pantry. As you look at all the clothing in a department store or at the mall, give God thanks for providing clothing for you to wear. Thank God for all the people who labored to make this clothing. Pray to God on behalf of other people who don't have access to adequate clothing. When you make a purchase, commit yourself to donating an item of clothing to a social service agency.

### Reflect

Like any discipline, it takes more than a one-time attempt to decide if this is something you want to pursue. What new avenue for prayer did you discover in these activities? Which one will you continue to try out? Which of your prayer practices did you affirm? In what settings did you use these activities? What response did you get from others you recruited for these activities?

# Praying and Making Ritual



## Exploration: Scripture

### About this Setting

Like many other activities we consider indispensable parts of our daily routine, such as reading or driving, prayer requires learning in order for us to effectively do it regularly. Scripture shows us various models of prayer from which we can learn. We can also learn from scripture how ritual can serve as a meaningful part of our day-to-day experiences. These practices will help you become familiar with scriptural prayer and ritual practices so that you might begin to integrate them into your own pattern of living.

The activities designed for the individual will help a person gain some comfort in sharing one's faith and living out that faith in daily life. The activities designed for the home and family are suggestions for family groups, however you define that, or for small groups who wish to gather to learn more about faith practices. In these suggested activities the participants will practice sharing their experiences of God and the way their faith informs their life with one another. This may help provide greater comfort for venturing out to share those thoughts with others.

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## About this Exploration

Scripture is filled with diverse and helpful models of prayer and stories of how faithful people make ritual. At the end of David's reign, in the presence of all gathered, he offers a mighty prayer of praise and thanksgiving to God. The disciples watch Jesus and see how Jesus' ministry flows out of his prayer life. They ask longingly, "Lord teach us to pray." Jesus provides them with a prayer that is still used by many people of faith today. We do not have to fear or wonder if our prayers are acceptable to God. We can know that God welcomes and delights in our conversation.

### BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**Luke 11:1-13**

**1 Chronicles 29:10-18**

## Household and Family Life

### Exploring & Engaging Activity



#### 1 Bless the Children (Easy Preparation)

##### Supplies:

- Bible

Read Genesis 27:27-29, 28:1-5. Isaac blessed his sons, Jacob and Esau, with words of hope and vision for their future. In the ritual of blessing his children, he spoke his prayers for them with expectation of their fulfillment. As Jacob and Esau heard their father's blessings, they witnessed the full measure of his love for them and his desires for their future. Think of the children in your family, either your own children or children in your extended family, as well as children of your friends and children in your church or neighborhood. Dream of what good things you desire to see come in their lives. Lay your hand upon their forehead and offer a prayer of blessing upon them. A blessing of the children could naturally be incorporated into your family traditions and customs, perhaps during holiday gatherings or evening meals. Birthdays are a good opportunity to offer prayers of blessing and future hopes. Write these in the birthday card you send. If you are not able to physically lay your hand upon a child, you could do this symbolically by holding a picture, via a phone call, or in a letter.

## Discerning & Deciding Activity



#### 2 A Thanksgiving and Praise Assembly

##### Supplies:

- Bible
- artwork: "No-Traveller's Borne" by Jess, [https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW\\_PRODUCT=true&product\\_id=17101&store\\_id=1401](https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=17101&store_id=1401)

Read 1 Chronicles 29:10-18. David called all the people together for a ceremony to hand over his reign to his son Solomon. As they gathered, David prayed, thanking God for all the good things that had occurred during his reign. He offered mighty words of praise and thanksgiving, and he acknowledged God as the maker, giver, and owner of all things. Set aside a time to gather your household for a thanksgiving and praise assembly. Display the picture in an area where everyone can see it. Say, "All things belong to God, the heavens and the earth and all that are in them." Then ask each person to name something for which he or



she is thankful. Close by saying aloud a prayer of thanksgiving and praise, using the words of David as an example.

## Sending & Serving Activities

### ③ Small Gifts, Big Reminders

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- small favorite snack for each person in your household
- note card for each person in your household
- tape
- pen or pencil

Read Luke 11:1–13. Jesus taught his followers that God likes to hear and answer our prayers. He said that just like parents give their children good gifts, so God gives even better gifts. This fun ritual can lead your family to understanding the importance of asking God for the desires of our hearts. Secretly write a note to each member of the household on a note card. Include the following words: “This gift is given to you in love. The gifts given to you by God are even greater than this. Luke 11:1–13.” On the opposite side of the card write: “Ask. Seek. Knock. God will give you all that you need.” Tape the cards to gifts and surprise everyone with a treat and a special gift of prayer.

## Individual and Personal Life

### Exploring & Engaging Activity



### ④ Novenas (Easy Preparation)

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- paper and pen or pencil

Read Luke 18:1–8. Jesus spoke highly of persistence in prayer when he told the story about the persistent widow. Her persistence was eventually rewarded. In the Roman Catholic tradition, people use Novenas to pray with persistence. “Novena” comes from the Latin word *novenus*, meaning “nine.” A novena is a prayer that is repeated on nine consecutive days asking God to meet a special need. By repeating a prayer on nine consecutive days, you can develop persistence in prayer. Think of a situation in your life that is currently of utmost importance. Write a short, easy-to-remember prayer about this situation. Pray this prayer each day for nine days.

## Discerning & Deciding Activity

### 5 Let Yourself Lament

**Supplies:**

- Bible

Read 1 Samuel 1:1–18. Hannah was overwhelmed with grief. Her whole adult life she prayed to God for a son, and one never came. One day as she was worshipping she was completely overcome with grief. God had not answered her prayers. She sobbed tears of lament. If we learn anything from Hannah, it's that it is all right to lament. It is all right to cry over unanswered prayers. In fact, our unintelligible sobbing can be a prayer of its own. One prayer practice that can bring depth and authenticity to our prayer lives is to allow ourselves to lament. If you have a prayer that is unanswered, tell God how you feel about it. Cry if you need to. Allow yourself to be completely sincere in your conversation with God. Your brokenness is a part of your life God wants to share.

