

Faith Sharing and Prayer

There are a number of prayer resources available in print and on the web. These are listed in Appendix A. This appendix contains a methodology for constructing faith sharing materials for a pastoral council or planning team.

This faith sharing process contains the following elements:

- Call to prayer
- Opening prayer*
- Scripture reading*
- Silent reflection
- Reflection questions*
- Small group sharing
- Reflection
- Large group sharing
- Petitions*
- Closing prayer*

The items marked with an asterisk should be printed on a single sheet of paper (both sides if necessary) and distributed to all participants before beginning. Before beginning, the leader/facilitator provides a brief overview of the faith sharing process.

Call to prayer

The leader/facilitator calls the group together and prepares it for prayer. This is often best done by some introductory remarks by the facilitator that provide a visual and auditory focal point. The content of the message should reference the busy often frantic lives which those present have come from and to which they will return. This time together is a time to lay those concerns aside and to call to mind the constant presence of God in our lives. Everything we do and everything we say is said and done under the loving gaze of a God who loves us unconditionally and who desires our eternal happiness. The facilitator then pauses for 15 seconds before moving to the opening prayer.

Opening prayer

The opening prayer is said together by all present. Some times this is done in unison; some times there is a role for the leader and then parts of the group: right side and left side or women and men for example. The opening prayer should be simple and no more than a few sentences.

Beyond the content of the prayer, the act of saying the prayer together re-enforces the notion of the Body of Christ gathered to pray and think together. The opening prayer can be the same each time or it can be different each time. The person responsible for facilitating the faith sharing is responsible for creating or selecting the opening prayer. The following are some examples.

Lord, we gather today in the faith that you are present among us. We hope on your promise that you are with us, your sisters and brothers, until the end of time. Help us to be with each other as you were with all those who were part of your life.

We gather in our confidence that the Spirit is both deep within each of us and in our relationships with each other. We pray that our time together will strengthen our faith in you and your promise to be with us always.

We gather at a time fraught in difficulties and challenges, both within the Church and in the world. Your own life and death help us understand that your promise of everlasting life does not mean that our lives will be free of such difficulties. Rather we come to understand that we are called to be your followers in good times and in bad in whatever circumstances life presents us. What we also know is that you have promised us that we will be filled with your life regardless of the circumstances of our life.

Scripture reading

The leader/facilitator or someone he or she asks then reads a passage from scripture. This can be a short passage from the Old or New Testament selected by the facilitator or it might be a passage selected from the Lectionary reading for the upcoming Sunday. The passage should be one that provides some content for reflection and sharing related to the work of pastoral planning or perhaps even the particular issues that might be on the agenda for that particular meeting. The following are citations of such.

Emmaus	Luke 24:13-25	Parable of the Sower	Matthew 13:1-23
Many Members in One Body	Romans 12:3-21	A Future With Hope	Jeremiah 29:10-14
Your Faith Has Saved You	Luke 8:43-48	Go Make Disciples of All Nations	Matthew 28:16-20
How Hard Is Change	Exodus 16:1-4a	Keep Your Eyes on Jesus	Matthew 14:22-33
Peter the Rock	Matthew 16:13-20	Christian Leadership	Mark 10:35-45

If the readings for the upcoming Sunday are used, typically selections are made from the Gospel or the second reading.

The person reading the selection should know ahead of time that he or she will be proclaiming the word of God at the session. S/he should prepare the passage several times and then proclaim it slowly and clearly.

Silent reflection

After the reading, the leader/facilitator invites the group to reflect silently on the reading, perhaps silently re-reading the passage and noticing any words or phrases that seem to resonate with them. One minute is sufficient time.

Reflection questions

The leader/facilitator then reads two or three reflection questions that are designed to focus attention on certain aspects of the reading for that session. These are open ended questions to help people probe their own personal experience of God's life and action in their lives. The following are some typical examples:

When Peter noticed the storm and so took his eyes off Jesus, he began to sink. Have there been times in my life when I was distracted by the storms around me and lost touch with my faith? Describe those circumstances and what it was like for you.

Jesus healed others by touching them. Have there times in my life when Jesus acting through others has touched and healed me? Have there been times when as a disciple of Jesus I touched and healed others in his name? What were those circumstances?

The facilitator should allow about two minutes for this reflection.

Small group sharing

The leader/facilitator gently invites people's attention and calls them to share their reflections to either the questions or their reflections on the scripture passage in groups of two or three. This should be done without people getting up and moving but rather just turning to each other. The facilitator should allow about five to seven minutes for this sharing and should announce to people with about two minutes left that all three people should have the chance to share. If it is necessary to have more than three people in a group, more time needs to be allotted to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to share.

Reflection

The leader/facilitator then asks everyone to attend to the large group and prepare for sharing in that context. Before that begins, the facilitator invites members to reflect on what they have just heard including what they said or thought but didn't say and to reflect on what they might have noticed in all that. The facilitator provides a brief 30 second period before opening the large group sharing.

Large group sharing

The facilitator then invites members to share whatever they might have noticed about what they heard or some of the reflections they had about the reading or the responses to the reflection questions. The only rule is that a member should not repeat what another member said in the small group sharing. It is important to respect the privacy of each member.

During the full group sharing, the facilitator might need to repeat in summary fashion what a person shares in order to make sure that all members hear it. In addition, however, the facilitator should look for opportunities to affirm and validate the sharing and to draw connections between sharing when that is appropriate.

Once the full group sharing draws to a close, the facilitator often finds it appropriate to sum up the sharing in some way and then move to the rest of the meeting. With large vocal groups, it may well be necessary for the facilitator to end the full group sharing even though there may be members desiring to share. This is done most gracefully if the facilitator has announced at the beginning of the session that it will last five minutes and that it is not necessary for each member to share since all have had a chance to share in the small groups.

Petitions

At the close of the meeting, the facilitator asks those present to return to a consciously prayerful mood for petitions and a final prayer. The facilitator begins by stating a petition that relates to the scripture passage or to the issues raised in the meeting. After the group responds, the facilitator invites the members to add their petitions.

Closing Prayer

The facilitator can provide a scripted prayer that all members recite together or can invite all those present to join hands and pray the Our Father together. After the Our Father, the facilitator invites all to exchange a greeting of peace as all prepare to leave the meeting.

Time

Prayer Element	Time
Call to prayer	1
Opening prayer	1
Scripture reading	2
Silent reflection	2
Reflection questions	2

Small group sharing	7
Reflection	1
Large group sharing	5
Petitions	4
Closing prayer	1
Total	26

Approximately 20 minutes are used at the beginning of the meeting and five at the conclusion. It is important that the duration of the process be managed but in a gentle manner.