

Prayers and Spiritual Programs

Spiritual Formation Working Group



GOAL: Members of The Catholic Women's League of Canada grow in faith by sharing, witnessing and developing leadership skills to create positive change.



STRATEGY: Provide opportunities to increase women's spirituality



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A Prayer for Discernment

Let us pray

(Pause)... Let us be still and recognize the **presence** of God with us and in us.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

Dear Creator,

Thank you for Your love, which breathed life into me at my birth and which I seek to reflect in all my words and deeds.

I know Your Holy Spirit dwells in me, within my humble heart.

So when I need to make decisions, I look inside my heart that You may help me to read Your guidance there.

Give me discerning eyes and an untiring spirit
To know what is of You, and what is not.

That I may ask: Is this decision of You?
And so feel Your consolation, that joy of Your love in my heart,
and follow this path that leads to You.

That I may also ask: Is this decision not of You?
... And so feel desolation... darkness, temptation, confusion, pain.
... and know that this choice leads not to You.

If I feel only desolation, may I continue to walk through this darkness anyway,
... until I see the light of Your consolation, the joy of Your love in my heart.

Once I have begun to listen well to You in my heart,
Give me the generosity to help others to read You in their heart,
to sound out Your guidance, one letter, one choice at a time.

Always, may the Holy Spirit guide me to ever follow You more closely in word and deed,
Until with Your grace, we may all dwell in eternity face to face,
with You.

Through Christ our Lord,
And the intercession of Blessed Mary, our patroness,

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

Amen.

Opening Prayer for a Meeting

Let us pray

(Pause)... Let us be still and recognize the presence of God with us and in us.

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

Good and loving God,
Our source of love and light,

Thank You for bringing us together today
In a spirit of generosity.

We offer You this prayer in gratitude.

May we honour one another

By keeping an open mind.

May we voice our truth

And listen with an open heart.

May we discern Your will

To unite us in a fruitful outcome.

We ask for Your wisdom and grace

To use our talents for the betterment of others.

With the guidance of the Holy Spirit,

And the loving intercession of Our Lady of Good Counsel,

Through Christ our Lord,

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

Amen.



Closing Prayer for a Meeting

Let us pray

(Pause)... Let us be still and recognize the **presence** of God with us and in us.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

Lord God, our loving Creator, from whom all good things come, we give You thanks this evening for supporting us in our League work.

Thank you for the coming together here of our minds and spirits, to create good works to fulfill Your will.

Our minds and spirits were open to each other, and therefore, open to You.

There were times when we may have been doubtful or frustrated to meet the call of the task ahead of us,

But, with the wisdom and guidance of Your Holy Spirit, we now find joy and help again in this, our work... Your work.

So dear Lord, knowing our needs, please remain with us as we go forth with even greater enthusiasm and confidence.

Through the intercession of Our Lady of Good Counsel and in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord,

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

Amen.



Prayer for Silence

In April 2020, Pope Francis asked Catholics to stop and reflect on the new silence of a pandemic world. We need to continue to seek out the silence wherever we can find it:

“May this silence, which is a bit new to what we are accustomed, teach us how to listen.”

(Pope Francis)

So let us pray,

(Pause) ... Let us be still and recognize the **presence** of God with us and in us.

Lord, we are seeking silence in our world.
You are speaking to us in this silence.

Let our own personal silence help us
to hear You better
and become a part of our own deepening silence.

Lord, let us use the silence of our eyes
to see only Your goodness and beauty in others

Let us use the silence of our ears to hear
Your life-giving words around us

Let us use the silence of our tongues
to add only goodness to the silence

Let us use the silence of our minds
to keep us ever open to the truth of You

And most of all, let us use the silence of our hearts
to be with You.

For in the words of our dear St. Teresa of Calcutta:

“I shall keep the silence of my heart with greater care,
so that in the silence of my heart
I hear His words of comfort...”

For in the silence and purity of the heart God speaks.”

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

Amen.

Prayer to Mary, Mother of the Church

Let us pray

(Pause) ... Let us be still and recognize the **presence** of God with us and in us.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

Dear Mary, Mother of the Church

Help us to remember that Jesus is always with us.

Remind us often that on the road to Emmaus,
the disciples were sad, as we can be sad,
yet Jesus was right there beside them, exactly where they were.

He helped them to recognize His word in the “burning” of their hearts.

He helped them see it was truly Him, the Risen Lord,
present to them as He broke the bread

He gave them the joy and courage to go back to Jerusalem,
the heart of their faith, and share the true good news:

That He lives always, with us,
in the unending victory of life over death.

So please help us, Mary, in this time of pain, sadness,
loneliness and sacrifice
to hear Jesus in His word,
to see Jesus in His Eucharist,
and in each other.

For we know He is present with us, in our human hearts
and in the kind presence of a friend or neighbour,
giving us His consolation, the certainty of His love and life
unending.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

Amen.

A Reflection and Prayer to Recognize Mary Magdalene in Each of Us

Background Reflection:

On Easter Monday 2020, the pope was thinking specifically about women.

It is not surprising given that the Gospel of John, which was read at Easter masses, reminds us that Mary Magdalene was the first person to bring the news of the risen Jesus to the disciples.

She in essence becomes the first apostle, commissioned by Jesus to share the good news of His resurrection.

So I ask myself,
As women, or men, are we like Mary Magdalene?
Although she was incorrectly identified with the “sinful woman” in Luke 7:36-50 by tradition until 1969. In 2016, Pope Francis specifically elevated her memory to the status of a festivity, so we can all properly honour this truly faithful disciple of Christ.

She is a saint...
A woman of substance and strength.
the apostle to the apostles.
So yes, we can be!

