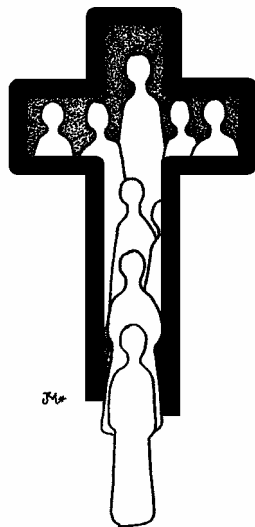


Pastoral Council Faith Sharing Sessions

October and November 2007



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AN INVITATION TO PRAY WITH YOUR PASTORAL COUNCIL

These opening and closing prayers have been prepared by the Office of Pastoral Planning, Diocese of Rochester, 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 form community, and to serve especially those in need). As stated in our diocesan “Parish Pastoral Council Guidelines,” the specific purposes of the pastoral council are:

- to form community as a sign and witness of unity for the larger community
- to provide recommendations for priorities, directions, and policies through pastoral planning
- 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, with listening to one another in faith and love, followed by listening to the larger community of parishioners in similar faith and love, and end again in prayer.

And so we invite you 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.

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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. Decide if this session is appropriate for your council or if you would like to choose another based on topic.
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.

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. You do not need to cover all of the questions. 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*.

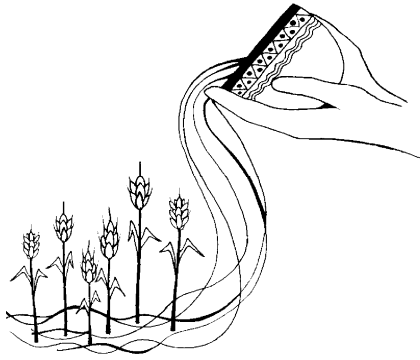
Notes

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. Some communities like to develop one intercessory prayer relative to the issues on which the pastoral council is working. This prayer is prayed by the entire community at Sunday liturgies over the course of the month. This practice provides spiritual support for the parish’s leadership, helps the entire congregation to be conscious of issues under consideration by the pastoral council, and helps all to focus on the God who leads the community into the future.
3. These prayer sessions, while designed for pastoral councils, can be used at the meetings of the parish staff, other parish committees, and the planning group council 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.



Increase our Faith
27th Sunday in Ordinary Time,
Cycle C
October 7, 2007

Prayer at the Beginning of the Meeting

Invitation to Prayer

All: Faithful God, your great love stands firm from generation to generation, your mercy is always abundant. Give us open and understanding hearts, that responding to your call we may bring your presence to all whom we meet. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen

Scripture Reading: Luke 17:5–10

The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith.” The Lord replied, “If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you would say to the mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.

“Who among you would say to your servant who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, ‘Come here immediately and take your place at table’? Would he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare something for me to eat. Put on your apron and wait on me while I eat and drink. You may eat and drink when I am finished’? Is he grateful to that servant because he did what was commanded? So should it be with you. When you have done all you have been commanded, say, “We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do.””

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

Silent Reflection

Questions for Faith Sharing

1. As leaders in our faith community, what do you do to nourish your faith?
2. How can we nourish a spirit of faith in the larger community?

Prayer at the End of the Meeting

Intercessory Prayers

Leader: As members of Christ's Body, we pray for our needs and the needs of the world...

That we may praise and thank God for an ever growing faith, we pray...

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: That we may live in oneness with one another, we pray...

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

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

After a few moments for personal intentions....for these and all those prayers we hold deep in our hearts, we pray...

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Closing Prayer

All: May the peace of the risen Christ fill our hearts this night and may we share that peace with one another. Amen. Alleluia.

Always be Thankful
28th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C
October 14, 2007

Prayer at the Beginning of the Meeting

Invitation to Prayer

All: Loving and gracious God, we gather in your presence as a faith community of believers. You call us to be good stewards of the resources that have been entrusted to us. We place our trust in you as we discern your will in our parish community. Help us to be open to your will. Be present to us throughout our meeting tonight so that we may continue to praise you in our words, decisions, and actions. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Luke 17:11-19

As Jesus continued his journey to Jerusalem, he traveled through Samaria and Galilee. As he was entering a village, ten lepers met him. They stood at a distance from him and raised their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!" And when he saw them, he said, "Go show yourselves to the priests." As they were going they were cleansed. And one of them, realizing he had been healed, returned, glorifying God in a loud voice; and he fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him. He was a Samaritan. Jesus said in reply, "Ten were cleansed, were they not? Where are the other nine? Has none but this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?" Then he said to him, "Stand up and go; your faith has saved you."