## Sending & Serving Activity

### 6 Write Your Own Psalm

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- paper and pen or pencil

The psalms can be very informative for our own prayers. Every range of human emotion is expressed within the psalms. Sometimes we even pray the words of the psalms themselves. But we can also go a step further and begin to shape our own words and expressions in the model of the psalmists. Scan through the psalms and find one that expresses how you feel right now. Read the psalm and become familiar with its form and pattern. Notice what topics are addressed in what order. Notice how long or short the phrases are, and how many phrases are grouped together. Now try and write your own prayer in the form of a psalm. With regular practice this exercise will become easier. Over time you'll begin to notice the psalms dramatically reshaping the patterns of your prayers.

## Work Place and Communal Life

### Exploring & Engaging Activity

#### 7 Contracts and Covenants (Easy Preparation)

**Supplies:**

- Bible

Read Genesis 31:43–50. Most people have signed some sort of contract in their lives. Perhaps you’ve signed a lease, a mortgage, or a loan for a car or an appliance. Maybe you’ve even signed business contracts in your employment. As you read the scripture, notice that when Jacob and Laban made a deal, they didn’t just sign a contract. They made a monument and swore a covenant before God. The monument was the visual reminder of the agreement that would serve as a contract today. But in their words, they asked God’s blessing upon each other. And, they remembered that God was a witness to their agreement. The next time you sign a contract, make a business deal, or agree to a covenant, remember that God is a witness to the whole thing. Also, try and model Laban and Jacob’s actions and ask God for blessing upon the other person or party involved.

### Discerning & Deciding Activity

#### 8 Dedicating Children

**Supplies:**

- Bible

Read Luke 2:21–22. When Jesus was a child his parents took him to Jerusalem to present him at the temple. In many Christian communities children are brought before the congregation for baptism or for dedication. In most cases, the parents speak vows agreeing to raise the children in Christian faith and love. The congregation agrees to assist the parents in this sacred charge. If children are dedicated or baptized in your church, recognize the significance of this ritual for the congregation, for the parents, and for the children. As you speak the words of covenant, ask yourself, “How can I help these parents? What role can I play in the faith development of these children?” The goal here is to become more than a spectator in this holy ritual; the goal is to actively participate in it.

Consider outlining a year-long plan of support and nurture for children who have been baptized or dedicated. What might you do each month on the anniversary of the event to continue to show your concern and care? This does not have to be elaborate, but could be as simple as sending a note card, making a phone call, stopping for a visit. It’s important that these significant occasions actually mean something to the family and the congregation.

## Sending & Serving Activity

### 9 Benedictions

**Supplies:**

- Bible

Read Numbers 6:22–26. The blessing that Moses gave to Aaron and his sons is familiar in many faith communities. Many pastors often speak this same blessing to their congregations at the end of worship services. Benediction is the ritual of speaking a blessing upon another person, sometimes in greeting, but more commonly in farewells. The next time you're on a phone call or talking with someone face to face, think about how the conversation is going to end. Instead of saying, "Goodbye," think about what words of blessing you might offer, such as "God bless you," "Traveling mercies," "Godspeed," or some other words of prayerful blessing.

### Reflect

The Bible is full of prayers and descriptions of ritual. When Jesus gathered with his disciples for Passover, the evening teemed with prayer and ritual. How might you incorporate more prayer in your family rituals? What new rituals of praying have you discovered that you might use or adapt in your family or in your work? Commit to reading at least two psalms each day. Mark those that speak to your current situation. What words or phrases of that psalm will you use in your prayers?



# Praying and Making Ritual



## Exploration: Discipleship

### About this Setting

Prayer and ritual are important to Christians, not just because they enhance our faith journey but also because they shape it. Through participation in Christian ritual and through intentional focus in prayer, we become more like Jesus, the one who calls us disciples. We follow the path that leads to our fully becoming the people we were created to be. These practices will help you begin to practice prayer and ritual in a more intuitive way so that they can become a more natural part of your discipleship.

The activities designed for the individual will help a person gain some comfort in sharing one's faith and living out that faith in daily life. The activities designed for the home and family are suggestions for family groups, however you define that, or for small groups who wish to gather to learn more about faith practices. In these suggested activities the participants will practice sharing their experiences of God and the way their faith informs their life with one another. This may help provide greater comfort for venturing out to share those thoughts with others.

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## About this Exploration

The practice of prayer and ritual incorporate “being” and “doing” when applied to discipleship. Mentors in scripture and faith tradition have nurtured others in the art of praying. Paul calls us to prayer as part of life. The invitation to rejoice always, to pray without ceasing, and to give thanks in all circumstances informs our daily discipleship. This attitude of prayer embraces the rhythm of life so that prayer becomes as natural as breathing. Rituals have been handed down that followers continue to use and find meaning in, as well as to interpret and create new ritual in contemporary contexts.

### BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

***Deuteronomy 26:1-11***  
***1 Thessalonians 5:16-24***

## Household and Family Life

### Exploring & Engaging Activity

#### 1 Wailing Wall (Easy Preparation)

##### Supplies:

- pad of Post-it Notes® or Sticky Notes®
- pen or pencil
- (optional) computer with Internet access
- website: “Window on the Wall,” <http://www.aish.com/w/e/>

In Jerusalem there is a place called the Wailing Wall where people go to pray and to leave their prayers. It’s the last remaining portion of the ancient Jewish temple. You can actually see the wall and even leave a prayer at the wall by going to the website “Window on the Wall.”

