



A Year of Prayer

For Parish Councils, Staff and Parish Groups

By

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As a person who has served in many ministries and many capacities over the past 40+ years, I know two things for certain: prayer is essential and finding prayer for groups in ministry is difficult. As a diocesan director of the offices of Pastoral Services and Lay and Diaconate Formation for the Diocese of Madison from 1998 to 2006, I found it beneficial to those in leadership at the parishes to provide prayers that could be used by various groups monthly. Using the same basic format that I used in those prayers, I have created prayers for 10 separate months including a prayer for the Advent season and a prayer for the Lenten season.

As a full time professor of pastoral theology at Mundelein Seminary and University of Saint Mary of the Lake in Mundelein, IL from 2006 to 2015, one of my delights was teaching the class on Evangelization and Catechesis. A whole segment of that class was on evangelizing and catechizing the leadership of the parish, most especially those who had been called into service on a pastoral or finance council. Two components from those segments stand out: the need for ongoing evangelization of the leadership and the need to provide meaningful prayer opportunities for the same leadership. I have included in this booklet resource a plan for an annual retreat for parish council or parish group members that can be accomplished in one day. I have also included the opening prayer for that retreat.

While these materials are copyrighted by me (© 2016), you have my permission to use them and to adapt them to your own needs. It is all one Church. I pray that these resources are helpful and that through their use, individuals may grow in their love of Christ, faith in His word, and hope in his promise.

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Introduction

Prayer is essential. Prayer changes things. Prayer changes us. Prayer is necessary before, throughout and after all of our activity in, with and through Christ. Too often in our world, prayer is dropped in a slot or pulled out of a hat. Prayer needs to be seen, instead, as the foundation of our efforts, placing us together and deserving of preparation beforehand. Prayer at a parish pastoral council or parish commission/group meeting is a means of establishing the relational axis for the group. On the one hand, the prayer centers the diverse group on the Lord, whom they came to serve. Focused on the Lord rather than themselves or tasks, the individual members are drawn out to the fuller mission of Christ and to relationships with others inherent in the building up of the Body of Christ. The prayer, in this environment, is viewed as the foundational ingredient for the work and relationships of the council or commission/group team. This situation evokes feelings of harmony, of love enlarging, and of animation.

This evokes the image of blood flowing into and out of the beating heart. The blood enters into the heart, the core of the body, and from there is sent to every region of the body to provide life giving oxygen and nourishment. The heart provides the power needed to deliver this life. Building upon the image of the blood entering into and being sent forth from the heart, the members represent the blood. The heart, of course, represents Christ. Without entering into Christ and being sent forth from Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, the team, though rich with gifts, would lack the true power to give and sustain life. This image is supported by the documents of Vatican II, most especially by *Lumen gentium*. “All men are called to this union with Christ, who is the light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, and towards whom our whole life is directed.”¹ “The Church – that is, the kingdom of Christ, already present in mystery – grows visibly through the power of God in the world.”² “As the assumed nature, inseparably united to him, serves the divine Word as a living organ of salvation, so, in a somewhat similar way, does the social structure of the Church serve the Spirit of Christ who vivifies it, in the building up of the body.”³

Beginning with prayer sets the team up for the holy work they are called to perform. An additional benefit within the prayers offered is that of providing an opportunity to share their faith after silent reflection. It is not mandatory that anyone or everyone speak/share. But allowing time for this allows for the individual disciples to proclaim their faith. Our faith was not given us to hoard. It was given us to share. As Pope Francis writes: “In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 28)

¹ *Lumen gentium*, 3. I am using the following translation for the documents of Vatican Council II: *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, Study Edition* ed. Austin Flannery, OP (Northport, New York: Costello Publishing, 1987).

² *Ibid.*

³ *Lumen gentium*, 8

Gathering Prayer Month 1

Invitation to Prayer

Opening Prayer

Leader:

Lord, may everything we do begin with your inspiration and continue with your saving help. Let our work always find its origin in you and through you reach completion. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.⁴

All: Amen.



Reading A reading from the Letter of Paul to the Ephesians (Eph 4:1-6)

I, then, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Time for Silent Reflection (followed by optional faith sharing)

Our Father

Closing Prayer

All: Loving and gracious Lord,
send forth your Spirit into our midst to strengthen and guide us.
Fill us with the graces of cooperation so that we might
hear your Word, discern your will, and labor together with joy
for the growth of your holy Church beginning with our parish. Amen.