So let us pray:

(Pause) ... Let us be still and recognize the presence of
God with us and in us.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

Dear Lord,

May each woman on Earth be aware of her ability to multiply good,
despite doubt and fear and a pandemic,
and even violence,

May she always see the great truth in Jesus, as the risen Lord.

May each of us women continue to carry forward our faith,
strengthened by it.

May we always be blessed to bring God’s light to others,

As we live His light in our hearts,
with our families, at our work and in our play.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

Amen.

Liturgy for Advent Wreath Facilitator's Notes

Theme:

The Advent wreath is a significant part of our journey as we begin a new church year. We use it to prepare ourselves for Christmas and for celebrating the birth of Jesus. It contains four and sometimes five candles. Each is to be lit on the Sunday at church and in the home for prayer. The candles are purple, pink and white. The greenery that is formed in a circle represents God's unending love for us. Some families will use a white candle and will light it at Christmas to announce the birth of Jesus.

Supplies:

Bible, Advent wreath/candle(s)



Liturgy for Advent Wreath: Prayer Service

First Week of Advent: Purple Candle



Leader:

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
We light the first candle, the candle of hope.

Reading: (James 5:7-8)

“Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.”

Reflection:

Advent has begun. We light this candle to remind us of all the hope that we have for our families and friends for the coming year.

Prayer:

Loving and gracious God, open our hearts and minds. Give us the hope and strength to journey ever closer to You and Your Son, Jesus Christ, during Advent.

Leader:

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

Second Week of Advent: Two Purple Candles



Leader:

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
We light the candles of hope and faith

Reading: (Psalm 119:111)

“Your decrees are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart.”

Reflection:

The test of faith is trusting that God loves and cares for us. He will provide what we need even when our prayers are not answered in the way we desire.

Prayer:

God, the Father of faith, help us to remember that prayer does not always change things. Prayer changes people and people change things.

Leader:

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

Third Week of Advent: Two Purple Candles and One Rose Candle



Leader:

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
We light the candles of hope, faith and joy

Reading: (Isaiah 55:12)

“For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.”

Reflection:

In Isaiah, the prophet proclaimed that joy is a sign—a sign of God’s presence. There are times when joy is absent in our lives. We need to remember all the good things that God has given and thank Him with rejoicing.

Prayer:

God, the Father of joy. Open our hearts so that we will rejoice in life itself as we smile and sing as we go through our days.

Leader:

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

Fourth Week of Advent: Three Purple Candles and One Rose Candle



Leader:

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
We light the candles of hope, faith, joy, and love

Reading: (Deuteronomy 6:5)

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.”

Reflection:

We are created in God’s image. Jesus taught about love in many of the parable stories that we had read and heard. Jesus calls us to love our neighbour as we love ourselves.

Prayer:

God, the Father of love, help us to break down barriers of ignorance, hate and injustice. Give us the strength to love one another as Mary, our Mother, loved Jesus her Son.

Leader:

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

A Prayer for Opening a Committee Meeting



Loving and gracious God,
blessed are You Lord, God of all creation.
We come to You with open hearts and minds,
for guidance in our deliberations.

Father, You have given us many gifts.
Give us the strength and wisdom as we journey,
to use our talents to complete the tasks,
that have been entrusted to us.

We give thanks for the greatest of all gifts,
Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son.

Guide us today.
This we ask through our Lord Jesus Christ
and the intercession of our patroness,
Our Lady of Good Counsel.

Amen

Contemplative Prayers: Silence Facilitator's Notes

Theme:

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, "...Christian Tradition has retained three major expressions of prayer: vocal, meditative and contemplative" (CCC 2699). Contemplative prayer is silence, the "symbol of the world to come," (St. Isaac of Nineveh) or "silent love" (St. John of the Cross). St. Teresa of Avila writes that, "Contemplative prayer... in my opinion is nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time... to be alone with him who we know loves us" (CCC 2709). Saints like these, as well as a saint of our own time, St. Teresa of Calcutta, lived contemplative prayer and silence. Perhaps by reflectively reading and praying the following adaptation of St. Teresa of Calcutta's words on inner silence, we can be led into our own dialogue with God.

Ways to Use these Prayers:

This prayer lends itself to reflection, journaling, sharing on a surface or much deeper level, and to talking with God and then listening to His voice. The following are **three prayer services or reflections** to lead us in contemplative prayer using the words of St. Teresa of Calcutta.

These prayers could help connect us to God by mentioning how we can deepen that closeness and ourselves by making us aware of the behaviours that keep us from God and each other.

Other ideas to use these prayers: with a short talk on contemplative prayer, silence, on St. Teresa of Calcutta, on Mary, or many other saints or topics.

These prayers fill all the criteria the League encourages: Catholic, inclusive, easily adapted to the Pray-Think-Act Model, offers adult faith development, and are beautiful!

Suggested Audience: Any number, with adaptations.

Time of Church Year:

As prayer is especially encouraged during Lent and Advent, these would be good times. However, this material can be used at any time during the liturgical year.

Time for Completion:

The following **three prayer services or reflections** could each be done in roughly 30 minutes; could be shortened to 20 minutes, or could take 40 minutes.

Supplies needed:

If the facilitator wishes to encourage journaling or use slips of paper to write intentions, participants should be asked to bring journals or slips of paper should be provided.

SILENCE

Listen in silence because if your heart is full of other things you cannot hear the voice of God. But when you have listened to the voice of God in the stillness of your heart, then your heart is filled with God.

To make possible true inner silence, practice:

Silence of the eyes, by seeking always the beauty and goodness of God everywhere, and closing them to the faults of others and to all that is sinful and disturbing to the soul.

Silence of the ears, by listening always to the voice of God and to the cry of the poor and the needy, and closing them to all other voices that come from fallen human nature, such as gossip, tale bearing and uncharitable words.

Silence of the tongue, by praising God and speaking the life-giving word of God that is the truth, that enlightens and inspires, brings peace, hope, and joy; and by refraining from self-defence and every word that causes darkness, turmoil, pain and death.

