

Celebration and Prayer Resources

Preparation and Decoration of the Prayer Space

Using all the senses, symbol and movement in prayer allows us to express our prayer at all levels of being and to experience God within us and through others in powerful ways that are beyond the limitation of words. Candles, flowers, music or incense allow an experience for body, mind and soul. The important thing is to make the place beautiful, to help people to focus on God and to create a space that invites people to pray.

The following ideas might be helpful:

- Arrange one or more beautiful cloths (the colour or pattern could vary according to the theme of the prayer/ the liturgical season etc.) Rainbow coloured cloths are very useful.
- Place a symbol according to the theme of the prayer and if appropriate and possible
- and/or arrange things which could be used to help people participate personally in the prayer in a responsive way e.g. pieces of paper cut in the shape of flowers/hearts/seeds/fruits which can then be written or drawn on.
- Place: an icon. This can be varied depending on the time of year and/or the Bible which could be laid on the table/a special cloth/a reading stand and/or a cross
- Arrange some flowers/plants
- Add at least one candle... Have easily accessible matches. Put glass plates under the candles to prevent wax spilling!!!!
- Have your reading/pictures/activities/songs (and music) /guitar/music books/matches ready and accessible e.g. the Bible, *"I walk with Jesus"* or *"I meet Jesus"*
- Add incense... (some people do not like the smoke and the smell so be sensitive)
- Turn the lights down...
- Switch off the telephone if possible
- Use gentle music to help people calm down & focus at the beginning, or to play during the prayer, or at the end

Planning prayers

1. First an appropriate **theme**,
2. Then a scripture **passage, poem, quote or story** to illustrate the theme,
3. Then a **symbol** or image which could be used to further deepen the theme and make it accessible,
4. Then a way of **decorating** the space which illustrates the theme in some way or echoes it
5. Then a possible **gesture** or action we could invite people to make as a response,
6. and finally appropriate **music and songs**.

Some Helpful Hints About Prayer With People With Learning Disabilities

Plan the prayer with a person with a learning disability and involve them throughout

Explain the format of the prayer before starting so people know what to expect

When reading from the Bible adapt according to the people present e.g.

- You could tell the story instead of reading it;
- You could add in the names of the people present;
- You could use simpler words that are more accessible;
- You could add in local references to make the text accessible today where you live;
- You could repeat key phrases

Make sure there is space for everyone and comfortable places to sit and that those who need support have someone with them. A story can be told and built up using Fuzz Felt symbols which are stuck up as the story progresses. A Polaroid or digital camera allows for immediate photos of people/activities. These can then be put into a book and be available for prayer. This is exciting and helps people to connect more easily than with line drawings.

Help people with learning disabilities to pray out loud either by:

- Example/modelling
- Inviting them to pray, encouraging them
- Saying a prayer out loud on their behalf if appropriate (important people could be prayed for on behalf of the person)

Times of silence are good; those who are non-verbal and those who are not are all united at such times in a very deep way.

We can experience how deeply we are all one. We can slow down. Listen to people with learning disabilities, remember what they say and see the potential deeper meaning hidden at first hearing. Then repeat what they have said helping them to be involved and to own their own story. Signing is important for some people: learn important signs beforehand, or make sure someone is present who can sign, or take the time to teach everyone the signs

For people who are non-verbal, it can help to have prayerful objects to hold e.g. a 'holding cross', a rosary, a picture (it needs to be appropriate for the person). For others it could be distracting to hold something. Be sensitive to each individual. For people who are blind or partially sighted it can be helpful to burn incense or use essential oils as a way to mark the time of prayer as being different. For short attention spans choose short readings, make brief comments. Often the fewer words the better. Use of repetition, gesture and body language reinforces communication. Using Signalong can help certain people follow what is being said. Action songs can be used if appropriate. Using a mike and speaker system can help to make quiet voices accessible to the group and is enjoyable too

Symbolic gestures allow each one to participate in his or her own way e.g.

