

Pastoral Council Prayers and Faith Sharing

**Advent 2022 – Ordinary Time,
February 2023
Cycle A**

AN INVITATION TO PRAY WITH YOUR PASTORAL COUNCIL

These opening and closing prayers have been prepared to help your pastoral council become what it is intended to be: a *leadership body* in *communion* with God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - and focused on enabling the community to carry out the *mission* of the Church (to proclaim the Gospel, to worship God, to form community, and to serve especially those in need). As stated in the “Parish Pastoral Council Guidelines” of the Diocese of Rochester, the specific purposes of the pastoral council are:

- to develop a common vision and purpose, actively advocate for the poor and the powerless, and to extend Christian commitment to the surrounding neighborhoods and communities;
- to orchestrate a statement of mission for the parish community and become the reference point for activity in the parish;
- to provide recommendations for priorities, directions, and policies through pastoral planning for worship, evangelization, outreach, stewardship, etc.;
- to promote communication, understanding, and collaboration among parish organizations and between the parish, the diocese, and the universal Church.

In our rush to “get the business of the council done” we may forget that we are challenged to ongoing renewal through prayer, study, listening, and dialogue. Because of our familiarity with secular boards of directors, we may forget that we are a body of church leaders engaged with our pastor or pastoral administrator in discerning the ways God is speaking to this community in this time and place. For our actions to be imbued with the wisdom of God, they must begin with prayer, followed by listening to one another in faith and love and listening to the larger community of parishioners in similar faith and love, and end again in prayer.

And so you are invited and encouraged to set aside time at the beginning and end of your pastoral council meetings to use these prayers. We are confident that the quality of your relationships with one another and the community at large and the quality of your decisions will be enhanced as you take time for shared prayer in God’s presence.

Peace and Blessings,

Shannon Kilbridge, Ph.D.
Associate Director
Department of Pastoral Services

Hints for the Prayer Leader

It may be helpful to designate a different person on your council to lead prayer for each meeting. In this way, more and more of the leaders of your community will gain experience with leading prayer in small groups.

Preparation before the Pastoral Council meeting

1. Read through the prayer session for the Sunday following your meeting. Become familiar with it.
2. Make enough copies of the prayer for all you expect to attend the meeting. You may distribute these at the beginning of the meeting or send them out to members ahead of time along with the agenda and minutes of the previous meeting.
3. If a visual image is suggested for this particular prayer session, bring it to the meeting if possible. Having an image in the center of the gathering will help members remember throughout the evening that the meeting unfolds in God's presence.

A Walk Through the Prayer Outline

Prayer at the beginning of the meeting (allow 10-15 minutes on your agenda):

1. Invite those present to become quiet and remember that they are in the presence of God. After a brief pause, begin the *Invitation to Prayer*.
2. Either read the *Scripture* passage yourself or have someone else do so (ask them before the meeting begins).
3. Allow several minutes for *silent reflection* and consideration of the faith sharing questions.
4. Invite those present to respond (in groups of two or three or in the larger council group) to any of the suggested *questions for faith sharing* out loud. People may also choose to share how the reading spoke to them in general. All do not need to respond but allow silent pauses so that people can reflect comfortably.
5. Go on to the beginning of your meeting's agenda.

Prayer at the end of the meeting (allow 5 minutes on your agenda):

1. Begin the *intercessory prayers* as written in the prayer session.
2. Invite others to share their own prayers aloud.
3. When all who choose to share prayers are done, say "For these prayers and all those we hold deep in our hearts."
4. Begin the *closing prayer*.

Notes

1. The intercessory prayers may be moved to the end of the “prayer at the beginning of the meeting” or offered in the middle of the meeting—as well as at the end as suggested in the prayer sessions.
2. These prayer sessions, while designed for pastoral councils, can be used at the meetings of the parish staff and other parish committees with minor adaptation.

Faith Sharing Guidelines

Each person is led by God on his or her personal spiritual journey. Faith sharing refers to shared reflections on the action of God in one’s experience as related to Scripture and faith. Faith sharing is not discussion, problem solving, or scripture study. The purpose is an encounter, between a person in the concrete circumstances of life and the Word of God, which leads to a conversion of heart. The entire faith sharing process is seen as prayer, i.e. listening to the Word of God as revealed in scripture and in each other’s experience.