Silence of the mind, by opening it to the truth and knowledge of God in prayer and contemplation like Mary who pondered the marvels of the Lord in her heart, and by closing it to all untruths, distractions, destructive thoughts, rash judgments, false suspicions of others, vengeful thoughts and desires.

Silence of the heart, by loving God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength; loving one another as God loves; and avoiding all selfishness, hatred, envy, jealousy and greed.

Amen

Adapted from prayers of St. Teresa of Calcutta, *In the Heart of the World*

Contemplative Prayer Service—Practicing Silence

Facilitator's Notes:

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states “...Christian Tradition has retained three major expressions of prayer: vocal, meditative and contemplative” (CCC 2699). This prayer service will focus on contemplative prayer. Contemplative prayer is silence, the “symbol of the world to come” (St. Isaac of Nineveh) or “silent love” (St. John of the Cross). St. Teresa of Avila writes that “Contemplative prayer... in my opinion is nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time... to be alone with him who we know loves us” (CCC 2709).

Jesus often draws apart to pray in solitude, on a mountain, in the wilderness, early in the morning or at night. According to the Gospel of Mark, early in his ministry, Jesus established the discipline of frequent prayer—communion with His Father. “In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed” (Mark 1:35). “After saying farewell to them [the crowd], he went up on the mountain to pray” (Mark 6:46). Luke also tells us, “But he would withdraw to deserted places and pray” (Luke 5:16).

A saint of our own time, St. Teresa of Calcutta, who gave her life to the poorest of the poor, the “cast off” of the world, said that prayer was what sustained her. Perhaps some of the words on prayer and inner silence of this great humble saint can help lead us into our own dialogue with God, our own pondering and our own growth in holiness.

We need silence, we need to find it and become comfortable with it. If our hearts are full of noise, or even of thoughts, worries or distractions, we cannot hear the voice of God. Jesus sought quiet,

deserted places. We must find a quiet place and then when our hearts are stilled, and receptive, God can fill our hearts. To make possible true inner silence, St. Teresa of Calcutta tells us to practice silence.

Opening Prayer: (Facilitator)

O Lord, our God, we thank You for Your love and mercy. We ask You to empower us with gifts of contemplation, so we may praise You, seek You with all our heart, listen to You, and be open to the truth and knowledge of You. We ask this by the healing and merciful power of our Lord Jesus Christ and through the intercession of St. Teresa of Calcutta.

Facilitator:

Please sit comfortably and listen.

Practice silence of the eyes, by seeking always the beauty and goodness of God everywhere, and closing them to the faults of others and to all that is sinful and disturbing to the soul.

Close your eyes and “see” the goodness and beauty of God. What are the people and things around you that represent the goodness and beauty of God? Feast your eyes! (45 seconds)

Facilitator:

Practice silence of the ears, by listening always to the voice of God and to the cry of the poor and the needy, and closing them to all other voices that come from fallen human nature, such as gossip, tale bearing, and uncharitable words.

Close your eyes again, and “hear” God’s voice. What does it sound like? Listen to God’s voice! (45 seconds)

Facilitator:

Practice *silence of the tongue*, by praising God and speaking the life-giving word of God that is the truth, that enlightens and inspires, brings peace, hope, and joy; and by refraining from self-defence and every word that causes darkness, turmoil, pain and death.

Close your eyes and let God’s words come to you, words of truth, peace, hope and joy. (45 seconds)

Facilitator:

Practice *silence of the mind*, by opening it to the truth and knowledge of God in prayer and contemplation, like Mary who pondered the marvels of the Lord in her heart, and by closing it to all untruths, distractions, destructive thoughts, rash judgments, false suspicions of others, vengeful thoughts, and desires.

Close your eyes and open your mind to God’s truth and love. (45 seconds)

Facilitator:

Practice *silence of the heart*, by loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; loving one another as God loves; and avoiding all selfishness, hatred, envy, jealousy and greed.

Close your eyes and open your heart, love God, with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and express that love to God. (45 seconds)

Amen.

(Facilitator’s Wrap Up of Experience in Contemplative Prayer)

Facilitator:

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that, “Entering into contemplative prayer is like entering into the Eucharistic liturgy: we ‘gather up’ the heart, recollect our whole being under the prompting of the Holy Spirit, abide in the dwelling place of the Lord which we are, awaken our faith in order to enter into the presence of him who awaits us” (CCC 2711). Sometimes, we are told, trials and dryness may be encountered. And sometimes, we experience a poor and humble surrender to the loving will of the Father and His Son.

Sharing Experience: (Facilitator)

Here, the facilitator may (depending on the size of the group and on comfort levels) ask if anyone would like to share the experience of the prayer. Please welcome and affirm all responses. (Maybe three to five minutes, depending on responses).

Facilitator:

As you remember aspects of this prayer experience, reflect on what comes to you in prayer. And may the Holy Spirit continue to bless your prayer life with new opportunities as you grow ever closer to God.

Closing Prayer: Our Father, Hail Mary, Fatima Prayer, etc. (you choose).

A Short Contemplative Prayer Service

Theme: A short prayer service with sharing and discussion using the Pray-Think-Act Model

Time: 20-30 minutes

Supplies needed: Copies or an overhead of the prayer, "Silence."

Facilitator's Notes:

Please use excerpts of the facilitator's notes from the previous Contemplative Prayer Service: Practicing Silence.

Opening Prayer (Facilitator): O Lord, our God, we thank You for Your love and mercy. We ask You to empower us with gifts of contemplation, so we may praise You, seek You with all our heart, listen to You, and be open to the truth and knowledge of You. We ask this by the healing and merciful power of our Lord Jesus Christ and through the intercession of St. Teresa of Calcutta. Amen (two minutes).