You can designate a “wailing wall” in your own home, too. As a family, discuss which wall in your home will be your wailing wall. As prayer concerns arise in the normal schedule of your lives, write them on a Post-it Notes® or Sticky Notes® and stick them on your wailing wall. Your prayers are now set before the rest of the household and they can join you in prayer. When prayers have been answered, you can either throw the notes away, or place them on another wall designated as the “answered prayer wall.”

### Discerning & Deciding Activity

#### 2 Prayer Walk

##### Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- video: “Down to the River to Pray,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F1FQqSGxBso>

Gather your household around the computer and watch the YouTube video “Down to the River to Pray.” Watch it again. As the words become familiar, sing along. Then go outside and take a walk together. As you walk, be mindful of other people you meet, wildlife or flora you see, and everything else going on around you. Talk about the things going on in your lives as well. Stop somewhere along your journey and pray about the things you have encountered, seen, and discussed.

## Sending & Serving Activity

### ③ First Fruits

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- all the canned and boxed goods from your pantry or cupboard

Have your family members help you take all the canned and boxed foods out of your pantry or cupboard and place them on a table or counter top. Read Deuteronomy 16:1–11. As Moses addressed the Israelites who were about to enter the Promised Land, he commanded them to set apart the first fruits of their labors to give to God. This ritual would serve as a tangible symbol of gratitude to God and a statement of trust that God would continue to provide for them. As you look at the items you gathered, thank God for the food before you. Take several of your favorite items, the ones you enjoy the most, and set them aside to donate to a food pantry. Return the remaining food to your pantry. As you deliver the items to the food pantry, remind yourself of the ways God has provided for you and take confidence that God will continue to do so.

## Individual and Personal Life Life

### Exploring & Engaging Activity



### ④ Resting in God's Presence (Easy Preparation)

**Supplies:** None

Involving our bodies in prayer can help us have a more holistic approach to our spiritual lives. There are many different types of body prayer with differing ranges of sophistication. As a beginning, try this basic practice. Sit in a comfortable position with your palms facing down on your lap and your eyes closed. For a minute or two allow yourself to enter God's presence, letting go of any anxieties you may have. Turn your palms face up. For a minute or two raise your petitions to God. Ask for the things you need and keep your hands open to receive what God has for you. Bring your hands together and lock your fingers together in a prayer position. Spend the next minute or two silently listening to God. If you enjoy this form of prayer you may expand the suggested times to your preference. You might try other prayer positions as well:

- kneeling on a bench or pillow
- hands raised in the air above your head
- lying prostrate—stretched out with face on the ground
- hands crossed across your chest in the shape of a pretzel

## Discerning &amp; Deciding Activity

 5 Prayer Inventory**Supplies:**

- Bible
- paper and pen or pencil
- poster: “Tibetan Yellow Monks Using Prayer Wheels” by Landor, <http://www.art.com/products/p12370511-sa-i1740258/henry-savage-landor-tibetan-yellow-monks-using-prayer-wheels.htm?sorig=0>

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24. Paul encourages Christians to pray without ceasing. Look at the picture of the monks with the prayer wheels and try and imagine what it would be like to pray constantly. This can be a hard concept to grasp if we don’t recognize all the ways we pray without even knowing it. Sit down with paper and a pen or pencil and take a prayer inventory. List all the ways you pray every day. Think about the times a hymn stuck in your head, the times you silently thought about someone you care for, the times you talked to God, and the times you just listened, the times you looked at something beautiful in nature and said, “Oh, my God.” Now list ways you can incorporate prayer more frequently in your day. Be aware of the many times you say or hear someone else say, “Oh, my God!” How can you turn that statement into a prayer, or how might you refrain from using that phrase if you don’t really intend it as a prayer?

## Sending &amp; Serving Activity

## 6 Prayer Closet

**Supplies:**

- closet, small room, or specially designated place in your home

Have you ever heard someone say they’re “going to the prayer closet”? Or, have you ever gone to the sanctuary of your church when services weren’t being held just to pray? Many Christians find value in designating a special place to pray. Designate a small room, a closet, another place in your home, or even a chair or a corner to be your prayer closet, perhaps a chair with a particular view. Each day go to this place to pray. Make sure you use that specific location just for prayer. Remind yourself this is a holy place, a place where you intend to meet God on a regular basis. As you engage in this practice you’ll find yourself more easily drawn into prayer when you’re in this place you’ve set aside as holy.



## Work Place and Communal Life

### Exploring & Engaging Activity



#### 7 Prayer Partner Appointments (Easy Preparation)

**Supplies:** None

Praying together can be tremendously encouraging, uplifting, and inspirational. When we share our prayers with other people, we share our lives with them, too. Recruit a friend, coworker, classmate, or relative who would be willing to become your prayer partner. Your prayer partner could even be your spouse, partner, or significant other. Schedule a specific time of day once each week to pray together. Make this appointment a top priority. Meet together during this time each week to pray for and with each other. When you're unable to meet face to face, keep your appointment by phone and know that you are still praying together in spirit.

### Discerning & Deciding Activity

#### 8 A Lunch Date with God

**Supplies:**

- sack lunch

Lunch time is a time when you might normally eat with other people. You might be taking a business client to lunch or meeting a friend for conversation. Lunch dates are times when we do business, explore our friendships, and get to know one another. Consider making a lunch date with God for a change. Pack a sack lunch and find a quiet place away from other people to eat your lunch. As you eat be aware of God's presence with you. Pray and have a conversation with God. Let your relationship with God develop in this intentional time together.

## Sending & Serving Activity

### 9 Coffee Conversations

**Supplies:**

- (optional) a good book
- money for a beverage at your favorite coffee shop

Coffee shops are places where conversations often occur spontaneously. On your next visit to a coffee shop, plan on spending some extra time. Try striking up a conversation with someone you don't know. Or, allow yourself to be drawn into a conversation by someone else. A good book can serve as an excellent conversation starter. The key for these conversations is to take notice of God's presence and action in the conversation. What might God be saying to you through this other person? What might God be saying to him or her through you? Be mindful of good manners and coffee shop etiquette as you engage in this practice.