1. Participants are given time to reflect before sharing begins, and a period of comfortable silence might occur between individuals sharing. Silence is a vital part of the total process of faith sharing.
2. Sharing is optional. Each person shares at the time and on the level where he or she feels comfortable.
3. There is no set order for sharing (you do not need to go in a circle around the group).
4. Listen respectfully and openly. If someone does not hear the sharing or does not understand, he or she can ask for clarification.
5. There is no discussion or commenting on what is shared. An appropriate response from the prayer leader or group might be a smile, a nod, or a “thank you.”
6. The prayer leader and group are not there as “problem solvers” or “advice givers.”
7. Participants are encouraged to share in the first person (I feel...I believe...etc.).
8. Anything that is shared in the group is confidential and does not leave the group. It is meant to be a gift for this group only.

Walk in the Light
1st Sunday of Advent, Cycle A
November 27, 2022

Prayer at the Beginning of the Meeting

Invitation to Prayer

Leader: O God, present in us and in all of creation,

All: Give us wisdom.

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 2:1-5

This is what Isaiah, son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In days to come, the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest mountain and raised above the hills. All nations shall stream toward it; many people shall come and say: "Come, let us climb the Lord's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths." For from Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between nations, and impose terms on many peoples. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Silent Reflection

Questions for Faith Sharing

1. *How are you being challenged to walk in the paths (or ways) of God, the ways of faith, hope and charity?*
2. *What are the obstacles that get in your way as you walk in these paths?*
3. *Since Advent is a time of preparing for Christ's second coming, how can we be role models of peace and healing in this time of blame and violence?*

During this meeting let us remember that following in the path of Jesus is challenging; it requires love of God and love of neighbor. May that love of God and neighbor be manifested in thoughtful, loving words and actions.

Prayer at the End of the Meeting

Intercessory Prayers

All: **Hail Mary...**

Leader: In confidence we now offer God our prayers:

That this Advent season be a time of renewal for our community,
we pray to the Lord.

All: **Come quickly, Lord Jesus.**

Leader: That all nations and leaders of the world abandon the temptation towards
violence and instead seek a lasting peace, we pray to the Lord.

All: **Come quickly, Lord Jesus.**

Leader: That each of us examine our own hearts for tendencies towards blame or
indifference towards those who walk a different path.

All: **Come quickly, Lord Jesus.**

Leader: For what else do we pray...
(When all those who choose are finished offering prayers)
For these and all the prayers we hold in the silence of our hearts, we pray
to the Lord.

All: **Come quickly, Lord Jesus.**

Closing Prayer

All: **God of peace and life,
guide us as we prepare for the coming of your Son. Help us to follow
him through the path of life and guide us as we walk from violence to
peace. May the Holy Spirit guide us. This we ask through Christ Our
Lord.**

Leader: Our Lady of Peace,

All: **Pray for us.**

Living in Harmony
2nd Sunday of Advent, Cycle A
December 4, 2022

Prayer at the Beginning of the Meeting

Invitation to Prayer

Leader: Holy God, be with us as we gather in your name

All: and as we await the arrival of your Son.

Scripture Reading: Romans 15:4-9

Brothers and sisters:

Whatever was written previously was written for our instruction, that by endurance and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to think in harmony with one another, in keeping with Christ Jesus, that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God.

For I say that Christ became a minister of the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, to confirm the promises to the patriarchs, but so that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.

As it is written:

Therefore, I will praise you among the Gentiles and sing praises to your name.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Silent Reflection

Questions for Faith Sharing (choose one or two for faith sharing)

- 1. This Scripture reminds us we are called to live in harmony. However, in the world, our families and the Church we often see an absence of harmony. What can you do in your life to build up a feeling of harmony?*
- 2. As parish leaders, how can we strengthen the harmony within our parish as well as with other parishes?*
- 3. Where is the Holy Spirit calling us to consider this scripture reading in our meeting tonight?*

Prayer at the End of the Meeting

Intercessory Prayers

Leader: In confidence we now offer God our prayers:
Lord Jesus, you prayed that we all be one...