Listening (Facilitator): Please get comfortable, close your eyes, and listen as I read the prayer "Silence" (two minutes). (Distribute a copy of the prayer to each person or have it on the overhead.)

Reading and Pondering (Facilitator): Please read the prayer silently and ponder it (two to three minutes). I invite you to find a partner (or turn to the person on your right, two minutes). If you are comfortable doing so, you will be asked to share, and of course, we are all asked to respect confidentiality by leaving anything shared in this room.

Sharing (Facilitator): I invite you to share with your partner one habit or action you practice that is life-giving. (You could briefly model if you wish. Four minutes so both may share).

(Depending on the group, if you, the facilitator, think it would be

appropriate, you could also ask them to share one habit or action they would like to work on changing or are in the process of changing. Remind them to do this only if they feel comfortable doing so.) (four minutes)

Large Group Sharing and Discussion (Facilitator): Please return to the large group. Would anyone like to share their experience of this prayer and sharing? Would anyone like to tell us what they do or have done that is life-giving? Would anyone like to share what they are working on? (Sharing and discussion could follow if you, the facilitator, feel comfortable with leading this. It is the facilitator's responsibility to ensure confidentiality is not broken and discussion remains positive. This large group sharing is usually optional, depending on the group and group facilitator. Give about three minutes).

Closing Prayer (Facilitator):

Think of your life-giving actions, and offer them up to God, and may the Holy Spirit continue to bless your prayer life with new opportunities as you grow ever closer to God. Please listen again to the words of St. Teresa of Calcutta:

"[Jesus] is close to you; He is with you. Just keep the lamp burning and you will always see Him. Keep on filling the lamp with all these little drops of love, and you will see how sweet is the Lord you love" (*In the Heart of the World*).

Prayer (Facilitator): Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen

The Prayer “Silence” as a Contemplative Reflection

The prayer “Silence” is divided into five segments: Silence of the Eyes, Silence of the Ears, Silence of the Tongue, Silence of the Mind and Silence of the Heart. Each section asks us to: seek God, listen to God, praise God, be open to the truth and knowledge of God and love God. (See prayer at the beginning of Contemplative Prayer—Silence)

This contemplative reflection could be used during Lent or at any other time of the year. The prayer could be used in many ways. The following is one suggestion:

First, as with any contemplation, find a quiet place and devote a few minutes to this prayer time. If possible, return to the same place at roughly the same time each day.

Step 1: Inviting the Holy Spirit as a guide, pray one section—Silence of the Eyes. Ponder the words and “sit” with them for five to 10 minutes. Listen to God. Pray either Our Father or your choice of prayer. Reflect on what comes to you.

Step 2: On the second day, repeat the process with Silence of the Ears. Repeat for days three, four and five so that for each of five days, you have prayed the five segments of “Silence.”

Step 3: On the sixth day, pray the whole prayer, and ask God to lead you to one small positive action. It should be something you can do (a telephone call, e-mail, text, going to Reconciliation, making cookies for someone, committing to seven days of prayer for someone or a situation, etc.). We can do many things without spending money and without a huge amount of effort or time. Thank God for the inspiration to turn your prayer into action.

Step 4: On the seventh day, perform that action and pray a decade of the rosary for that person or people. Thank the Holy Spirit and the Lord for your prayer life.

This contemplative prayer experience could be a discipline for each week of the 40 days of Lent. It could be incorporated into your prayer life once a week for the year, or you could think of many ways to use this prayer to turn your prayer life into action. God bless you as you journey ever closer to Him.

Discernment: Facilitator's Notes

Theme:

This is a practical and understandable experience for members as they continue to develop their skills and faith in discernment. So, an opportunity to better hear, understand and follow God's calls.

Intended Audience:

This group discussion activity based on the Pray-Think-Act Model and is suitable for small or large groups. It fosters a deeper, personal reflection for new actions and understandings.

Expected Time for Completion: 30 minutes

Background:

St. Ignatius of Loyola (born 1491 AD) believed that we experience God's guidance within ourselves in the stirrings of our hearts. We feel joy or sorrow, hope or despair, courage or fear. When we examine these stirrings, we are aware of what is of God and what is not of God. We follow then what is of God.

Consolation is the joy of God's love. It pulls us toward God. It means God is with us in our choice of word or deed.

Desolation is the darkness, confusion, temptation and pain that signals to us that we are not on the path which leads us closer to God. We are encouraged to walk through desolation to persevere toward God anyway. And to wait to make any important decision until we are not in deep desolation. Wise advice.

Here is a sample of a program to help us focus on and further develop our ability to discern God's call in the choices we must make throughout life.

Program:

A facilitator coordinates and speaks as necessary. The goal is to make the members comfortable, relaxed and interested. It is also an interactive experience, so the facilitator helps others to experience this time together. Her role is one of service.

This program is based on the Pray-Think-Act Model encouraged for members to participate more fully in the experience and grow more deeply in their faith.

Set up:

The facilitator will:

- set up a display, including candle, bible, liturgy of the hours, rosary
- choose one scripture passage
- ask women to bring individual bibles/provide bibles or copies of the passage

Discernment: Prayer Service

Part 1: Introduction Meeting God in Silence

With all watching, slowly and reverently light the candle, open the bible or breviary. Ask those present to sit comfortably, be still. The facilitator may use material from the introduction on the previous page as she sees fit.

Facilitator:

To contemplate how we can each use discernment to guide us in daily choices, we need to let ourselves first be silent (pause).

Opening Prayer:

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

Dear Lord,

May I create silence within me...

May my eyes rest in You... my ears rest in You...
my lips rest in You...my mind rest in You.

But most of all, let there be silence in my heart.

That I may be open to Your word, to Your call, to You.

It is in the silence of the heart that God guides me,
in consolation, I follow You
in desolation, I wait.