### Reflect

The invitation to rejoice always, to pray without ceasing, and to give thanks in all circumstances informs our daily discipleship. This attitude of prayer embraces the rhythm of life so that prayer becomes as natural as breathing. As you used these activities, what did you notice about yourself in your day-to-day rituals? Did you find yourself breathing more prayers? In what ways were you more mindful of prayer in your daily circumstances?



# Praying and Making Ritual



## Exploration: Christian Tradition

### About this Setting

Many of us have had rituals and prayer practices handed down to us. Whether they are meal time prayers taught by our parents, Sunday School traditions led by our teachers, family holiday traditions, or bedtime stories with our own children, the things passed on from generation to generation shape our experience of the holy. These practices will help you to claim rituals and prayer practices that have been handed down to you from others as well as those that have been handed down by Christians throughout the ages.

The activities designed for the individual will help a person gain some comfort in sharing one's faith and living out that faith in daily life. The activities designed for the home and family are suggestions for family groups, however you define that, or for small groups who wish to gather to learn more about faith practices. In these suggested activities the participants will practice sharing their experiences of God and the way their faith informs their life with one another. This may help provide greater comfort for venturing out to share those thoughts with others.

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## About this Exploration

Christians pray and engage in rituals to draw closer to God and participate in God's vision of a world of justice and peace. Christians across time and cultures stand in a tradition in which we receive God's blessings and share that experience with others. Opening the treasury of Christian traditions can help us express our thanksgiving, laments, petitions, and celebrations. Prayer strengthens our relationship with God as we both speak and listen to the Divine. As we recall God's acts of faithfulness in the past, we are encouraged that God is present with us today.

### BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**Matthew 6:7-15**  
**1 Corinthians 11:17-26**

## Household and Family Life

### Exploring & Engaging Activity



#### 1 Creating a Baptismal Font (Easy Preparation)

##### Supplies:

- bowl, of any size, filled half way with water
- (optional) small indoor water fountain

In many Christian traditions a baptismal font or pool is located in the sanctuary, sometimes near the entrance. In some churches, the font or pool is open and filled with water. People enter worship and dip their hands in the water, sometimes making the sign of the cross afterward. This act assists them in the important activity of remembering their baptism. This simple, but rich, ritual can also be done at home. You may find deep significance in creating a home baptismal font of your own. Fill a decorative bowl half full of water. Place it in a special location within your home, preferably near the main entrance. You could also use a small indoor water fountain. The flowing water mimics the water of a stream. As you and others in the home enter or leave, dip your fingers in the water to remember your baptism. It is important to change the water on a regular basis to keep it fresh. This ritual can help you center your perspective on your faith.

## Discerning & Deciding Activity



#### 2 Baptism Testimonies

##### Supplies:

- artwork: "Baptism of Christ" by Pheoris West, [https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW\\_PRODUCT=true&product\\_id=17101&store\\_id=1401](https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=17101&store_id=1401)
- computer and Internet access
- video: "Wash O God Our Sons and Daughter," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MHEvIRiqBYo>

Gather everyone around the computer. As you watch the YouTube video "Wash O God Our Sons and Daughters," sing along together. After the video, spend time together remembering each person's baptism, as appropriate. Have everyone examine "Baptism of Christ" by Pheoris West. You may want to wonder together about the images you see in the picture and their connection with baptism. After this time, ask those who have been baptized to describe what they remember or what it means to them. Those who were baptized as infants might talk about their



confirmation experiences. Those who have not yet been baptized can feel free to ask questions about baptism. One way to nurture faith in children and young people is for them to hear stories from older generations about important rituals such as baptism. They may be curious about: how you decided to be confirmed or baptized, who helped you or supported you, what classes or preparation was required, what did it feel like, how was the occasion celebrated, and so forth.

### Sending & Serving Activity

#### ③ Pilgrimage

**Supplies:** None

For centuries Christians have found meaning in the ritual of pilgrimage. A pilgrimage is a journey to some place that is sacred, holy, or significant. A pilgrimage can be as simple as a journey to church, as intense as a trip to Jerusalem or a historic cathedral, or as familiar as taking a trip back to the place you grew up. Plan a trip together and make it a pilgrimage. However long or short the journey, pay close attention to the way God interacts with you at your destination and on the journeys there and back.

### Individual and Personal Life

#### Exploring & Engaging Activity

#### ④ Prayer of Examen (Easy Preparation)

**Supplies:** None

St. Ignatius of Loyala developed the Prayer of Examen as a way to merge our perception of the holy and the ordinary and to weave prayer into the focus of our everyday experiences. To try this adapted version, allow ten to twenty minutes before going to bed. Find a quiet and comfortable place to sit. Beginning at the morning and moving to the evening, reflect on the experiences of the entire day. Ask yourself where you encountered God today. Give God thanks for the good things that happened. Seek God's help with the trials that continue. Ask forgiveness for the mistakes you may have made. Close the prayer by asking God for a night of safe rest and a new day tomorrow.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities

### 5 Lectio Divina

**Supplies:**

- Bible

Lectio Divina, Latin for “divine reading” or “holy reading,” is a centuries old prayer practice. Choose a passage of scripture to read. It helps if you are continuously reading a particular book or following a lectionary. There are four movements to this practice.

- *Lectio*: Read the passage through slowly and deliberately, grasping onto a word or phrase that stands out.
- *Meditatio*: Meditate upon the passage asking what the Holy Spirit might be saying to you.
- *Oratio*: Speak to God, and listen as though you’re having a conversation.
- *Contemplatio*: Rest in the presence of God, contemplating how good it is to be in God’s company.