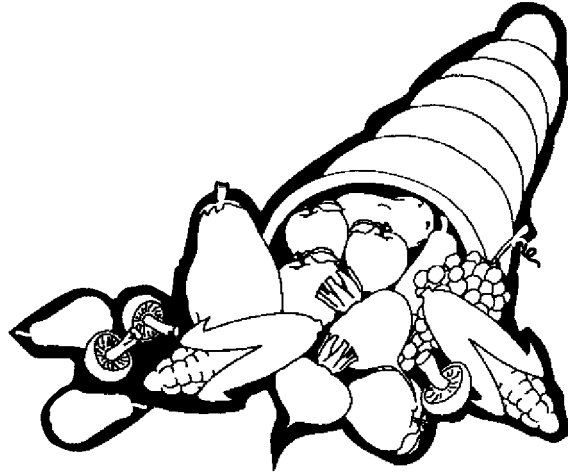
The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Silent Reflection

Questions for Faith Sharing

1. Jesus offers the gift of healing to the ten lepers. Healing is a manifestation of God's love for us all. How do we show gratitude to God in our daily lives for all that has been given to us? How does our community show its gratitude for God's blessings?
2. Where is God calling us to consider this reading in our meeting today?

As we continue our meeting, let us remember that we are all called to be good stewards of our Lord, and to follow his will in all that we say and do.



Prayer at the End of the Meeting

Intercessory Prayers

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

That our faith community will always respond with compassion to the needs of others, 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, we pray to the Lord.

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Closing Prayer

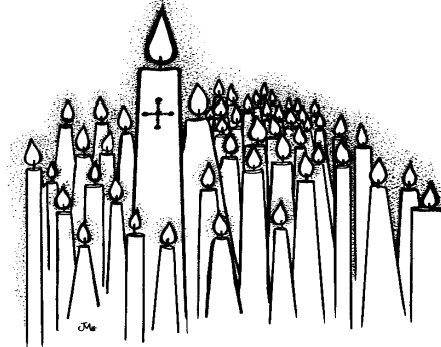
All: Father in heaven, the hand of your loving kindness powerfully yet gently guides all the moments of our day. Go before us in our pilgrimage of life, anticipate our needs, and prevent our falling. Send your Spirit to unite us in faith, that sharing in your service, we may rejoice in your presence. Amen.

Persevering in Hope
29th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C
October 21, 2007

Prayer at the Beginning of the Meeting

Invitation to Prayer

Leader: God of hope,
sometimes we feel the darkness
setting in and believe that our
prayers are not being heard.
Renew our hope;
strengthen our perseverance.
Remind us that your love always
surrounds us.
We ask this in the name of Jesus,



All: Amen.

Scripture Reading: Luke 18:1-8

Then Jesus told his followers a parable about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary. He said,

"There was a judge in a certain town, who neither feared God nor respected any human being. And a widow in that town used to come to him and say, 'Render a just decision for me against my adversary.'

"For a long time the judge was unwilling, but eventually he thought, 'While it is true that I neither fear God nor respect any human being, because this widow keeps bothering me I shall deliver a just decision for her lest she finally come and strike me.'"

The Lord said, "Pay attention to what the dishonest judge says. Will not God then secure the rights of his chosen ones who call out to him day and night? Will he be slow to answer them? I tell you, he will see to it that justice is done for them speedily. But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

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

Silent Reflection

Questions for Faith Sharing

1. When you have felt that your prayers have not been answered as you hoped, what have you done?
2. How do you feel such experiences might have helped you in your faith life?
3. How can we, as pastoral council members, help our community when difficult times come upon us and it seems like our prayers are not being heard?

Prayer at the End of the Meeting

Intercessory Prayers

Leader: Persisting in our prayer, we now offer God our concerns and needs.
Please reply “Lord, help us to grow in our faith,” to our petitions.

For our church—that when we are experiencing difficult times we might hold on to our belief that God will hear us and save us, we pray.

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

(The leader may add or invite prayers that address the concerns dealt with in this meeting.)

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

(When all who choose to share are finished offering prayers)
For these prayers and all those we hold deep in our hearts, we pray:

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Closing Prayer

Leader: Loving God,
you are full of understanding and patience.
Help us to remain faithful to you
throughout times of darkness and uncertainty.
Grant us your wisdom, your guidance, and your protection;
help us to be strong and to persevere in our faith
through all the difficulties of life.
We ask this as we ask all things
+in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

All: Amen.