For in the silence and purity of my heart, God speaks.

Amen.

Word of God:

Here are some examples of references to the bible (from the Old Testament and New Testament) to encourage reflection on listening to God in our hearts. The facilitator may choose one or more women to read all or parts of the selected scripture text. These passages have been chosen as they lend themselves to discernment exercises and may be used in similar experiences.

Old Testament:

- Psalm 139:23
- 1 Chronicles 28:9-10
- 1 Samuel 16:7

New Testament:

- Sower of the seed: Luke 8:4-15; Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20
- Mary's Fiat: Luke 1:46-55
- Mary ponders the Word in her heart: Luke 2:19
- Many rooms in God's Kingdom: John 14:1-4
- Jesus promises the Holy Spirit: John 14:15-21, 23 or John 16:15-16

Part 2 Reflection and Discussion:

Reflection: The facilitator invites the members to think deeply for one or two minutes about the scripture they have each just heard. They may wish to re-read it to themselves from their own copy.

Discussion: Here, the facilitator can summarize what discernment means (see Introduction) while also introducing the accompanying lesson below on how to discern.

Suggestion on How to Discern in Life: A Call to Action

There are three acts we are encouraged to take.

1. **Be Aware** – Think or reflect about choices we are faced with. Be aware that we are indeed making a choice. For example: Should I go to the CWL meeting tonight? (pre-pandemic). There is a choice. Identify what we are choosing... Do I stay home? Do I go?
2. **Understand** – Here, we think about what is in our hearts. What does it feel like in my heart if I consider staying home? Do I feel consolation (joy, love) or desolation (darkness, pain, sadness)? Which choice leads me to God and consolation?
3. **Act** – This may mean initially praying on these questions for a time... asking God which answer serves the kingdom of God. Then, when the answer is clear, act to walk toward God. Consolation is the right direction.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

The facilitator will encourage her League sisters to discuss the following questions, highlighting that each woman's answer is neither right nor wrong. We are all learning with and through each other's insights and understanding. It is suggested to devote about 10 minutes to this part.

For example:

1. Do these steps make sense to you? Can we clarify their meaning?
2. Have you used this type of thinking? How? When?
3. Do you have any questions about these?
4. Did the scripture reading(s) give you some insight on discernment?
 - a. How? Why? Why not?
5. Do you have any questions about the scripture reading?
6. What does discernment mean to you? How would you describe making good choices which lead us closer to God?
 - a. Could you offer an example?

Part 3 Closing Prayer:

A sample prayer that the facilitator may choose to say along with all those present:

Prayer for Discernment

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

Dear Creator,

Thank you for Your love, which breathed life into me at my birth and which I seek to reflect in all my words and deeds.

I know Your Holy Spirit dwells in me, within my humble heart.

So when I need to make decisions, I look inside my heart that You may help me to read Your guidance there.

Give me discerning eyes and an untiring spirit
To know what is of You, and what is not.

That I may ask: Is this decision of You?
And so feel Your consolation, that joy of Your love
in my heart,
and follow this path that leads to You.

That I may also ask: Is this decision not of You?
And so feel desolation... darkness, temptation, confusion,
pain..
and know that this choice leads not to You.

If I feel only desolation, may I continue to walk through this
darkness anyway,
until I see the light of Your consolation, the joy of
Your love in my heart.

Once I have begun to listen well to You in my heart,
Give me the generosity to help others to read You in their heart,
to sound out Your guidance one letter, one choice at a time.

Always, may the Holy Spirit guide me to ever
follow You more closely in word and deed,

Until with Your grace, we may all dwell in eternity
face to face, with You.

Through Christ our Lord,
And the intercession of Blessed Mary, our patroness, **Amen.**

Personal intercessions: The facilitator may at this time ask for any special intercessions by any of the members present. All answer for example, “Lord hear our prayer.”

The Holy Spirit: Facilitator's Notes

Facilitator's Notes:

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. We pray to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We repeat, "Come Holy Spirit, Inspire the hearts of Your faithful..." The apostle Paul tells us (1 Cor. 12:3) "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." This section presents some basic information on the Holy Spirit which you may choose to use as background when you present either of the **two prayer services offered later in the document**. If you receive requests for more prayer services or reflections involving the Holy Spirit, (the virtues, the fruit of the Spirit, Pentecost, etc.), you may be able to use and add to these notes from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* or from another source. In these facilitator's notes, the following topics are briefly covered:

- Who is the Holy Spirit?
- Confirmation and the gifts of the Holy Spirit
- The Holy Spirit and the virtues (theological and moral)
- Using the gifts and growing the virtues in my life
- The fruit of the Holy Spirit

Who is the Holy Spirit?

While the emphasis on the Holy Spirit is most evident at confirmation, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us that the third person of the Blessed Trinity has already been active at the first initiation into the sacramental life, since "Christians are baptized 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'..." (CCC 232, 233).

In the Nicene Creed of the Church, we proclaim, "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets."

The Catechism also explains, "What the soul is to the human body, the Holy Spirit is to the Body of Christ, which is the Church" (CCC 797).

Confirmation and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit

The sacrament of confirmation brings a new dimension to the grace of baptism. Through water and the Spirit, the baptized are more perfectly bound to the church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Confirmation increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit, enabling and obliging recipients to be "... True witnesses of Christ,... [and] to spread and defend the faith by word and deed (CCC 1285).

There are seven specific gifts of the Holy Spirit. Identified particularly in Isaiah 11:1-3, these gifts help the faithful to be receptive to obeying God's inspiration, in particular to develop virtue (see next section). The following descriptions of the gifts are excerpts from St. Thomas Aquinas:

- Wisdom – the ability to know and judge human affairs according to divine truth
- Understanding – to receive insight into God's truths ... the ability to "see" God
- Counsel – allows a person to make choices directed by God ... to do God's will

- Fortitude – to choose good over evil and to hold on to faith
- Knowledge – is the ability to judge correctly about matters of faith and right action ... to follow the path of justice
- Piety – is revering God... worshiping God... respecting all people on account of their relationship to God
- Fear (awe) of the Lord – is reverence for God... and avoiding separating ourselves from Him.