⁴ *The Liturgy of the Hours According to the Roman Rite*, Vol. III, Ordinary Time Weeks 1-17 (New York; Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975), 711.

Gathering Prayer Month 2

Invitation to Prayer



Opening Prayer

Leader:

Lord, hear the prayer we offer to you and help us to follow your Spirit so that we might produce an abundance of goodness in patience and faith. We ask this through Our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.⁵

All: Amen.

Reading A reading from the Letter of Paul to the Ephesians (Eph 3:20-21)

Now to him who is able to accomplish far more than all we ask or imagine, by the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Time for Silent Reflection (followed by optional faith sharing)

Intercessions

Leader: Lord, you called us into your Holy Church.

ALL: *Look on us with favor, Lord, and hear us.*

Leader: Open our hearts and minds to the needs of your Church at this time.

ALL: *Look on us with favor, Lord, and hear us.*

Leader: Help us to discern your power and presence at work.

ALL: *Look on us with favor, Lord, and hear us.*

Leader: Lead us in our work during this gathering.

ALL: *Look on us with favor, Lord, and hear us.*

Concluding Prayer:

All: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forever. Amen.

⁵ Adapted from Evening Prayer of Thursday Week IV, *The Liturgy of the Hours According to the Roman Rite*, Vol. III, Ordinary Time Weeks 1-17 (New York; Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975), 1229.

Gathering Prayer Month 3

Invitation to Prayer

Opening Prayer



Leader:

Lord, work is your gift to us, a call to reach new heights by using our talents for the good of all. Guide us as we work and teach us to live in the spirit that has made us your sons and daughters, in the love that has made us brothers and sisters.⁶

We ask this through Christ, our Lord.

All: Amen.

Reading A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews (Heb 10:24)

Let us hold unwaveringly to our confession that gives us hope, for he who made the promise is trustworthy. We must consider how to rouse one another to love and good works.

The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Time for Silent Reflection (followed by optional faith sharing)

Response (Ps 117)

Men: Praise the Lord, all you nations! Give glory, all you peoples!

Women: The Lord's love for us is strong; the Lord is faithful forever.

Intercessions

Leader: Lord, we gather together in service to our brothers and sisters of faith.

ALL: *Remember your Church, Lord, and hear us.*

Leader: Guide us in our discussions and reflections.

ALL: *Remember your Church, Lord, and hear us.*

Leader: Help us to discern your will and to follow your Spirit.

ALL: *Remember your Church, Lord, and hear us.*

Leader: Lead us in all of our work during this gathering for your Church.

ALL: *Remember your Church, Lord, and hear us.*

Leader: Make our efforts bear fruit.

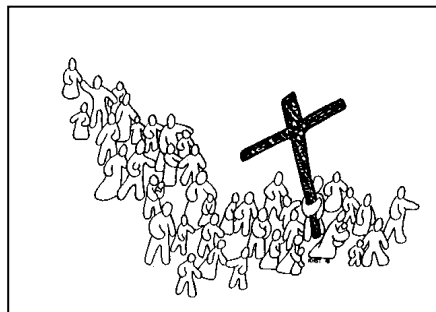
ALL: *Remember your Church, Lord, and hear us.*

Our Father

⁶ *The Liturgy of the Hours According to the Roman Rite*, Vol. III, Ordinary Time Weeks 1-17 (New York; Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975), 715.

Gathering Prayer Month 4

Invitation to Prayer



Opening Prayer

Leader:

Lord, as we gather to consider the work needed to grow your Church, we come to you. You are the light that no darkness can put out. Fill us with the resplendent light of your eternal love. May we love you above all things and our brothers and sisters for your sake. Grant this through Christ our Lord.⁷

All: Amen.

Reading

A reading from the Letter of Paul to the Galatians (Gal 6:9-10)

Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up. So then, while we have the opportunity, let us do good to all, but especially to those who belong to the family of the faith.

The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Time for Silent Reflection (followed by optional faith sharing)

Response

Leader: Lord, we recognize that the grace we have received today come from you.

ALL: *Look on us with favor, Lord, and hear us.*

Leader: Open our hearts and minds to the needs of your Church at this time.