Act with Justice
30th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C
October 28, 2007

Prayer at the Beginning of the Meeting

Invitation to Prayer

All: Provident God, you gather us as your servants. Prepare our hearts to love justice, to care for the lowly, to love the Christ in every person. Give us a spirit of wisdom as we ponder the needs and concerns of our community. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Sirach 35: 12-14, 16-18

The Lord is a God of justice, who knows no favorites. Though not unduly partial toward the weak, yet he hears the cry of the oppressed. The Lord is not deaf to the wail of the orphan, nor to the widow when she pours out her complaint.

The one who serves God willingly is heard; his petition reaches the heavens. The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds, it does not rest till it reaches its goal, nor will it withdraw till the Most High responds, judges justly and affirms the right, and the Lord will not delay.

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



Silent Reflection

Questions for Faith Sharing

1. Justice is embraced through our being rooted in the Gospels. What is your practice of praying with the Gospels? How can you cultivate this as a daily part of prayer?
2. Sirach reminds us that God wants justice for those on the margins. Who are the marginalized, the oppressed whom our community supports? Are there others to whom we need to reach out with God's compassion and justice?

Prayer at the End of the Meeting

Intercessory Prayers

Leader: Let us raise our hearts in gratitude and name one thing for which we are grateful this day...

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.

How do we see...
31st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C
November 4, 2007

Prayer at the Beginning of the Meeting

Invitation to Prayer

All: Loving and gracious God, we gather in your presence as a faith community of believers. You call us to be good stewards of the resources that have been entrusted to us. We place our trust in you as we discern your will in our community. Help us to be open to your will. Be present to us throughout our meeting tonight so that we may continue to praise you in our words, decisions, and actions. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Luke 19:1-10

Jesus came to Jericho and intended to pass through the town. Now a man there named Zacchaeus, who was a chief tax collector and also a wealthy man, was seeking to see who Jesus was; but he could not see him because of the crowd, for he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus, who was about to pass that way. When he reached the place, Jesus looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house." And he came down quickly and received him with joy. When they all saw this, they began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner." But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a descendant of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost."

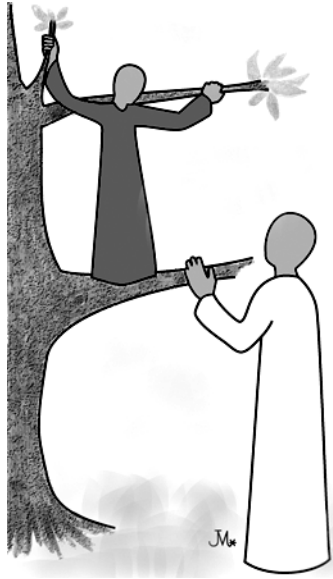
The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Silent Reflection

Questions for Faith Sharing

1. Zacchaeus seeks Jesus out and is changed in the encounter. How are we transformed as a community in our encounter with Christ in the Eucharist and in each other? Do we seek Christ in each other?
2. Where is God calling us to consider this reading in our meeting tonight?

As we continue our meeting, let us remember that we are all called to be good stewards of our Lord, and to follow his will in all that we do and say.



Prayer at the End of the Meeting

Intercessory Prayers

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

That our faith community will always be one that seeks the love of God through the mercy and forgiveness of others, 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, we pray to the Lord.

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Closing Prayer

All: Father in heaven, God of power and Lord of mercy, from whose fullness we have received, direct our steps in everyday efforts. May the changing moods of the human heart and the limits which our failings impose on hope never blind us to you, source of every good. Faith gives us the promise of peace and makes known the demands of love. Remove the selfishness that blurs the vision of faith. Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Calling on God, Our Savior
32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time,
Cycle C
November 11, 2007**



Prayer at the Beginning of the Meeting

Invitation to Prayer

Leader: God of promise,
you are ever faithful to your people.
Guard us and guide us,
preserve and protect us
through all the days of our lives
until we are one with you forever.
We ask this in the name of Jesus.

All: Amen.

Scripture Reading : 2 Thessalonians 2:16-3:5 (NRSV Version)

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.

Finally, brothers and sisters, pray for us, so that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified everywhere, just as it is among you, and that we may be rescued from wicked and evil people; for not all have faith. But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one. And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will go on doing the things that we command. May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.