The Holy Spirit and the Theological and Moral Virtues

While baptism is the foundation of the whole Christian life, it is also a gateway to life in the Spirit, a door to the other sacraments, each of which activates and intensifies the capacity to live our Christian life more fully. The anointing with sacred oil by the bishop at confirmation, and the words: “Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit” provides the confirmed with sanctifying grace to enable growth in the virtues. Virtues are interior dispositions towards goodness and moral living. When these are fully developed, the virtues make possible true joy, because they do not depend on circumstances or passing feelings.

“A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. ...To perform good acts, [and] to give the best of [oneself]” (CCC 1803, 1833). This disposition can be described as the internal power to live and act under the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and to use those seven gifts.

The Theological Virtues: Help us live in right relationship to God (CCC 1812).

- faith – to believe in God (CCC 1814)
- hope – to desire eternal life with God (CCC 1817)
- charity/love – to love God with our whole hearts, and neighbour as ourselves out of love for God (CCC 1822)

The Cardinal (Moral) Virtues: Help us live in right relationship with our neighbour (CCC 1805).

- prudence – guides the conscience to choose good (CCC 1835)
- justice – respect for the rights of neighbour, giving to others what is their due (CCC 1836)
- fortitude/courage – to resist temptation, to conquer fear (CCC 1837)
- temperance – to moderate pleasures and balance the use of created goods (CCC 1838)

Using the Gifts and Growing the Virtues in My Life

There is a close connection between the seven virtues and the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Ultimately, the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit “are designed to be used in the world for the purpose of transforming that world for Christ. ...To do what one is called to do in one’s own time and place to advance the kingdom of God” (Frank Blisard, “The Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit,” *Catholic Answers*, June 10, 2019).

If the virtues have been taught, and if the gifts have been practiced, they help us to grow in holiness by making us receptive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Aided by these gifts, the virtues grow through education (by parents and others), through experience, and by our deliberate virtuous acts, especially when there is a struggle to do what is right and good (CCC 1839). We are invited always to use these gifts and to perfect these virtues.

The Fruit of the Holy Spirit

The cooperation of virtues and gifts in our lives produces fruit. The fruit of the Spirit is a kind of perfection that the Holy Spirit forms in us. “The tradition of the Church lists twelve of them: ‘charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity’” (CCC 1832).

Discernment Who is the Holy Spirit: Prayer Service

Theme:

In this prayer service, we will explore some basic questions about the Holy Spirit, visualize, draw, discuss with each other and pray.

Intended Audience and Usage:

Catholic Women's League (CWL) members or other groups as:

- a prayer service with visualization, drawing and sharing
- a spiritual component of a CWL executive or members' meeting

Anywhere from five to 100 people. A little more time would be needed for the movement of pairs/groups at larger gatherings.

Expected Time for Completion: 30 minutes

Supplies needed: Paper, pencils, coloured markers, etc.

Facilitator's Notes:

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that "Christians are baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...." So, the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Holy Trinity. I wonder, what do I know about the Holy Spirit? What is my image of the Holy Spirit? Can human senses see, feel or touch the Spirit? (Refer back to the facilitator's notes at the beginning of this document on The Holy Spirit and use any excerpts you feel would help participants enter into this prayer service).

Opening Prayer: The Nicene Creed (Facilitator)

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation He came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate; He suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one holy, Catholic and apostolic church. I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. **Amen**

Facilitator:

What do we learn about the Holy Spirit from reciting the Creed? This is a great mystery to ponder—this trinity of the Father, Son and Spirit. We are not theologians, and these are difficult concepts to grasp. However, we can listen to the words and find which ones “speak” or “stand out” for us. Let us take three to five minutes to share: (Encourage them to mention the following from the Creed:

“by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.”

“I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets”).

If the group is large, the facilitator may:

Break the group into partners or groups of three people. Take three to five minutes sharing words or phrases that “speak” or “stand out” for each person. Share in the large group if people are comfortable for three minutes.

Descriptive Words: (Facilitator)

Please get comfortable and close your eyes for a visualization exercise, hearing descriptions of the Holy Spirit. As you hear the image of the Holy Spirit, try to imagine “seeing” it with your eyes closed.

The Catechism tells us, “The term ‘Spirit’ translates the Hebrew word *ruah*, which, in its primary sense means breath, air, wind.

Jesus... uses the sensory image of the wind...” Jesus promises the coming of the Holy Spirit and refers to him as the “paraclete,” commonly translated as the consoler. St. Paul uses the titles: the Spirit of the Promise, the Spirit of Adoption, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of the Lord, and the Spirit of God. St. Peter uses the Spirit of Glory (CCC 691-693).

Symbols:

In addition, there are many symbols of the Holy Spirit referred to in the Catechism—water, anointing with oil, fire, cloud and light, the seal, the hand, the finger, the dove. When Christ comes up from the water of His baptism, the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, comes down upon Him and remains with Him (CCC 695-701).

Facilitator:

We will take five to seven minutes and I invite you to draw, write and print words that describe for you the Holy Spirit. Use the paper, pencils, coloured markers provided.

Facilitator:

(There are a couple of things you could do here)

- a. In pairs, people could share their image and why they chose that image and those words. Allow about three minutes for both.
- b. Share in the large group.

Note: These images and words could be put together in a collage and displayed at the next meeting, lunch or conference. Perhaps one of the members has a child or grandchild who would love to make a piece of art from these expressions of faith.