All: Make us one in your name, Lord.

Leader: For great unity and respect among all Christians...

All: Make us one in your name, Lord.

Leader: That the Holy Spirit guide the work of our Pastoral Council and all the committees of our parish...

All: Make us one in your name, Lord.

Leader: For all considering a vocation within the Church, as priests, deacons, religious, and lay ministers...

All: Make us one in your name, Lord.

Closing Prayer

**All: God our Father,
help us to reflect in our lives the unity and harmony of the Trinity.
May our thoughts and actions bring harmony within your Church.
Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, one
God forever and ever. Amen.**

Prepare the Way of the Lord
3rd Sunday of Advent, Cycle A
December 11, 2022

Prayer at the Beginning of the Meeting

Invitation to Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, John the Baptist taught us how to prepare for your arrival, through repentance and care for the poor. As we prepare for your second coming, help us to follow John's instruction. This we ask in your holy name.

All: Amen.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 11:2-11

When John the Baptist heard in prison of the works of Christ, he sent his disciples to Jesus with this question, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?"

Jesus said to them in reply,
"Go and tell John what you hear and see:
the blind regain their sight,
the lame walk,
lepers are cleansed,
the deaf hear,
the dead are raised,
and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.
And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me."
As they were going off,
Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John,
"What did you go out to the desert to see?
A reed swayed by the wind?
Then what did you go out to see? Someone dressed in fine clothing?
Those who wear fine clothing are in royal palaces.
Then why did you go out? To see a prophet?
Yes, I tell you and more than a prophet.
This is the one about whom it is written:
*Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you:
he will prepare your way before you.*
Amen, I say to you,
among those born of women,
there has been none greater than John the Baptist;
yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Silent Reflection

Questions for Faith Sharing

1. *Jesus gave John the Baptist such praise because he offered a faithful example of waiting for the Messiah by serving those who are in need. How can we follow the example of John the Baptist by waiting on those who are in need?*
2. *In our community, who are the poor, the homeless, the unemployed, etc.? And how can we serve (wait on) them?*

Prayer at the End of the Meeting

Intercessory Prayers

Leader: In confidence we now offer God our prayers:

Lord, you opened the eyes of the blind.

All: Open our eyes to see and serve you in the poor.

Leader: Lord, you made the lame to walk.

All: Guide our steps in the pathways of peace and justice.

Closing Prayer:

All: Tender God, continue to bless us as we wait joyfully for your Son's coming among us. May we serve those in need and in so doing serve the One we wait for. Grant this through our Lord, Jesus Christ, your Son who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen.

God With Us
4th Sunday of Advent, Cycle A
December 18, 2022

Prayer at the Beginning of the Meeting

Invitation to Prayer

Leader: Lord God, you called your servant St. Joseph to watch over the Holy Family. To do this he had to overcome his fears. Help us to move beyond our fears and to bring the Gospel Message to all we meet.

All: Amen.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 1:18-24

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, Son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord said through the prophet:

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means, “God is with us.”

When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Silent Reflection

Questions for Faith Sharing

1. *When have you had to trust God?*
2. *Dreams are powerful! Through St. Joseph's dream, God tells him what he needs to do in order to bring Jesus into the world. What are your dreams (a.k.a. hopes or ideas) for your faith life as well as for our parish? How can we act like St. Joseph by being open to God's will?*

Prayer at the Conclusion of the Meeting

Intercessory Prayers

Leader: In confidence we now offer God our prayers:

Lord, help us to follow the example of St. Joseph, the just one,
we pray,

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: Lord, help us to see the dreams you have for our parish community.

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: That all life may be honored and celebrated as a gift from God,
we pray,

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: And for what else do we pray...

(When all who choose are finished offering prayers)
For these prayers and those we hold in our hearts, we pray to the Lord.