ALL: *Look on us with favor, Lord, and hear us.*

Leader: Help us to discern your power and presence at work.

ALL: *Look on us with favor, Lord, and hear us.*

Leader: Lead us in our work during this gathering.

ALL: *Look on us with favor, Lord, and hear us.*

Concluding Prayer:

All: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forever. Amen.

⁷ Adapted from Daytime Prayer Saturday Week II, *The Liturgy of the Hours According to the Roman Rite*, Vol. III, Ordinary Time Weeks 1-17 (New York; Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975), 972

Gathering Prayer For Advent

Invitation to Prayer

Opening Prayer

Leader:

Almighty Father, give us the joy of your love to prepare the way for Christ our Lord. Help us to serve you and one another with joyful love and deep commitment. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. ⁸

All: Amen.

Reading Jeremiah 29: 11- 13

For I know well the plans I have in mind for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare, not for woe! Plans to give you a future full of hope. When you call me, when you pray to me, I will listen to you. When you look for me, you will find me. Yes, when you seek me with all your heart, you will find me with you, says the LORD, and I will change your lot.

The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Time for Silent Reflection (followed by optional faith sharing)

Responsory (Ps 119: 49 - 50)

Right: Remember your word to your servant by which you give me hope.

Left: This is my comfort in affliction, your promise that gives me live.

Intercessions:⁹

Leader: To our Redeemer who came to bring good news to the poor, let us pray

ALL Let all humanity see your glory.

Leader: Show yourself to those who do not know you, let them see your saving work.

ALL Let all humanity see your glory.

Leader: Let your name be preached to the ends of the earth so all might find you.

ALL Let all humanity see your glory.

Leader: You brought freedom to us by saving us, continue to save us and make us free.

ALL Let all humanity see your glory.

Our Father



⁸ Adapted from *The Liturgy of the Hours According to the Roman Rite*, Vol. I, Advent Season & Christmas Season (New York; Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975), 1152.

⁹ Ibid.

Gathering Prayer Month 6

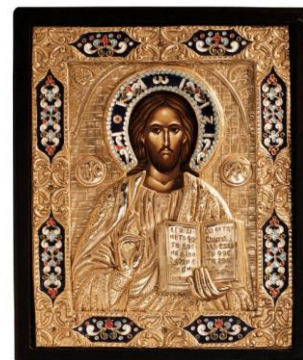
Invitation to Prayer

Opening Prayer

Leader:

Lord Jesus, be our companion as we seek to follow you.
Where two or three gather in your name, Lord, you
promised to be with them and share their fellowship.
Look down upon us gathered here in your name, and
graciously pour out your blessings upon us. You live and
reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God,
forever and ever. ¹⁰

All: Amen.



Reading A reading from the Gospel of John (Jn 15:1-5)

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and everyone that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit. You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you. Remain in me, as I remain in you, just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me can do nothing.

The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Time for Silent Reflection (followed by optional faith sharing)

Responsory (Ps 145: 10-13, 17-18)

Right:	All your works give you thanks, O Lord, and your faithful bless you.
Left:	They speak of the glory of your reign and tell of your great works.
Right:	Making known to all your power, the glorious splendor of your rule.
Left:	Your reign is a reign for all ages, your dominion for all generations.
Right:	The Lord is trustworthy in every word, and faithful in every work.
Left:	You, Lord, are just in all your ways, faithful in all your works.
Right:	You, Lord, are near to all who call upon you, to all who call upon you in truth.

Our Father

¹⁰ *The Liturgy of the Hours According to the Roman Rite*, Vol. III, Ordinary Time Weeks 1-17 (New York; Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975).

Gathering Prayer Month 7

Invitation to Prayer

Leader: We gather in prayer,
marking ourselves with the sign of the cross.



All: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer¹¹

Leader: Lord, may our lives mirror our love for you
Whose wisdom has brought us into being,
And whose care guides us on our way.
We ask this through Christ, our Lord, your Son, who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

All: Amen.

Reading: A reading from the prophecy of Isaiah (Is 58:6-9)

This, rather, is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; clothing the naked when you see them and not turning your back on your own. Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your wound shall quickly be healed; your vindication shall go before you, and the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer, you shall cry for help, and he will say, "Here I am."