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

Silent Reflection

Questions for Faith Sharing

1. How have you experienced God's faithfulness in your life? When have you felt God's strength and protection in the face of evil?
2. What fears have you heard our parishioners express?
3. How can this pastoral council build our community's faith and confidence in God's steadfast love?

Prayer at the Conclusion of the Meeting

Intercessory Prayers

Leader: Let us bring our meeting to a close by offering a psalm to our loving God. Please reply "Protect us, O Lord," to our petitions.

For our church—may we stand firm in our faith in the face of doubt and opposition, we pray:

All: Protect us, O Lord.

Leader For world leaders and those whose efforts to do good are met with ridicule and hate, we pray:

All: Protect us, O Lord.

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

(When all who choose to share are finished offering prayers)
For these prayers and all those we hold deep in our hearts, we pray:

All: Protect us, O Lord.

Closing Prayer

Leader: Good and gracious God,
turn your ear to us; hear our prayer.
Keep us as the apple of your eye;
hide us in the shadow of your wings.
Show us your wondrous love.
Guard us, O Lord,
while we are awake
and keep us safe while we sleep
that waking we may keep watch with Christ
and sleeping we may rest in his peace.
We ask this as we ask all things
+in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

All: Amen.

God is Present
33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C
November 18, 2007

Prayer at the Beginning of the Meeting

Invitation to Prayer

In silence be aware of God's presence within you, around you and in all creation.

Leader : Let hearts who search for God rejoice.

All: Seek always the face of the God who loves us.

Scripture Reading: Luke 21:5-19

While some people were speaking about how the temple was adorned with costly stones and votive offerings, Jesus said, "All that you see here—the days will come when there will not be left a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down."

Then they asked him, "Teacher, when will this happen? And what sign will there be when all these things are about to happen?"

He answered, "See that you not be deceived, for many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he,' and 'the time has come.' Do not follow them! When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for such things must happen first, but it will not immediately be the end."

Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be powerful earthquakes, famines, and plagues from place to place; and awesome sights and mighty signs will come from the sky.

"Before all this happens, however, they will seize and persecute you, they will hand you over to the synagogues and to prisons, and they will have you led before kings and governors because of my name.

"It will lead to your giving testimony. Remember, you are not to prepare your defense beforehand, for I myself shall give you a wisdom in speaking that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute.

"You will even be handed over by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends, and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name, but not a hair on your head will be destroyed. By your perseverance you will secure your lives."

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

Silent Reflection

Question for Faith Sharing

Where do you find the presence of God in your life?

Prayer at the End of the Meeting

Intercessory Prayer

Leader: Reconciler God, your touch brings life; your hand makes all things new.
Hear our prayer.

For the Church, a community of wounded healers, we pray...

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: For those who have gone before us to their place of rest, we pray...

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

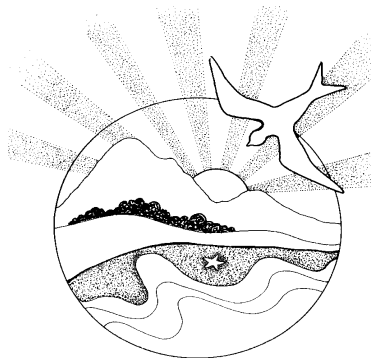
Leader: And for what else do we pray...

(When all who choose to share are finished offering prayers)
For these prayers and all those we hold deep in our hearts, we pray:

All: Lord, 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!



**Our Lord Jesus Christ the King
Feast of Christ the King, Cycle C
November 25, 2007**

Invitation to Prayer

Leader: To Jesus Christ our Sovereign King, who is the world's salvation,

**All: All praise and honor do we bring and thanks and adoration.
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.**

Scripture Reading: Colossians 1:12 – 20

Brothers and sisters;

Let us give thanks to the Father, who has made you fit to share in the inheritance of the holy ones in light.

He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the first born from the dead, that in all things the fullness was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross through him, whether those on earth or those in heaven.

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

Silent Reflection

Questions for Faith Sharing

1. Which image of Jesus or description of his actions, found in this passage, stands out for you?
2. How do you praise and thank God for the gift of Jesus?

Prayer at the End of the Meeting

Prayer of Gratitude

Leader: In a word or phrase, share the gratitude that is your heart at this moment...

Closing Prayer

All: **You raised up your Son, O God, and seated him at your right hand as the shepherd and king who seeks what is lost, binds up what is wounded, and strengthens what is weak. Empowered by the Spirit, may we share with others that which we have received from your hand, to the honor of Jesus Christ. Amen.**