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Closing Prayer

All: God our Father, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of your Son, help us to remember that he is our life and our peace. Bless our preparations and strengthen our faith that he may be born through our gestures of love. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Follow the Star
Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord, Cycle A
January 8, 2023

Prayer at the Beginning of the Meeting

Invitation to Prayer

All: **Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.**

Leader: Justice shall flower in his days,
 and profound peace, till the moon be no more.
 May he rule from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth.

All: **Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.**

Scripture Reading: Matthew 2: 8 - 12

“Go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word, that I too may go and do him homage.” After their audience with the king they set out. And, behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother.

They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way.

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Silent Reflection

Questions for Faith Sharing

1. *What star (guide) do we follow? How does the star help us follow one path over another?*
2. *How can we encourage our faith community to follow the Star?*

Prayer at the End of the Meeting

Intercessory Prayers

Leader: As we search to faithfully follow the Star, we pray...

...

All: Jesus, give us courage.

Leader: Strengthen us to respond to the needs of our times, we pray...

All: Jesus, give us wisdom.

Leader: As people of faith, let us share life and love with every person, we pray

All: Jesus, be our peace.

Leader: And for what else should we pray...

(When all who choose are finished offering prayers)

For these prayers and all those we hold deep in our hearts, we pray...

All: Hear us, O God.

Closing Prayer

**All: May peace fill our hearts, our world, our every moment.
May we keep our eyes fixed on the star.
Amen.**

Baptized to Serve
2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A
January 15, 2023

Prayer at the Beginning of the Meeting

Invitation to Prayer

Leader: Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.
All: Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.
Leader: Open our ears, that we might hear your call.
All: Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.
Leader: Open our eyes, that we might see where you want us to go.
All: Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.
Leader: Open our hands, that we might reach out to those in need.
All: Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.
Leader: Open our hearts, that we might respond with love.
All: Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.
Leader: Open all our senses, that we might be aware of your presence.
All: Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.

Scripture Reading: John 1:29-34

John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him and said,
"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.
He is the one of whom I said,
'A man is coming after me who ranks ahead of me
because he existed before me.'
I did not know him,
but the reason why I came baptizing with water
was that he might be made known to Israel."

John testified further, saying,
"I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from heaven
and remain upon him.
I did not know him,
but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me,
'On whomever you see the Spirit come down and remain,
he is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'
Now I have seen and testified that he is the Son of God."

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Silent Reflection

Questions for Faith Sharing

1. *What difference does my baptism make in my life?*
2. *In what ways are we called as a Pastoral Council to point out Jesus to parishioners?*
3. *In what ways are we called as a parish to point out Jesus to our town/city/community?*

Prayer at the Conclusion of the Meeting

Intercessory Prayers

Leader: In faith, we bring our needs and concerns to our gracious God.
For all those who serve our parish community in any capacity, that they may be inspired by the Holy Spirit always to answer God's call saying, "Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will," we pray...

All: Open our hearts, O Lord.

Leader: Please offer any other needs or concerns so that we may pray for them...
(When all who choose are finished offering prayers)
For these prayers and all those we hold deep in our hearts...

All: Open our hearts, O Lord.

Closing Prayer

**All: As we set off for home and rest this night, O Lord,
open our hearts and minds to you and your continuing call.
May we remember that you will always be with us
as our companion and guide.
Bless all who are members of our parish community.
May each be a witness to your Spirit calling each of us
ever closer to you and to one another.
We make our prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Belonging to Christ
3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A
January 22, 2023

Prayer at the Beginning of the Meeting

Invitation to Prayer

All: Good and gracious God, creator of the universe, giver of life, we give you thanks and praise for your mighty works and generous gifts. We praise you for the gift of Jesus the Christ. Help us to follow the teachings of Jesus and unite us in his love. Amen.

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17

I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and in the same purpose. For it has been reported to me about you, my brothers and sisters, by Chloe's people, that there are rivalries among you. I mean that each of you is saying, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with the wisdom of human eloquence, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its meaning.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Silent Reflection

Questions for Faith Sharing

1. *How do the parishioners view the Pastoral Council? Do they see a united group or factions? Do they feel comfortable approaching members of the council with their thoughts and concerns?*
2. *What would be the first impressions of an outsider who came to worship with our community? How can we foster a culture of welcome?*

Prayer at the Conclusion of the Meeting

Intercessory Prayers

Leader: In confidence we now offer God our prayers and our needs.
For all who serve others in any capacity, that they do so humbly and with
loving kindness, we pray to the Lord...