The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Time for Silent Reflection (followed by optional faith sharing)

Leader: Let us join our voices together and pray in the words our Savior taught us.

ALL: Our Father, who art in heaven....

Leader: As we end our prayer, let's exchange a sign of Christ's peace with one another.

¹¹ From *The Liturgy of the Hours According to the Roman Rite*, Vol. III, Ordinary Time Weeks 1-17 (New York; Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975)..

Gathering Prayer For Lent



Invitation to Prayer

Leader: We begin by gathering in prayer,
marking ourselves with the sign of the cross.

ALL: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Opening Prayer¹²

Leader: Merciful Father, may the penance of our Lenten observance make us your obedient people. May the love within us be seen in what we do and lead us to the joy of Easter. 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.

All: Amen.

Reading: A reading from the prophecy of Joel (Joel 2: 12-13)

Return to me with your whole heart,
with fasting, and weeping, and mourning;
Rend your hearts, not your garments,
and return to the LORD, your God.
For gracious and merciful is He,
slow to anger, rich in kindness,
and relenting in punishment.

The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Time for Silent Reflection (followed by optional faith sharing)

Responsorial (Psalm 51: 11 – 14)

Left: Turn away your face from my sins; blot out all my guilt.

Right: A clean heart create for me, God; renew in me a steadfast spirit.

Left: Do not drive me from your presence, nor take from me your holy spirit.

Right: Restore my joy in your salvation; sustain in me a willing spirit.

Our Father

Closing Prayer:

Leader: Father, help us to be ready to celebrate the great paschal mystery. Make our love grow each day as we approach the feast of our salvation. We ask this through Our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit.

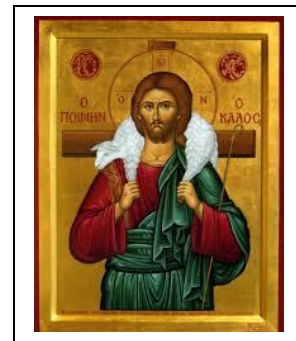
ALL: Amen.

¹² Adapted from *The Liturgy of the Hours According to the Roman Rite*, Vol. II, Lenten Season-Easter Season (New York; Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975).

Gathering Prayer Month 9

Invitation to Prayer

Leader: We begin by gathering in prayer,
marking ourselves with the sign of the cross.



All: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*Opening Prayer*¹³

Leader: Lord Jesus Christ, to save all mankind you stretched out your arms on the cross.
Let our work be pleasing to you. May it proclaim your salvation to the world. You
live and reign for ever and ever.

All: Amen.

Reading: Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me. Then the God of peace will be with you.

The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Time for Silent Reflection (followed by optional faith sharing)

Intercessions:

Leader: Let us bring our needs to the Lord, our God.

Help us to consider the needs of others above our own desires, we pray

ALL: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: Help us to take the role of servant for the Lord with humility and joy, we pray

ALL: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: Keep us from division and make of us one mind in the truth and one heart in charity, we pray

ALL: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: Loving Lord, together with your Son, You sent the Holy Spirit to your Church.

Continue to send the Spirit to enlighten and strengthen us, to empower us through the wonders of your divine love working through us. We ask this through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever.

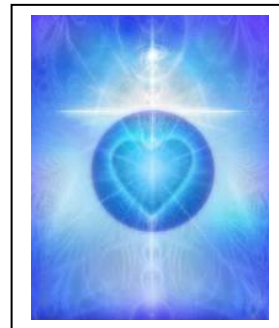
ALL: Amen.

¹³ Opening Prayer, Responsorial, and Petitions are adaptations of prayers from *The Liturgy of the Hours According to the Roman Rite*, Vol. III, Ordinary Time Weeks 1-17 (New York; Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975)..

Gathering Prayer Month 10

Invitation to Prayer

Leader: We begin by gathering in prayer,
marking ourselves with the sign of the cross.



All: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*Opening Prayer*¹⁴

Leader: Heavenly Father, to enlighten the world, you sent to us your Word as the sun of truth and justice shining upon humankind. Illumine our eyes that we may discern your glory in the many works of your hands. Tenderize our hearts that we may allow your transformative love to convert our hearts and minds to your ways. We ask this through our Lord, Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever.

All: Amen.