## Sending & Serving Activity

### 6 Complementing the Lord’s Prayer

**Supplies:**

- Bible

It can be helpful to root our prayer lives in the great prayers handed down to us through Christian tradition. One such prayer is Jesus’ own prayer, often called the Lord’s Prayer. Read Matthew 6:1–15. Try using the prayer found in verses 9–13 as your own prayer. If you are already familiar with the Lord’s Prayer and the version you know is different, use the version you know. There are slight variations in wording, most often seen in the petition “Forgive us our . . .” Some people use the words “debts” and “debtors,” while others say “trespasses” and “those who trespass against us.” Still others use a more contemporary version, saying “sins” and “those who sin against us.” All versions are acceptable. Use the following to merge your prayers with the Lord’s Prayer.

“Our Father in heaven,”  
*Insert your own way of addressing God.*

“hallowed be your name.”  
*What is another way you can praise God’s name?*

“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”  
*Ask God for those things you believe God desires to happen in the world.*

“Give us this day our daily bread.”  
*Ask God for the things you need.*

“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”  
*Ask God for forgiveness for your own sin and for help in forgiving other people.*

“And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.”  
*Ask for God’s protection and help in all things.*

## Workplace and Communal Life

### Exploring & Engaging Activities



#### 7 Greetings and Blessings (Easy Preparation)

**Supplies:**

- Bible

The letters attributed to the Apostle Paul have been formative for Christian faith since they were first written. Paul had a ritual of always greeting those whom he addressed with a blessing. To get a feeling for the way Paul greeted others with blessing, read some, or all, of the following scripture passages: Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1: 2–3, 1 Corinthians 1: 2, Galatians 1:2b–3, Ephesians 1:2, Philip-pians 1:2, Colossians 1: 2, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 1:2, 1 Timothy 1: 2, 2 Timothy 1:2, Titus 1:4, and Philemon 1:3. As you meet people at work, at school, or out in public, try your own style of greeting people with a blessing. You may try to formulate wording of your own, or you may simply make it a habit to greet others with courtesy and dignity.

### Discerning & Deciding Activity

#### 8 Labyrinth

**Supplies:**

- computer with Internet access
- website: “Drawing a Seven-Circuit Labyrinth,”  
<http://www.lessons4living.com/drawing.htm>
- pencil and paper, masking tape, rocks and items from nature
- meditative music
- music player

Christians have used labyrinths for centuries to help engage in prayer. Some churches and monastic communities have a labyrinth embedded on a floor or outside on their grounds. A labyrinth is intended for walking and praying, although traveling a labyrinth with your finger on a smaller design is common, too. Visit the website “Drawing a Seven-Circuit Labyrinth,” and familiarize yourself with drawing a seven-circuit labyrinth. If you’re ambitious, try making one out of masking tape on the floor of a large room or outdoors with rocks and items from nature, such as sticks, plants, vines, and so forth. Whether you’re walking a labyrinth on the floor or symbolically walking one with your fingers, choose some quiet, meditative music and allow yourself to drift into prayer as you journey towards the center of the labyrinth, meditate within the center, and journey out again.

## Sending & Serving Activity

### 9 The Lord's Supper

**Supplies:**

- Bible

Read 1 Corinthians 11:17–26. The ritual of the Lord's Supper or communion was instituted by Jesus and was practiced regularly by Christians in the first century. Ever since, the Lord's Supper has continued to be a dramatic, symbolic ritual giving meaning and purpose to those who participate. Some churches celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly, some have it monthly and on special church celebrations, and others only do it a few times a year. Attend and participate in the Lord's Supper whenever it is offered at your church. Notice that the table has not just been set for a few but for many. As Jesus urges us to come to the table, we are urged to bring others. Invite others to come and partake of the Lord's Supper, and be sure to allow them to ask you any questions they may have if they're unfamiliar with the practice. You also may wish to volunteer to take communion to people who are homebound, in a nursing home, or in the hospital.

### Reflect

As you thought about baptism, what did you remember about your own baptism? What did you learn about your baptism from another member of your family? Did you know the story of your parents' or grandparents' baptisms? How would you tell your great-grandchildren about your baptism?



# Praying and Making Ritual



## Exploration: Context and Mission

### About this Setting

Though most of our daily experiences lead us to think and act individually, our faith is communal in nature. Prayer and ritual help us understand our place in the community of faith, draw us into deeper relationships with God and one another, and expand our perspective beyond our own selves. These practices will help you to incorporate other people in your daily rituals and develop a missional perspective of praying for and with others.

The activities designed for the individual will help a person gain some comfort in sharing one's faith and living out that faith in daily life. The activities designed for the home and family are suggestions for family groups, however you define that, or for small groups who wish to gather to learn more about faith practices. In these suggested activities the participants will practice sharing their experiences of God and the way their faith informs their life with one another. This may help provide greater comfort for venturing out to share those thoughts with others.

The activities for the work place and community are ways you can witness to your own faith in the larger sphere of daily life. They may help you have more confidence sharing your faith beyond the comfort of home or church.

## About this Exploration

Ritual helps us understand ourselves and our relationships—within our immediate and extended families, communities of faith, and the world. The prophet Joel reminds us that in a hurting and troubled world God calls us together in community and God’s Spirit is poured out amongst all people. The Holy Spirit aids us as we practice prayer and ritual. Engaging in prayer and ritual directs our focus away from ourselves and toward our communities, our global community, and God. When we embrace prayer and ritual in this context, we may experience God’s transforming power here and now.

### BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**Joel 2:1-2, 12-17**  
**Philippians 1:3-4**

## Household and Family Life

### Exploring & Engaging Activity



#### 1 Meal Time Prayers (Easy Preparation)

**Supplies:** None

Many families have a tradition of saying a prayer together before a meal. This is a meaningful ritual because it moves us beyond individualistic prayer into communal prayer. As your household gathers for a meal together, spend time in prayer before you eat. If you say a prayer on behalf of everyone, be sure to give thanks for the meal and the fellowship and that you are mindful of those who don’t have enough food to eat. Or you can share a memorized prayer together in unison, such as: *Come, Lord, be our guest. Let this food of ours be blessed.* You could even sing a song together as the prayer. The Doxology, which is usually sung at the offering time in worship, is a good song to sing at meal time because it reminds us that all things come from God. Give each member of the family a turn at leading the prayer. This helps people learn how to pray and affirms each person’s ability to pray. The prayers do not have to be elaborate.

- God is great. God is good. And we thank God for our food. By God’s hands we are fed. Thank you, God, for daily bread.
- For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful. And may we always be mindful of the needs of others. For Jesus’ sake, Amen.
- God, bless this food to our use, and us to your service. Fill our hearts with grateful praise. Amen.

### Discerning & Deciding Activity



#### 2 Family Story Time

**Supplies:**

- cherished storybook, or children’s Bible storybook, or a current book of interest
- artwork: “The Reading” by Wilson, <http://www.art.com/products/p10278691-sa-i852604/s-wilson-the-reading.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=6acc8b6e6b0347f498d112cbdaf18251&searchstring=the+reading+wilson>

If you have ever read a bedtime story to a child, you know that it is an important time of imagining and relationship building. Storytelling can be a deeply spiritual family ritual. And it doesn't just have to happen before bed. Designate a certain day and time in the week to be Story Time. Spend time together reading, looking at the pictures, and discussing the story. Choose reading material that is appropriate to the members of your family. You might want to read a novel together over a longer period. Or use the family photo album as a starter for storytelling. If you are really imaginative, venture away from the book and make up stories of your own. While you read together, display the "The Reading" by Wilson in the room to serve as inspiration for your time together. You might want to make up a story about the people in the picture, who they are, when they lived, and what they are reading together.

### Sending & Serving Activity

#### ③ Family Mission Day

**Supplies:** None

Serving others and helping people in need is a central practice of the Christian faith. When done regularly it can become a meaningful ritual. Designate a certain day once a week or once a month as your mission day. Each time your mission day arrives, participate together in a service or mission project. The possibilities could include: serving a meal at a homeless shelter, visiting elderly people at a nursing home, working at a food pantry, doing yard- or housework for an elderly neighbor, or doing other service and mission projects that are hosted by your church or in your community. Research some of the opportunities that your congregation is connected with or are available in your community. As a family, decide what you will do, how often you are able to do it, and how each member of your family may participate.

### Individual and Personal Life

#### Exploring & Engaging Activity



#### ④ Looking for God in the Day (Easy Preparation)

**Supplies:** None

Prayer is a two-way conversation between God and us. Sometimes it can be difficult to be aware of God's voice. But if we pay attention, we can often experience God through other people. As you go about the normal routine of your day, try looking for God in all of your experiences and conversations. On the way to work or school, who did you encounter? Did you see God acting in them in any way? At the office or in the classroom, what conversations did you have with customers, classmates, or coworkers? How was God present in those conversations? If we pay attention, we can experience God in just about every encounter we have.

## Discerning & Deciding Activity

### 5 Prayers of Confession and Repentance

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- computer with Internet access
- video: “Standing in the Need of Prayer”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3P2YEC-ochc&feature=related>

Read Joel 2:1–2, 12–17. The prophet Joel wrote about a message he received from God telling the people to repent and turn back to God. Prayers of Confession and Repentance are one of the primary ways Christians engage in turning back toward God. In such prayers we confess our wrongs, we own up to the people we are, and we ask for forgiveness. We do so with full confidence that God is faithful to forgive and help us overcome our problems. Watch the YouTube video “Standing in the Need of Prayer.” Sing along to the words: “It’s me . . . standing in the need of prayer.” Singing these words can help you focus on your own need for confession and repentance. Then read 1 John 1:9, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Psalm 103:8–12, or Joel 2:12–13 again, and know the assurance of God’s forgiveness.

## Sending & Serving Activities

### 6 Intercessory Prayers

**Supplies:**

- paper, journal, or small notebook
- pen or pencil

Through prayerful conversation with God we find ourselves changed and our needs fulfilled. But we also are moved from self-centeredness to awareness of others. Intercessory prayers are prayers we lift to God on behalf of other people. In praying for others we intercede for them; we go to God on their behalf. As you pray, make sure you spend time thinking about other people in your life. It may be helpful to write a list of people you know who are in need of prayer. You could use a journal or small notebook to be a prayer journal to keep track of your prayers for others. Ask God to meet their needs, to surround them with a healing presence, and to fulfill their spiritual longings. As you do this you will likely be moved to pray for more than just the people you know, but all of God’s people around the world.

## Work Place and Communal Life

### Exploring & Engaging Activities

#### 7 Gratitude for Others (Easy Preparation)

**Supplies:**

- Bible

Read Philippians 1: 3–4. As Paul wrote to the Christians in Philippi, he made sure to tell them he was grateful for them and that he regularly prayed for them. When we pray we may also give thanks for the people God has placed in our lives as a blessing. We may also make sure they know we are grateful for them. Imagine how uplifting it would be if someone came to you and told you they were grateful for you and they prayed for you regularly. It would be great! Now it's your turn to show gratitude for others. Think about the people you are grateful for. Spend time thanking God for them in your prayers. Make sure to let them know how much they are appreciated as well.

### Discerning & Deciding Activities

#### 8 Anointing

**Supplies:**

- anointing oil (can be found at many Christian bookstores and suppliers) or olive oil

Anointing is an ancient Christian practice that is a form of visible prayer. By dipping your finger in oil and making the sign of the cross on someone's forehead, or the back of the hand, you are praying for God to touch them through you and for them to have faith in the power of Christ. Anointing prayers are most often done when we are sick, when we are struggling, or when we are experiencing the call of God. Gather with a group of friends or relatives for a special time of sharing. Ask each person to share a struggle for which he or she would like prayers. Take turns anointing one another with oil and praying for one another.



