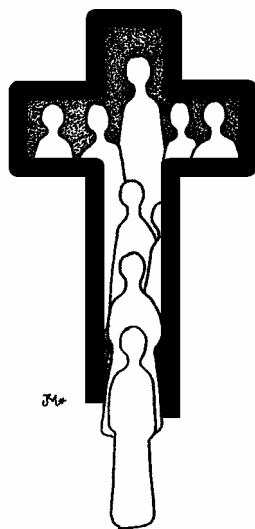


Pastoral Council Faith Sharing Sessions

September 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.

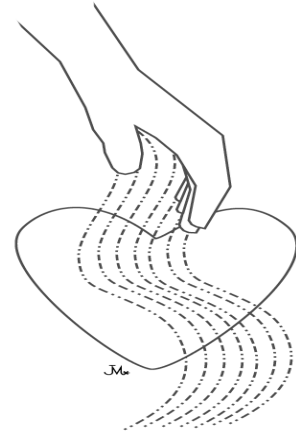
1. Participants are given time to reflect before sharing begins, and a period of comfortable silence might occur between individuals sharing. Silence is a vital part of the total process of faith sharing.
2. Sharing is optional. Each person shares at the time and on the level where he or she feels comfortable.
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.

Creating a Place of Welcome
22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C
September 2, 2007

Prayer at the Beginning of the Meeting

Invitation to Prayer

Leader: God of all,
 You have placed us in a position of trust,
 a position of service.
 Help us to welcome all people to your house.
 Help us to understand their needs
 so that we might serve them,
 and through them, serve You.
 We ask this in the name of Jesus,



All: Amen.

Scripture Reading : Luke 14:12-14

Then he said to the host who invited him,
"When you hold a lunch or a dinner,
do not invite your friends or your brothers or sisters
or your relatives or your wealthy neighbors,
in case they may invite you back and you have repayment.
Rather, when you hold a banquet,
invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind;
blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you.
For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

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

Silent Reflection

Questions for Faith Sharing

- a) Who are the people who come to our church? What are the issues they are dealing with? What are their hopes? What are their fears?
- b) Do we make everyone who comes feel welcome? What are some practical ways that we, as Parish Pastoral Council members, can do this?
- c) How can we, as Parish Pastoral Council members, help our community reach out and invite those who are in need into our midst? How can we serve the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind?

Prayer at the Conclusion of the Meeting

Intercessory Prayers

Leader: God is the ultimate host—the one we can turn to in our need, the one who provides a banquet of love for us. Let us turn to our loving God with our hopes and concerns. Please reply “Lord, hear our prayer,” to our petitions.

For our church, that we might offer a warm welcome to all who long for the sacrament of love and life, we pray.

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

For our nation, that we might care for those who are most vulnerable in our society and world, we pray.

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

(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:

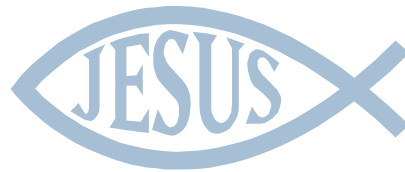
All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Closing Prayer

Leader: Loving God,
having received the banquet of life
through your gracious Son,
we are called to offer its fruits,
in turn, to all who come to our door.
It is not an easy task.
Grant us the vision to see you in the people who come to us,
especially the poor, the weak, the vulnerable, and the difficult.
Grant us the courage to love your people,
and the grace to provide them what they need.
We ask this as we ask all things
+in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

All: Amen.

Called To Serve
23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C
September 9, 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 discipleship, removing all things that get in the way of us truly following you. 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 today so that we may continue to praise you in our words, decisions, and actions. Amen.

Scripture reading: Luke 14:25-33

Great crowds were traveling with Jesus, and he turned and addressed them, “If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. Which of you wishing to construct a tower does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if there is enough for its completion? Otherwise, after laying the foundation and finding himself unable to finish the work the onlookers should laugh at him and say, ‘This one began to build but did not have the resources to finish.’ Or what king marching into battle would not first sit down and decide whether with ten thousand troops he can successfully oppose another king advancing upon him with twenty thousand troops? But if not, while he is still far away, he will send a delegation to ask for peace terms. In the same way, anyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple.”

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

Silent Reflection

Questions for Faith Sharing

1. Jesus is telling his disciples that the cost of discipleship is steep. We are to give our lives over for the good of others. As a Pastoral Council, how far are we willing to go for the good of our parish community? Are we willing to sacrifice for the good of the community, even when our decisions are unpopular?

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 disciples of our Lord, and to follow his will in all that we say and do.

Prayer at the Conclusion of the Meeting

Intercessory Prayer

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

That our faith community will always strive to follow the will of God and to put the good of others ahead of our own. Let us 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.

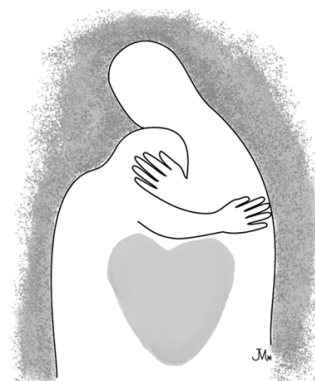
All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Closing Prayer

All: Gracious God, you bring forth new life in us as we strive to do your will. Hear our prayers that we may always strive to give our best in whatever way we are called. Help us to give our service for the good of others, that we may seek you in others. We ask all this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



Being Found
24th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C
September 16, 2007



Prayer at the Beginning of the Meeting

Invitation to Prayer:

Leader: Let hearts rejoice who search for God,

All: **Seek the Holy One, seek the face of God.**
Glory to you, Creator God
Living Word, Indwelling Spirit,
As it was in the beginning, is now,
and will be forever. Amen.