- Writing or drawing a prayer on a card (which could be cut in appropriate shapes) and placing it in the central point;
- Giving each one some symbol to take away (a seed to be planted, a candle, a quote beautifully written out, a flower....);
- Sharing food; Adoration of the cross on Good Friday;
- Each one blessing his/her neighbour

Be very clear when the prayer is ended (by a closing familiar ritual such as blowing out the candle)

Trust your own gifts in leading prayer. Each of us has our own way of doing things and our own way of praying. Be true to yourself. Some people will be more creative, musical, reflective...

It is okay to laugh in prayer time if there is something funny! We need to be true to ourselves before God and not simply trying to conform to an image of holiness.

You may find it helpful to write out the outline of the prayer for yourself to follow

Go with the flow! Often things do not go as planned and that is fine! Something new can be given through the 'mistakes'. Remain relaxed and focussed. Remember that people with learning disabilities teach us to be able not always to be in control! Use visual aids

Make use of music – instrumental or sung, or maybe CD's

Be attentive to the needs and moods of individuals during the prayer: is a time of gentle quiet needed, or laughter, or a rousing song? Remember you cannot please everyone all of the time!!!

Start where people are and provide **an experience which relates to their everyday lives** and links in with the chosen theme of the prayer time, using senses and symbol where appropriate. **Link this human experience to the sacred** using simple words and **gentle repetition or symbols**. It is helpful to choose **one simple, clear theme**. **Simplicity is key**. Moving at a **gentle, unhurried pace** with periods of silence or quiet music allows time to assimilate, reflect and respond. It is important to provide an **atmosphere** which helps people to absorb God's love and message intuitively and unconsciously through their environment. This can be done by the way the prayer space is decorated. We can try to **be what we want to convey**. If we pray totally and sincerely others will sense our own reverence, wonder and delight. It is important to **'announce the Word'** i.e. to explain the meaning of the text chosen and to explain its relevance to us in this home/community today. We show our **reverence** by the way we hold the Bible. E.g. We can offer the Bible to everyone, inviting them to place their hands on it to show their willingness to listen. We read it thoughtfully, slowly, with dignity, as though God had asked us to give this message to his people. It can be helpful to read it again to allow the words to resonate deep within, going from the head to the heart. We show our **reverence and care** by our attitude, such as when washing one another's feet, which gives an experience of God's love and strengthens our relationship with Jesus.

Suggested Prayer Activities

- ★ Put stones (from the beach or coloured glass ones) on the table:
 - These could be picked up and wondered at – like the treasure in the field. *Mt 13: 44*.
 - We could offer them as our gifts to God.
 - We could lay the stones down as we put our worries and fears at the foot of the cross. (Have a cross on the table).
 - They could represent things we find difficult to do and be put in a 'Something for God to Do Box'
- ★ Put a bowl on the table:
 - Pour water into it. Let people wash their faces/hands.
 - Invite each person to dip their fingers into the water of life. *Jn. 4*
 - Invite someone to pick the bowl up and bless the person next to them with the water. This could go on round the group. *Isaiah 43*
 - Let people fill a glass from the bowl and drink. *Isaiah 55: O, come to the water, all you who are thirsty*
- ★ Ask one person to go round the group and bless each member of the group, laying their hands on the person's head, or hands. *Isaiah 43*
- ★ Use a mirror: Who can you see? Is it a child of God? What is their name?