## Sending & Serving Activities

### 9 Foot Washing Service

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- large basin full of water
- towels

Foot washing is a ritual that Jesus shared with his disciples. As he washed their feet, he became a servant to them and expressed his great love for them. Gather a group of friends or relatives for a foot washing ritual, perhaps before a meal. Read aloud John 13:1–20. Ask people in the group for permission to wash their feet. Gently remove their shoes and socks and lovingly wash their feet with the towel and water. If someone does not want his or her feet washed, offer to wash his or her hands instead. Say to the person you're washing, "As Christ became a servant to his friends, so I become a servant to you." Invite others to be the foot washer as well. Close the ritual with a prayer or a song.

### Reflect

Look through the front section of a newspaper, read the lead articles in a news magazine, or read world news stories on the Internet. Picture the context of each story. How is that context different from yours? How might you pray if you were in that context? How might someone in that context pray for you? We need the prayers of others to remind us that God is universal.

# Praying and Making Ritual



## Exploration: Future and Vision

### About this Setting

Prayer and ritual involve both speaking and listening, both participating and observing, both doing and discerning. As we develop more fully in our practices of prayer and ritual we become more attuned to the ways God is speaking to us and leading us into a brighter and better future. These practices will engage you in recognition of the visionary aspects of prayer and the future-mindedness of ritual.

The activities designed for the individual will help a person gain some comfort in sharing one's faith and living out that faith in daily life. The activities designed for the home and family are suggestions for family groups, however you define that, or for small groups who wish to gather to learn more about faith practices. In these suggested activities the participants will practice sharing their experiences of God and the way their faith informs their life with one another. This may help provide greater comfort for venturing out to share those thoughts with others.

The activities for the work place and community are ways you can witness to your own faith in the larger sphere of daily life. They may help you have more confidence sharing your faith beyond the comfort of home or church.

## About this Exploration

The practices of our faith are happening within us and around us. Through awareness and attentiveness, we may be beckoned toward a new vision for the future in our relationships with both the Divine and with one another. An openness to and discovery of the things going on around us will focus us upon the spiritual conversations already taking place. By exploring prayer and ritual in the present we can find new ways to build a vision for a future grounded in God's love and faithfulness.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:  
**2 Samuel 7:18–29**  
**Philemon 1:1–9**

## Household and Family Life

### Exploring & Engaging Activity



#### 1 Ignatian Imagination (Easy Preparation)

**Supplies:**

- Bible

Ignatius of Loyola, a religious leader in Spain and the founder of the Jesuits in 1540, sought to develop the full capacity of the mind for contemplative prayer. He believed in using the imagination with direction and form. Ignatian prayer, often referred to as “Guided Imagination” or “Guided Meditation,” is usually centered on scripture. The Ignatian method of praying the scripture is one of using all of your senses, of placing yourself in the story as an observer. It is where you can observe yourself, Jesus, and others in the story and how they all relate and respond to Jesus. You are invited to see with your inner eye the story as it is read. Imagine yourself in the story, listen to the sounds, smell the smells, feel the surroundings.

Gather everyone in your household in a quiet place. Direct each person to find a comfortable seating position. Read the story from Matthew 14:22–33, and then allow several minutes of silence. Read the story again slowly, inviting everyone to close their eyes and to allow their imaginations to take over. Where are you in the story? Where are you in relation to Jesus—close, far away? What sounds do you hear? What smells do you notice? What do the surroundings look like? What is the temperature? What does the sky look like? After a few minutes of silence, ask everyone to share a sensation, a feeling, or an image from the story. Read the story one more time. As you do, invite everyone to consider what God might be calling them to do or to be. Share your thoughts together.

## Discerning & Deciding Activity

### 2 Inviting Jesus to Our Table

**Supplies:**

- meal for the whole household
- an empty chair
- artwork: “Guatemala: Processions” by Betty LaDuke  
[https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW\\_PRODUCT=true&product\\_id=15626&store\\_id=1401](https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401)

Through prayer we experience the presence of God. One way we can do that is by imagining Christ is in the room with us. During your next family meal, set an extra seat at the table. Explain to everyone that this table has been set for Jesus. As you dine, Jesus is present with you through his Spirit. Place the artwork “Guatemala: Processions” where everyone can see it, to help everyone visualize Christ in their midst. As you eat, pay attention to the conversations and actions of everyone at the table. How are they different than usual? After dinner discuss as a family what difference it made having Christ at the table. This practice may become a regular ritual in your family.

## Sending & Serving Activities

### 3 Speaking Our Dreams

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- computer with Internet access
- video: “U2 Still Haven’t Found (with lyrics),” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BnD6ojjA0OA>

Read 2 Samuel 7:18–29. David approached God in prayer and spoke of his dreams. Speaking of our hopes and dreams can help us approach the future with inspiration and hope. When we share our dreams with one another we invite them to become a part of our future. Gather everyone around the computer and watch the YouTube video “U2 Still Haven’t Found (with lyrics).” After the video discuss the following questions:

- What are you looking for that you haven’t found yet?
- What are your hopes and dreams for the future?

Take these hopes and dreams to God in prayer together.

## Individual and Personal Life

### Exploring & Engaging Activity

#### 4 Affirmation Prayers (Easy Preparation)

**Supplies:** None

An affirmation is a positive statement. An affirmation prayer involves speaking positive statements as prayers with belief, anticipation, and desire. As we speak affirmation prayers, we become empowered to live out our prayers in our lives. As we speak affirmation prayers, the words of our prayers become our future. Think of areas in which you struggle or need to grow. In a positive sentence, identify what you want to be. For example, if you want to become more accepting of others, say, “I am accepting” or “I see all people as you see them.” Begin your affirmation prayer by addressing God. Then speak your affirmations. Close by saying “Amen,” which means “let it be so.”