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: Please offer any other needs so that we may pray for them...

(When all who choose are finished offering prayers)
For these prayers and all those we hold deep in our hearts...

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Closing Prayer

**All: May the God who unites us in prayer this evening keep us always
united in love. May we always seek peace and justice through the
Prince of Peace and source of justice, Jesus Christ.
May the Holy Spirit lead us always in right paths. Amen.**

Faithful God
4th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A
January 29, 2023

Prayer at the Beginning of the Meeting

Invitation to Prayer

Leader: We begin with a moment of silence, to breathe, to reflect, to focus....
to be attentive to ourselves, to each other and the presence of Christ....
May God come and increase our faith!

All: Praise God from whom all blessings flow
Praise God all creatures here below
Praise God above you heavenly host
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost....

Scripture Reading: Psalm 146

Women: The Lord keeps faith forever, secures justice for the oppressed,
gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets captives free.

All: "Blessed are the poor in spirit; the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs."

Men: The Lord gives sight to the blind and raises up those who were
bowed down.

The Lord loves the just and protects the stranger.
All: "Blessed are the poor in spirit; the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs."

Women: The fatherless and the widowed, the Lord sustains.
But the way of the wicked, he thwarts.

All: "Blessed are the poor in spirit; the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs."

Men: The Lord shall reign forever; your God, O Israel, through all
generations.

All: "Blessed are the poor in spirit; the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs."

Silent Reflection

Question for Faith Sharing

*How can we (individuals, council, a parish community) be part of
...God giving sight to the blind
...raising up those who are bowed down...
...sustaining the downtrodden?*

Prayer leading into the meeting

Leader: Faithful God, be with us as we gather in your name. Inspire us to work together untiringly to build your kingdom. Guide our discussions and actions away from unimportant things to what really matters for your people. We ask this through Jesus our Lord. Amen!

Prayer at the Conclusion of the Meeting

Intercessory Prayers

Leader: Faithful God, we ask your ongoing guidance in all we have planned and discussed.

For our parish and all its members, that we may be open to parishioners' needs and ideas, we pray...

All: Open our hearts to your Spirit!

Leader: For all who are struggling...the homebound or ill, families in challenging relationships, those who are stressed or overburdened, that they feel the comfort of our church family, we pray...

All: Open our hearts to your Spirit!

Leader: That peace will reign in our hearts, and that, as we leave, we may be signs of your presence wherever we go, we pray...

All: Open our hearts to your Spirit!

Leader: Please offer any other needs so that we may pray for them...
(When all who choose are finished offering prayers)
For these prayers and all those we hold deep in our hearts...

All: Open our hearts to your Spirit!

Closing Prayer

**All: May we give you glory in all that we do, as we pray:
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.**

Salt and Light
5th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A
February 5, 2023

Prayer at the Beginning of the Meeting

Invitation to Prayer:

Leader: Gracious God, you call us to be light for the world.

All: Whoever follows Jesus our Christ will have the light of life.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:13-16

Jesus said to his disciples:
“You are the salt of the earth.
But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned?
It is no longer good for anything
but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.
You are the light of the world.
A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden.
Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket;
it is set on a lampstand,
where it gives light to all in the house.
Just so, your light must shine before others,
that they may see your good deeds
and glorify your heavenly Father.”

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Silent Reflection

Questions for Faith Sharing

- 1. Salt is often used to improve the taste of food. Recall someone—a personal acquaintance, a public figure, or a canonized saint—who has improved your life or human existence. What do you admire most about this person? How do they inspire you to live differently?*
- 2. Jesus calls his disciples to serve as a beacon of light in a dark world. How can our parish bring hope to others?*

Prayer at the Conclusion of the Meeting

Intercessory Prayers

Leader: In confidence we now offer God our prayers and our needs.

For those people who have showed us how to be salt and light, we pray...

All: God of light, hear our prayer.