Closing Prayer (Facilitator):

Let us pray,

Spirit of the Living God
open our hearts and minds to experience the unconditional love of God.

Empower us with the gifts of Your Spirit
so that we may respond to God's call in joyful service.

Inspire and bless the members of the Catholic Women's League
so that the fruit of Your Spirit may be evidenced in all they say and do.

Amen

(The closing prayer was the League's national theme prayer for 2017-2018).



Confirmation and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit Prayer Service

Theme:

We will look at the gifts of the Holy Spirit and how we use them in our lives.

Intended Audience and Usage:

League members, baptism preparation, confirmation preparation as:

- a prayer service with reflection and sharing
- part of a mini retreat before confirmation

Anywhere from five to 100 people. More time would be needed for the movement of pairs/groups at the larger gathering.

Time of Church Year:

This prayer service could be used at any time, but especially before or after Easter, before baptism, before confirmation, or during the 50 days of Easter leading up to Pentecost.

Expected Time for Completion: 30 minutes

Supplies needed:

You may wish to provide a handout with the quote from Isaiah, the list of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and space for writing answers to the two questions.

Facilitator's Notes:

While **baptism** is the foundation of the whole Christian life, it is also a gateway to life in the spirit, a door to the other sacraments, each of which activates and intensifies the capacity to live that life more fully. The sacrament of **confirmation**, the anointing with sacred oil by the bishop, and the words, "**Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit,**" increases the **gifts of the Holy Spirit**, enables and obliges the recipient to be true witnesses of Christ, and to spread and defend the faith by word and deed (CCC 1285). The confirmed is provided with sanctifying grace to enable growth in the virtues. Virtues are interior dispositions towards goodness and moral living. When these are fully developed, the virtues make possible true joy, because they do not depend on circumstances or passing feelings.

"A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good... to perform good acts, [and] to give the best of [oneself] (CCC 1803). This disposition can be described as the internal power to live and act under the promptings of the **Holy Spirit**, and to use those seven gifts which can lie dormant in the soul unless acted upon. (Refer back to the facilitator's notes at the beginning of this document on **The Holy Spirit** if needed).

There are seven specific **gifts of the Holy Spirit**. Identified particularly in Isaiah 11:1-3, these gifts help the faithful to be receptive to obeying God's inspiration.

Opening Prayer: (Facilitator)

(Divide people into two groups—right and left, for the opening prayer.)

Believing in God’s unending love for us, let us pray that the Holy Spirit will send us the gifts that we need in our everyday lives as we work, live and interact with His people.

Right:

We ask the Holy Spirit for *wisdom*, to know and judge according to divine truth.

Left:

We ask the Spirit to help us grow in *understanding* to receive insight into the higher truths that are necessary for our salvation.

Right:

We ask the Spirit for *right judgment (counsel)* to make choices directed by God.

Left:

We ask the Spirit for *fortitude (courage)* to choose the good over evil; and to hold on to our faith.

Right:

We ask the Spirit for *knowledge* to judge correctly about matters of faith and right action; to never leave the path of justice.

Left:

We ask the Spirit for *piety* to worship God, and become humble of heart that we may hear God’s voice.

Right:

We ask the Spirit for help to always stand in *awe* and *wonder* before God, and to keep close to Him.

All: Amen

(These prayers are based on St. Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae*.)

Hymn suggestion: “Send Us Your Spirit” (1985, Daniel L. Schutte). Please obtain copyright permission.

Scripture Passage: (Facilitator)

A reading from the Book of Isaiah (11:1-3).

A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear;

The word of the Lord.

Facilitator:

This is the only place in the bible where all the gifts of the Holy Spirit are listed. Isaiah is looking way into the future of Israel and the “branch” growing out of the root of Jesse, is Jesus. In Jesus, the gifts are complete. But they also grow in us as they are nurtured.

Reflection (Facilitator):

We will take a few minutes to reflect on these gifts. Please listen quietly as I slowly read the gifts of the Holy Spirit:

- Wisdom – to know and judge rightly
- Understanding – to know God’s truth
- Right judgment/counsel – to follow God’s will
- Fortitude/courage – to choose good over evil
- Knowledge – to follow the path of justice
- Piety – to worship God
- Awe and wonder – of God.

Facilitator:

Choose one of the gifts and answer for yourself these two questions: (three minutes)

1. How has this gift been developed in me? (Influences of people and events).
2. What is an instance in which I have used this gift to help another person or persons or to deal with my own challenging situation?

Facilitator:

(Organize people in partners. Each person is invited to share their answers. The partner listens, then shares their gift and experience, while the first person listens. Give five minutes to allow both to share).

Action (Facilitator): If you both feel comfortable, exchange e-mails or telephone numbers and plan to get together in the following month for tea or coffee.

Large Group (Facilitator):

(Reassemble the whole group and ask if people would like to share which gift they have been given and whether their experience has developed that gift. Some groups will respond and some will not. Regardless, give it a minute or two, and be sure to thank them).

Conclusion: (Facilitator)

Please remember to pray for each other, especially the person you have shared with. You have been contributing to the development of the kingdom, one sharing, one kind word, one smile at a time. Sometimes it seems we are called on to use and reuse one particular gift more than others. But, as we use the gifts, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we further strengthen these gifts in ourselves and help build up others. Let us continue, sisters in the League, as we pray:

Closing Prayer: (Facilitator)

Let us pray,

Heavenly King, Consoler Spirit, Spirit of Truth, present everywhere
and filling all things,

treasure of all good and source of all life, come dwell in us,

cleanse and save us, You who are All Good.

(from the Byzantine Liturgy)

Prayer for Mercy

Leader:

Heavenly Father, You are glorious indeed.

Response:

Your mercy knows no bounds.

Leader:

We are but fragile people in great need of your help.