Scripture: Psalm 51

Antiphon: Teach me wisdom of the heart.

Women: Have mercy on me, O Gracious One,
according to your steadfast love;
forgive me where my thoughts and deeds have hurt others.

Men: Lead me in the paths of justice, guide my steps on paths of peace!

Women: Create in me a clean heart, O Gracious One,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Enfold me in the arms of love, and
fill me with your Holy Spirit.

All: Restore in me the joy of your saving grace,
and encourage me with a new spirit.

Silent Reflection

Questions for Faith Sharing

1. When and where do I let my focus lose sight of God's constant love for all of creation?
2. What spiritual practice do I need to cultivate in order to walk with a new spirit?

Prayer at the Conclusion of the Meeting

Intercessory Prayer

Leader: Gracious God, we remember the needs of others, that we may reach up to claim your love for them, and reach out to give your love in the name of Christ.

For families suffering loss and alienation, for children abandoned and unloved, for the forgotten elderly, we pray:

All: Compassionate God, hear our prayer.

Leader: For aliens and refugees, for those who are prisoners of conscience, for those who labor for human rights, we pray:

All: Compassionate God, hear our prayer.

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

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

All: Compassionate God, hear our prayer.

Closing Prayer

All: God of all peoples, make us one with all your saints and with any who are in need. Teach us to befriend the weak and welcome the outcast, that we may serve the Lord Jesus Christ and live as he taught us. In his holy name we pray. Amen

Psalm 51, Psalms for Praying, Nan C. Merrill, Continuum, New York

Sharing our Abundance
25th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C
September 23, 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 today so that we may continue to praise you in our words, decisions, and actions.

Scripture reading: Luke 16:1-13

Jesus said to his disciples, “A rich man had a steward who was reported to him for squandering his property. He summoned him and said, ‘What is this I hear about you? Prepare a full account of your stewardship, because you can no longer be my steward.’

The steward said to himself, ‘What shall I do, now that my master is taking the position of steward away from me? I am not strong enough to dig and I am ashamed to beg. I know what I shall do so that, when I am removed from the stewardship, they may welcome me into their homes.’ He called in his master’s debtors one by one. To the first he said, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ He replied, ‘One hundred measures of olive oil.’ He said to him, ‘Here is your promissory note. Sit down and quickly write one for fifty.’ Then to another the steward said, ‘And you, how much do you owe?’ He replied, ‘One hundred kors of wheat.’ The steward said to him, ‘Here is your promissory note; write one for eighty.’ And the master commended that dishonest steward for acting prudently. “For the children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. I tell you, make friends for yourselves with dishonest wealth, so that when it fails, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

The person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones; and the person who is dishonest in very small matters is also dishonest in great ones. If, therefore, you are not trustworthy with dishonest wealth, who will trust you with true wealth? If you are not trustworthy with what belongs to another, who will give you what is yours? No servant can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and mammon.”

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

Silent Reflection

Questions for Faith Sharing

1. Jesus is calling us to be good stewards of all that has been entrusted to us. These resources are a means to an end. How are we using these resources to help God in building up his Kingdom?
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 Conclusion of the Meeting

Intercessory Prayer

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

That our faith community will always strive to be good stewards and to help bring the love of God into our world. Let us 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: Gracious God, you bring forth new life in us as we strive to do your will. Hear our prayers that we may always strive to give our best in whatever way we are called. Help us to give our service for the good of others, that we may seek you in others. We ask all this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



Responding to the Need
26th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C
September 30, 2007

Note: Please ensure there are adequate copies of the Magnificat for everyone (page 2).

Prayer at the Beginning of the Meeting



Invitation to Prayer

Leader: God our help,
All we have is gift from You:
You have created this world and its peoples.
You protect us and guide us, comfort and console us.
Give us the ability to see the needs of our people
and to respond to them effectively,
with kindness and patience.
We ask this in the name of Jesus,

All: Amen.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 146: 6-7, 8-9, 9-10

Happy are those whose help is Jacob's God,
whose hope is in the LORD, their God,
The maker of heaven and earth, the seas and all that is in them,
Who keeps faith forever,
secures justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry.
The LORD sets prisoners free;
the LORD gives sight to the blind.
The LORD raises up those who are bowed down;
the LORD loves the righteous.
The LORD protects the stranger,
sustains the orphan and the widow,
but thwarts the way of the wicked.
The LORD shall reign forever, your God, Zion, through all generations!
Hallelujah!

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

Silent Reflection

Questions for Faith Sharing

1. How has your call to the Parish Pastoral Council been a call to serve God's people? What particular gifts do you feel are being called forth?

2. What are the needs you believe the parish community has that the Pastoral Council should be addressing this year?
3. What are some practical ways that we, as Parish Pastoral Council members, can tend to the most pressing of these needs?

Prayer at the Conclusion of the Meeting

Intercessory Prayers

Leader: In confidence we now offer God our prayers and our needs. Please reply “God our help, hear our prayer,” to our petitions.

For our church—that we might secure justice for the oppressed, give food to the hungry, set prisoners free, and give sight to the blind, we pray:

All: God our help, hear our prayer.

Leader For our world—that nations may seek to raise up those who are bowed down, to protect the stranger, sustain the orphan, and care for the widow, we pray:

All: God our help, hear our prayer.

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: God our help, hear our prayer.

Closing Prayer

Leader: Let us pray together the Magnificat, the song of Mary,

**All: My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;
my spirit rejoices in God my savior.
For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness;
behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.
The Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him.
He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart.
He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly.
The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty.
He has helped Israel his servant, remembering his mercy,
according to his promise to our ancestors,
to Abraham and Sarah and their descendants forever.**

Leader: May God grant us a safe journey home and a peaceful night.
+in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

All: Amen.