- Sing a song where each person can be named e.g. “*All night, all day, angels watching over NAME, my lord*” “*He’s got NAME in his hands, he’s got the whole world in his hands*” “*Come to the circle*” (John Coleman song)
- ★ Put a picture/icon of Jesus on the table. Talk about Jesus’ friends, the disciples, laying down photos of each member of the group as you do so.
- ★ Go outside in the dark and read and explain the creation story in Genesis 1 as candles are lit and everyone listens to the sounds around, looking up at the stars
- ★ Give everyone a butterfly, a flower, a candle, a piece of fruit (or ask them to choose) and invite them to lay it down in the centre giving thanks for the day/week/year/holidays...
- ★ Have a dry rose of Jericho/dehydrated paper flowers and pour water on it/them watching it/them blossom and talk of how God brings new life even when we think everything is dry and dead
- ★ Ask someone to lie down and lay a rope around him/her so when s/he gets up the outline of a body is seen; ask people to put a candle in the outline somewhere. Read *1 Cor. 12: 12 – 31* – we are part of the one body.
- ★ On the theme of unity: Sing ‘*Bind us together*’ as wool is passed round the circle binding everyone together. Sing John Coleman’s song ‘*Broken, all of us broken*’ as each one cuts the wool binding him/her to the person next to him/her (pass round scissors for this). Tie the wool together again (the circle becomes smaller – less beautiful and ‘perfect’ because it is now full of knots, but people are closer together)
- ★ Invite people to look at shells: you have to look inside some types to see the beauty; others you can hear the sea...
- ★ Give everyone the end of a bit of wool. Each gives the other end to someone else and lays the wool down until we see a beautiful coloured web of relationships.
- ★ Ask everyone to bring their slippers (worn to our shape, comfortable, reminding me God accepts me as I am) or whatever makes them feel really at home. Discuss what helps you to feel at home. Talk about God being our home.
- ★ Talk about our clothes wrapping our bodies just as we are wrapped in God’s love. *Julian of Norwich*
- ★ Give out shelled hazelnuts and read Julian of Norwich’s passage on the hazelnut in the palm of God’s hand. Invite people to reflect on the hazelnut saying, ‘This is my world. It is held in the love of God.’
- ★ Look at a map of the town and talk of the words of Jesus being like a map for us to find our way home to God.
- ★ Draw with white crayon on white paper – a heart, someone’s name, a cross, a chalice and some breadDuring the prayers, paint over the paper with water based paint – the picture, which we couldn’t see before, will become visible. It was always there – just like God’s love for us.
- ★ Make bread dough – during the prayer, each person make a bread roll, perhaps saying a prayer as they do so. Put the rolls in the oven while you finish prayers, and then eat it ...
- ★ Cut a picture according to the chosen theme into several jigsaw pieces and then during the prayer get people to put the picture back together
- ★ Create a sun in the centre. Cut out strips of yellow paper which will become the sun’s rays. Invite people to write their name on a ray and to lay it down giving thanks for the different paths/gifts of each person.
- ★ Create a flower of unity – each person adding a petal representing themselves.
- ★ Cut out cards in the shape of a hand. Each writes his/her name on one and reflects on the words of God, “I have carved you on the palm of my hand.” *Isaiah 49: 16*
- ★ Tell the Parable of the Banquet (have all the props prepared and in place nearby) and invite people to act it out spontaneously until a table is laid with fruits and bread and the poor have been welcomed.
- ★ Plant some seeds/sow watercress seeds in the shape of the letters of people’s names or another shape.
- ★ Create a dream catcher on the floor with stones and feathers. Ask people to pick up a stone and to reflect on what is difficult in their lives. This is laid down. Then invite people to pick up a feather and give thanks for what is good.
- ★ **Shrove Tuesday** Make pancakes, Have a pancake race, pray with them, Have a Fancy Dress Party
- ★ **Ash Wednesday**
 - Each one write down any burden, sin, darkness, pain, fragility we wish to be freed from. Lay these papers in a bowl with last year’s palms. Burn the papers and palms (attention for fire alarm and smoke detector!!!). Pass bowl round and each dabs a thumb in the ashes and makes sign of cross on neighbour’s forehead.
 - Create a heart on the floor out of stones: each one could take a stone and with all the stones spell out the words ‘Father forgive them’; each one could then keep a stone over Lent and at Easter paint it with bright colours; when everyone comes together the stones could be used to spell out ‘Alleluia!’ OR at Easter replace each stone one by one with a flower or a candle
 - Use the old Christmas tree to make a Lenten tree: over Lent hang symbols on the tree and at Easter each one bring a flower to decorate the tree
- ★ **Lent** spring clean our hearts, homes, (throw out, give away, recycle, clean, mend...)
- ★ **Holy Week**