Reading: Ephesians 2: 17-22

He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone. Through him the whole structure is held together and grows into a temple sacred in the Lord; in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit

The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Time for Silent Reflection (followed by optional faith sharing)

Responsorial: Psalm 33: 20-22

Right: Our soul waits for the Lord,
Left: Who is our help and shield.
Right: For in God our hearts rejoice;
Left: In your holy name we trust.
Right: May your kindness, LORD, be upon us.
Left: We have put our hope in you.

Closing Prayer: said by all

Lord God, you sent forth your Spirit, so too you send us forth as agents of your kingdom. Clarify your call to us. Give us courage to do whatever is asked. Send us forth with joy and trust. Amen.¹⁵

¹⁴ Opening Prayer, Responsorial, and Petitions are adaptations of prayers from *The Liturgy of the Hours According to the Roman Rite*, Vol. III, Ordinary Time Weeks 1-17 (New York; Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975)..

¹⁵ Adaptation of prayer from <http://emmauscommunity.net/pages/book/gathering.pdf>

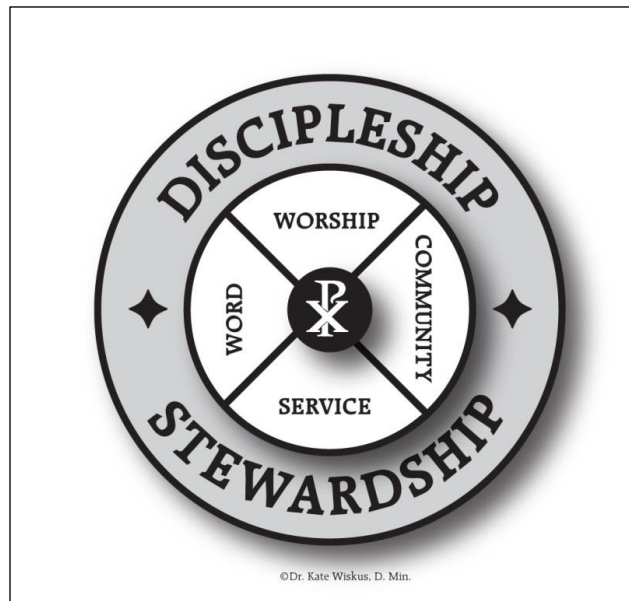
Sample #1 of an Annual Retreat for Council & Commission/Group Members

PRIOR TO RETREAT: Distribute the USCCB document *Disciples Called to Witness: The New Evangelization*. Ask the members of the council(s) to read this very short (27 pages) document prior to the retreat so as to be able to join in a meaningful discussion of it. The books can be ordered from the USCCB website.

THE DAY OF THE RETREAT:

- Gather with coffee and rolls or a brunch buffet. Take time for community before entering into the “retreat” mode because it is important for the participants/members to establish some rapport for the tasks that lay before them in the retreat.
- Call the group together to begin with prayer. Use a developed and printed prayer to launch the retreat. One example of such a prayer is provided in this booklet immediately following the retreat section. Be sure to allow for faith sharing after silent reflection in the middle of the prayer. Also, invite the participants to add intercessions specific to the community’s needs or personal needs. This allows them to both share their faith in group and formulate and offer prayer for others.
- Following the gathering/opening prayer, turn to Scripture – Ephesians 4:1-16
 - Read the text of Ephesians 4:1-16 aloud. If possible have handouts of the reading for everyone so they might focus on the words more deeply.
 - Speak of “*to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received*”
 - What does that mean to the individuals?
 - What call have they received? Baptismal? Call to serve in council?
 - Stress our Baptismal Call to participate in the ongoing mission of Christ as “Priest, Prophet, and King”
 - Speak of the unity and diversity of the Body of Christ.
 - Speak of the ultimate goal – “Living the truth in love, we should grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, with the proper functioning of each part, brings about the body’s growth and builds itself up in love.”
- Discuss *Disciples Called to Witness: The New Evangelization*
 - Stress universal call to holiness
 - Stress living out baptismal call as disciples
 - Stress growing disciples at the parish level through liturgy, catechesis, parish life, community, service to others, mentorship, etc.