### Discerning & Deciding Activity

#### 5 Line Poem

**Supplies:**

- paper and pen or pencil

Poetry is a way of expressing thoughts, ideas, and feelings through words. This type of expression can be a form of prayer. Not all of us are natural poets, though. Sometimes we need a guide. Near the top of a piece of paper, in the center, draw a straight line long enough for one word. Below that line, draw two straight lines side by side, each long enough for one word. Below those, draw three more lines in the same manner. Then make four more lines below those. Finally, draw one line at the bottom of the page. Think of a theological word or phrase, such as: “love,” “grace,” “hope,” “joy,” “forgiveness,” “prayer,” “ritual,” “peace,” or “justice.” Write it on the top line. Next, think of two adjectives that describe that word. Write them on the two lines side by side. Then think of three action words that involve the word. Write them on the three lines side by side. Now think of a four-word phrase regarding that word. Write it on the four lines side by side. Finally, think of a synonym for the word and write it at the bottom. See the sample below.

Hope

Abundant Assured

Believing Trusting Knowing

Trusting in God’s Promises

Confidence



## Sending &amp; Serving Activity

## ⑥ Praying with Mandalas

**Supplies:**

- computer with Internet access
- printer
- video: “Sand Mandalas”  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kRTa6btlyBg>
- website: “Mandala 14,” <http://www.grundschule-brauchbar.de/web/mandalas/mandalas/man014.html>
- colored pencils
- (optional) blank paper

“Mandala” is a Sanskrit word that means “holy circle.” Praying with mandalas is a form of active prayer in which we allow God to speak to us through our imaginations as we draw in a pattern. Watch the YouTube video “Sand Mandalas. Print out the mandala design from the website “Mandala 14.” Color within the design whatever you like. It’s important not to make a plan for what you want it to look like. Simply start doodling and see what happens. As you color the mandala, pay attention to your thoughts and emotions. Allow God to speak to you through this passive activity. As you become more comfortable with the mandala, you may wish to try using a blank piece of paper, drawing a large circle, and letting the pattern make itself as you sit with God.

## Work Place and Communal Life

## Exploring &amp; Engaging Activity



## ⑦ Prayer Vigil (Easy Preparation)

**Supplies:** None

Vigil comes from the Latin word *vigilia*, which means “watchfulness” or “attentiveness.” In a prayer vigil, people set aside a certain amount of time to be watchful and attentive in prayer. Many congregations hold a twenty-four hour vigil the day before a holiday such as Easter. Sometimes people hold a vigil if someone is missing or is gravely ill. Invite other people to join you for a prayer vigil. Choose whatever amount of time is comfortable for you and for them. A vigil doesn’t have to be all night. It can be as short as 30 minutes. Think of people you know who are ill or any other situation you wish to pray about. Spend this time together being watchful and attentive in prayer.

## Discerning &amp; Deciding Activity

## ⑧ Decisions and Discernment

**Supplies:**

- large piece of paper
- markers

God often speaks to us through other people. Conversations can awaken us to ideas we never imagined. Intentionally listening to others can help us pay attention to issues of which we might not be aware. The next time you're making an important decision, whether individually or as a group, practice discernment. If you're deciding whether to buy a home, seek out the wisdom of a trusted friend. If you're making a decision at work, gather others who might be affected by the decision and bring them into the conversation. Pray for God's presence and wisdom in your decision before you begin.

Discernment is a gift of the Holy Spirit that orients persons to be attentive to the presence of God in our midst. Several dimensions distinguish discernment from other approaches to decision making. Prayer is incorporated throughout, with times of silence for listening to the Holy Spirit. The interpretation and application of scripture is central. Time is taken to hear many voices. Values, concerns, hopes, and fears are named more than positions. Intuition, experience, reason, tradition, and new insights are all welcome sources for reflection. Common direction is sought through cooperation and collaboration.

Questions can also be asked to test possible leadings of the Holy Spirit, such as:

- Is this leading in keeping with the Word of God as revealed in Jesus Christ through scripture?
- What examples from the past may provide direction for the present?
- Is this leading self-serving, or is it motivated by love for God and others?
- Does it matter who gets the credit?
- Is the ministry of Jesus being continued in what we do?
- Will the community benefit—will the outcome build up the body of Christ?

Draw a line down the middle of a piece of paper. On one side write all the reasons supporting the decision. On the other side write all the reasons against the decision. Be sure and listen with an open heart and mind as others share their insights. Spend time asking God to help you sort out the information and make a wise decision.

## Sending & Serving Activity

### 9 Intercessory Action

**Supplies:**

- Bible

Read Philemon 1:1–9. When Paul wrote to Philemon, he did so on behalf of Onesimus, a slave of Philemon. He wrote to appeal to Philemon to release Onesimus from slavery and receive him as an equal. Paul shared his prayers with Philemon, but also appealed to him directly. Intercessory prayer is the practice of praying to God on behalf of others. This crucial aspect of personal ministry often leads us to become involved in the situation. In Paul's case, he saw an injustice and sought to do something about it.

One part of intercessory prayer would be to name the situations in your community where people are in need, such as a homeless shelter or a halfway house or a soup kitchen or the office of the state division of community services. Another part of intercessory prayer is seeking guidance for how you can help overcome or eliminate the situations that send people to these places. What might you be able to do to address homelessness or poverty? Of all of the things you are praying for, what are the things you have the power to do something about? Ask God to give you strength to intercede in action as well as in word. Be faithful to do as God leads you and calls you.

### Reflect

Which activity in this session was most helpful in envisioning the future that God calls us to? As you ponder that future, about what might you need to pray for now? Although we often think of the future as far off, the future is tomorrow as well. How will you pray today to make a difference tomorrow?