- Have a Way of the Cross visit a place representing suffering of Jesus (soup kitchen, refugees, prison)
- Have an Easter egg hunt (each egg could be decorated with the names of people or their photos so each person hunts for his/her own egg)
- Have a treasure hunt in teams – matching photos to objects
- Do circle dancing
- Exchange a kiss of peace and reconciliation
- ★ **International Day For Peace**
- Make a mobile of origami paper cranes and tell the story of *Sadako and the 1,000 Paper Cranes* Send the cranes to the Peace Museum in Hiroshima. Let the fragile mobile remind us how fragile the maintaining of peace can be.
- Reflect on the fact that the anniversary of the bomb falling on Hiroshima is the same day as the Feast of the Transfiguration. Then send cards with doves on to communities committed to working for peace to be in solidarity with them.
- ★ **Gift of each other**
- Paper fruit representing each person is hung from a tree until the tree is full
- Have an empty pot/bowl representing the church. Each person in turn pours his/her glass of water into the bowl until it is filled with the gifts of each one.
- Plant seeds, bulbs
- Create a cairn of stones together
- Create a circle of cut out paper people all linked together holding hands
- Outline the body of a person with rope on the ground and then each one lay a symbol of the gift s/he brings somewhere in the body. Read 1 Cor. 12: 27
- Have a basket of fruit and nuts which are all different. Each one chooses one and then the leader gives thanks for each individual's gifts as symbolised by the fruits.
- Each one paint a glass; put lighted candles in each glass and give thanks for how each person brings light and colour to the community in a unique way.
- Out of stones create a house and read 1 Peter 2: 5 'you may be living stones making a spiritual house'
- Create a path together each one laying down a brick decorated to illustrate the gift of each person
- Have a large painting of a vine. Add grapes cut out from paper, each 'grape' having the name of a person Read Jn. 15: 'I am the vine...'
- do some fundraising for people in particular financial need. Making food (special dishes/biscuits /cakes) and selling them at church. Have a week where everyone does something for another person and is paid e.g. giving a massage, teaching someone sign language, making cards, washing a car....
- Make a card together to send to Missionaries/someone supported by Amnesty International

Possible things to include in a liturgy box/cupboard:

For use as symbols/decoration: A cross, A fishing net (can be useful in mimes) Advent ring, Angels Balloons, Beautiful cloths/saris, Candles, floating candles, tea lights), Christmas crèche/Baby Jesus, Coloured/clear glass beads, Dried leaves, Heart shapes e.g. a cushion, Icons (appropriate for different liturgical seasons), Incense, Interesting bits of wood/drift wood/bark, Map of the world (can be used to mark places of war/where friends come from...), Mirrors, Sand, Sea shells, Stars, Stones

Helpful items: A collection of postcards with interesting images on e.g. an open door, a mother and child...(these can be kept in a small photo album), A torch, Attractive bowls and baskets of different sizes/ shapes, CD player, CDs of quiet classical music, Christian hymns and songs, popular songs about hope and goodness of heart, sounds of nature, Clear glass plates to put under candles to prevent wax dripping onto carpets, Matches (with long sticks for ease of lighting), Photos of each person, Various candle holders, Keep a folder of helpful, creative ideas as a reference/resource pack (in other words 'steal', adapt, repeat ideas from liturgies which you have found to be good!) and keep adding to it. Collect potential liturgy props (woven baskets, glass bowls, little figures of a mother with a child etc)

For use in creating things: Balls of wool, Blu tack, Board for mounting sheets of paper, Clip art CD, Coins, Collections of pictures – from cards, magazines and newspapers, Coloured ribbons, Double sided sticky tape, Glue (glue sticks), Glue, glitter, other things to stick, Origami paper, Paper, Wrapping paper, Pastels, pens, crayons, paints, charcoal, Scissors, String

N.B. a hook in the ceiling can enable mobiles, decorations, streamers, piñatas and other things to be hung up.