Leader: Please offer any other prayers...

(When all who choose are finished offering prayers)

For these prayers and all those we hold deep in our hearts, we pray...

All: God of light, hear our prayer.

Closing Prayer

All: As you have made this day, O God, you also make the night. Give light for our comfort. Come upon us with quietness and still our souls, that we may listen for the whisper of your Spirit and be attentive to your nearness in our dreams. Empower us to rise again in new life to proclaim your praise and to show Christ to the world. Amen.

God's Wisdom
6th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A
February 12, 2023

Prayer at the Beginning of the Meeting

Invitation to Prayer

Leader: Open our eyes and ears to your wisdom, gracious God.

All: **For you have revealed to little ones the mysteries of the kingdom.**

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 2:6-10

Brothers and sisters:

We speak a wisdom to those who are mature,
not a wisdom of this age,
nor of the rulers of this age who are passing away.

Rather, we speak God's wisdom, mysterious, hidden,
which God predetermined before the ages for our glory,
and which none of the rulers of this age knew,
or, if they had known it,
they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

But as it is written:

What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard,
and what has not entered the human heart,
what God has prepared for those who love him,
this God has revealed to us through the Spirit.

For the Spirit scrutinizes everything, even the depths of God.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Silent Reflection

Questions for Faith Sharing

1. *How does God's wisdom differ from what we ordinarily characterize as "wisdom"? Can you think of some examples from your own life?*
2. *How can we, as disciples of Christ, discern God's wisdom in the circumstances of our lives? How can we help others discern God's wisdom in their own circumstances?*

Prayer at the Conclusion of the Meeting

Intercessory Prayers

Leader: In confidence we now offer God our prayers and our needs.

That we might seek to discern your wisdom and guidance when faced with difficult decisions, we pray...

All: God of wisdom, hear our prayer.

Leader: Please offer any other prayers...

(When all who choose are finished offering prayers)

For these prayers and all those we hold deep in our hearts, we pray...

All: God of wisdom, hear our prayer.

Closing Prayer

All: May the blessing of God enfold us, bring us a restful night and refreshment for a new day. Amen. Alleluia!

Expanding our Love of Others
7th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A
February 19, 2023

Prayer at the Beginning of the Meeting

Invitation to Prayer

Leader: Bless the Lord, O my soul;
and all my being, bless his holy name.

All: The Lord is kind and merciful.

Leader: Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits.

All: The Lord is kind and merciful. (Psalm 103)

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:38-48

Jesus said to his disciples:
“You have heard that it was said,
An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.
But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil.
When someone strikes you on your right cheek,
turn the other one as well.
If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic,
hand over your cloak as well.
Should anyone press you into service for one mile,
go for two miles.
Give to the one who asks of you,
and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow.

You have heard that it was said,
You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.
But I say to you, love your enemies
and pray for those who persecute you,
that you may be children of your heavenly Father,
for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good,
and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust.
For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have?
Do not the tax collectors do the same?
And if you greet your brothers and sisters only,
what is unusual about that?
Do not the pagans do the same?
So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Silent Reflection

Questions for Faith Sharing

1. *Jesus urges his disciples to forgo even the limited retaliation allowed by the Old Testament and thus to interrupt the whole cycle of revenge. When have you been most tempted to retaliate and hurt another? What helped to interrupt that temptation?*
2. *How does the call to love our enemies most challenge us today as individuals, as a church community, or as a society? What might be a first step toward love?*

Prayer at the Conclusion of the Meeting

Intercessory Prayers

Leader: In confidence we now offer God our prayers and our needs.

That we might learn to see others as God does, we pray...

All: God of love, hear our prayer.

Leader: Please offer any other prayers...

(When all who choose are finished offering prayers)

For these prayers and all those we hold deep in our hearts, we pray...

All: God of love, hear our prayer.

Closing Prayer

All: As you have made this day, O God, you also make the night. Give light for our comfort. Come upon us with quietness and still our souls, that we may listen for the whisper of your Spirit and be attentive to your nearness in our dreams. Empower us to rise again in new life to proclaim your praise and to show Christ to the world. Amen.