- Return to Scripture – Hebrews 10:19-24
 - Discuss the passage and the call contained within
 - How do we “rouse one another to love and good works”?
- Engage in visioning as group on carrying these understandings forward
 - Engaging other lay leadership
 - Establishing parish focus on evangelization and growing disciples
 - Maintaining focus for councils, commissions, and parish membership on active discipleship and growth in relationship with our Lord and one another as we realize the mission of Christ
- Close with a prayer.

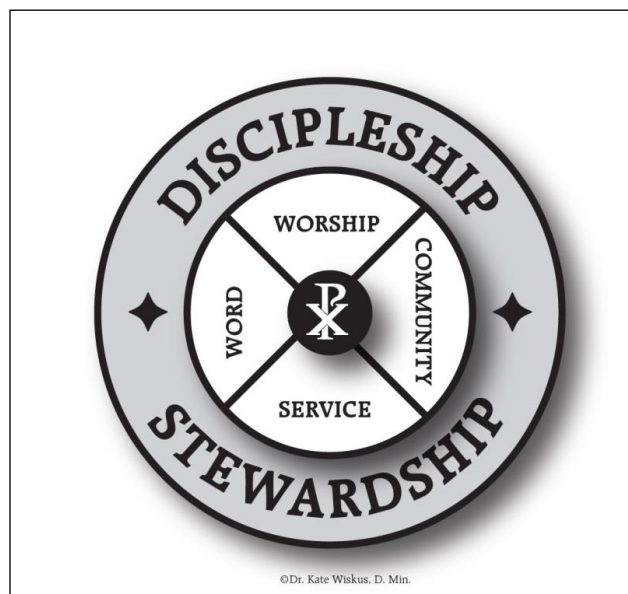


Sample #2 of an Annual Retreat for Parish Pastoral Council Members

PRIOR TO RETREAT: Distribute Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium: The Joy of the Gospel*. Ask the members of the council(s) to read the introductory section and chapter 1 (25 pages) prior to the retreat so as to be able to join in a meaningful discussion of it. The books can be ordered from the USCCB or from Amazon. Document is also available online at: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html

THE DAY OF THE RETREAT:

- Gather with coffee and rolls or a brunch buffet. Take time for community.
- Call the group together to begin with prayer. Use a developed and printed prayer to launch the retreat. Be sure to allow for faith sharing after silent reflection in the middle of the prayer.
 - Following the gathering/opening prayer, turn to Scripture
 - Read the text of Colossians 1: 9-14 aloud. If possible have handouts of the reading for everyone so they might focus on the words more deeply.
 - Speak of “*to live in a manner worthy of the Lord*” What does that mean to the individuals?
 - How does this reading tie into our baptisms, both the blessings and responsibilities of our “*inheritance of the holy ones in light*”?
 - Turn to our Baptismal Call to participate in the ongoing mission of Christ as “Priest, Prophet, and King” (use baptismal graphic)



- Discuss the good that can be accomplished when we live our baptismal discipleship through worship, word, community, and service.

- Summarize and lead discussion *The Joy of the Gospel*
 - Stress the call for all of us to take part in realizing the mission of evangelization.
 - Look especially at “An Ecclesial Renewal Which Cannot Be Deferred”. What is this calling the parish leadership to undertake and to ensure?
 - Can individuals see the connection between growing disciples at the parish level and the parish liturgy, catechesis, parish life, community, and service to others?
- Return to Scripture – Philippians 4: 4-9
 - Discuss the passage and the mandate for living the faith well contained within
 - How do we as leaders bring this “Joy of the Gospel” to our parish community?
- Engage in visioning as group on carrying these understandings forward
 - Engaging other lay leadership
 - Establishing parish focus on evangelization and growing disciples
 - Maintaining focus for councils, commissions, and parish membership on active discipleship and growth in relationship with our Lord and one another as we realize the mission of Christ
- Close with a prayer.

Gathering Prayer For Council Annual Retreat



Invitation to Prayer

Leader: We begin by gathering in prayer,
marking ourselves with the sign of the cross.

All: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer¹⁶

Leader: Almighty and ever-living LORD, source of all truth and love and life,
You have revealed to us your love throughout all ages. Give us attentive hearts
and minds so we might hear your word fully and discern your will truly.
Unite us in spirit and truth and enable us to be living signs of your transformative
love. We ask this through Christ, our Lord.

All: Amen.

Reading:

Reader #1: A reading from the Letter to the Ephesians (4:15-16)
Rather, living the truth in love, we should grow in every way into Him who is the head,
Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting
ligament, with the proper functioning of each part, brings about the body's growth and
builds itself up in love.

The Word of the Lord

All: Thanks be to God.

Time for Silent Reflection (followed by optional faith sharing)

Responsorial (Psalm 16: 7-9, 11)

All: I bless the LORD who counsels me;
even in the night my heart exhorts me.
I set the LORD ever before me;
with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed.
Therefore my heart is glad and my soul rejoices,
my body, too, abides in confidence.
You will show me the path to life,
fullness of joys in your presence,
the delights at your right hand forever.

¹⁶ From *The Liturgy of the Hours According to the Roman Rite*, Vol. III, Ordinary Time Weeks 1-17 (New York; Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975)..

Petitions

- Leader: Let us turn to our Saving Lord with our needs.
- Reader #2 That the leaders of the universal Church, most especially our Pope, Francis, our bishop and our pastor, that they may give tireless witness to the good news of Jesus Christ in its fullness, we pray.
- ALL *Assist us, Lord, as we pray.*
- Reader #2 That the faithful of our parish will reach out in Christ's name to the poor, the sick and the marginalized in our neighborhoods, our parish, our communities, and our world, we pray.
- ALL: *Assist us, Lord, as we pray.*
- Reader #2 That compelled by the truth of your love, we may be your disciples, doers of your word and messengers of your hope in our daily activities, we pray.
- ALL: *Assist us, Lord, as we pray.*
- Leader: Most loving God, your presence is constant. Renew our strength and commitment so that our lives will continue to praise your name. We ask this through Christ, Our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in union with the Holy Spirit, now and forever.
- ALL: *Amen.*
- Leader: Let us join our voices together and pray in the words our Savior taught us.
- ALL: Our Father, who art in heaven....
- Leader: As we end our prayer, let's exchange a sign of Christ's peace with one another.



Developing Prayer for Pastoral Councils

Prayers for the parish councils, commissions, or any group that gathers in the parish to further the mission of Christ through their particular activities are easily developed.

One option that is always there for such gatherings is the *Liturgy of the Hours*, using the appropriate prayer for the hour of the day when the meeting is occurring. These can be found in the one or four volume edition of the *Liturgy of the Hours*. They can also be found on the internet at sites such as

- Universalis (<http://www.universalis.com/>)
- eBreviary (<http://www.ebreviary.com/ebreviary/ebreviary.nsf/pphome.html>)

A second option is creating your own prayer format or template. It is recommended that you design a template and then change out the components from month to month. A resource for such prayers is the *Liturgy of the Hours*. You can reference them and use portions of the prayers as deemed appropriate for the season or the group. Additional resources exist that one can draw from to create prayers for meetings such as:

- *Let's Begin With a Prayer: 101 Prayers for Meetings* by Sally Macke
- *Prayers for Parish Groups: Preparing and Leading Prayer for Group Meetings* by Donal Harrington
- *Meeting Prayers* by Philip A. Verhalen
- Catholics Online website: <http://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?p=554>

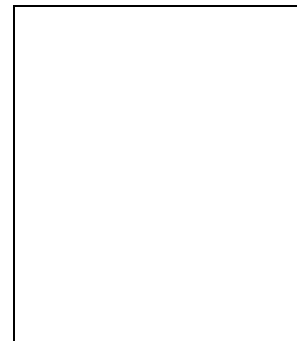
On the following page, I have provided a template for the monthly prayer for meetings. When developing the prayers, I recommend considering the *Liturgy of the Hours* as a resource for the opening prayer, responsorial, and intercessions/petitions. One can allow for silent reflection, and if possible, faith sharing within the context of the prayer. Song can be incorporated into the prayer if one is present with a music background that can lead.



Gathering Prayer

Invitation to Prayer

Leader: We begin by gathering in prayer,
marking ourselves with the sign of our baptisms
and of our triune LORD God.



All: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Leader:

All: Amen.

Reading:

.

The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Time for Silent Reflection (followed by optional faith sharing)

Responsorial:

Right:

Left:

Right:

Left:

Intercessions:

Leader:

ALL:

Leader:

ALL:

Leader:

ALL:

Leader:

ALL:

Leader: (closing prayer)

ALL: Amen.

Our Father