You allow us free will—we can follow Your laws or choose to stray by giving into temptation. When we stray, You welcome us back with open arms. You are always waiting for us and never truly leave us. **R**

Leader:

When we turn to You in despair; You comfort us.

When we become angry with You; You forgive us and send Your angels to help.

When we are lost; You send us guides who help us along our way back to You. **R**

Leader:

You are glorious indeed Lord!

We thank You for all that You do for us.

We thank You for Your forgiveness.

We thank You for the strength You send us in our times of need.

You always know what we need; even when we do not know ourselves.

We are grateful for Your interventions during these times of need. **R**

Leader:

Send the Holy Spirit upon us to guide our way.

We give You thanks always. **R**

All:

Blessed be God forever. Amen.

*This prayer can be prayed all together or using a leader with responses.

Prayer for Those Who Stray

Let us pray,

Lord, you cared enough for Your people in the beginning to set them up in Your Garden of Eden. All their physical needs were met.

You had one simple request—that the tree of knowledge of good and evil be left alone and not eaten as food.

Human frailty prevailed and temptation won. Your covenant with humankind was broken.

Banished from Your garden we had to learn to feed, clothe and care for ourselves.

Thus, began our journey towards Your heavenly kingdom.

The way is rocky with many trials and tribulations.

We have learned about hunger, strife, sickness and disease.

We have seen Your mercy and forgiveness in action throughout the ages.

We pray for forgiveness Lord.

We pray for healing—physical, emotional and spiritual.

We pray for mercy.

Hear us O Lord, we beg of You.

Forgive us O Lord we pray.

Bring us closer to You O Lord.

Send us the support of the heavenly host that we may follow the path back to Your goodness and mercy that You have always kept for us.

This we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Follow with Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be...

What Are Your Two Loaves and Five Fish?: Facilitator's Notes

A Reflection of Mark 6:34-44

Theme:

The theme of this reflection is on recognizing, knowing and sharing our gifts. But it is also important to know that God will multiply our offerings into something much greater than we can even imagine.

Intended Audience:

This reflection is tailored for small group discussion. If there is a larger group (more than six people), it is suggested that the leader break the group into smaller groups to encourage sharing and discussion. The larger group can be brought back together for overall discussion at the end if time permits. This reflection can also be done individually with silent contemplation or spiritual journaling.

Intended Time of Year: Any time of the year.

Expected Time for Completion: 30 minutes

Supplies needed:

The facilitator is encouraged to make copies of the quoted passage from Mark 6:34-44 or to ask participants to bring their bibles.

Background:

St. Ignatius of Loyola (born 1491 AD) believed that we experience God's guidance within ourselves in the stirrings of our hearts. We

feel joy or sorrow, hope or despair, courage or fear. When we examine these stirrings, we are aware of what is of God and what is not of God. We follow then what is of God.

Consolation is the joy of God's love. It pulls us toward God. It means God is with us in our choice of word or deed.

Desolation is the darkness, confusion, temptation and pain that signals to us that we are not on the path which leads us closer to God. We are encouraged to walk through desolation to persevere toward God anyway. And to wait to make any important decision until we are not in deep desolation. Wise advice.

Here is a sample of a program to help us focus on and further develop our ability to discern God's call in the choices we must make throughout life.

Program:

A facilitator coordinates and speaks as necessary. The goal is to make the members comfortable, relaxed and interested. It is also an interactive experience, so the facilitator helps others to experience this time together. Her role is one of service.

This program is based on the Pray-Think-Act Model to encourage members to participate more deeply in the experience and grow more deeply in their faith.

What Are Your Two Loaves and Five Fish?: Prayer Service

A Reflection of Mark 6:34-44

Opening Prayer:

Come Holy Spirit. Come Lord Jesus. We invite You into this space, into this meeting and into our hearts. As we reflect upon Your word today, help us to grow in knowledge and love of You; that we may come to know and recognize the great gifts You have provided us. Help us to discern how to share them with others for the glory of Your kingdom. As with all endeavours, we rely on Our Blessed Mother's intercession to bring us closer to You, Her Son, when we pray together, "Hail Mary..."



Scripture Passage:

(The leader or volunteer is to read the passage out loud. Encourage participants to take a few minutes to read it slowly and privately. They can make notes or circle/highlight key words or phrases that impact them during the reading).

The Feeding of the Five Thousand (Mark 6:34-44)

As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat." But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat? And he said to them, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." When they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled; and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

Reflection:

Jesus does not need the two loaves and five fish to feed the crowd; He could have performed a mighty miracle all on His own. Not only would that have shown His divine mercy and power, but it probably would have been much easier and faster! Instead, He took what was humbly offered and used it to multiply it beyond anyone's imagination. He knew that the small gift alone was not nearly sufficient to feed the multitude of people. But He also knew that it was sufficient for Him to do so. Why, when He could have done the miracle alone, does He ask for our participation? Let us pause to consider.

Many of us can remember being young and helping our mothers with baking. Better yet, we can remember our little ones "helping" us. Remember the spilled flour and the broken eggshells in the batter... not exactly helping! But the memory is priceless. Why? Because we baked together and we saw how much joy and pride our littles had in helping. Would it have been faster and easier to do the baking ourselves? Yes, but at what cost? And think of the satisfaction they felt in being a part of the process. Such pride in sharing "their" cookies!

God's salvation could have come in any form. But in His goodness, He chose to be born of Mary and enter into our humanity; into our beautiful, muddled and complicated mess. He does not need our help, but He delights in it nonetheless. He delights in our offering our meagre loaves and fish, knowing that they alone are not enough but trusting that He will take them and multiply them beyond all measure. In trusting Him with our gifts, we can expect superabundance in return. God will not be outdone in generosity.

But surrendering control to God is not easy. Women, especially, often like to hold on to control and feel that we must do it all ourselves. Can you relate? One of the hardest things to do is to set aside our pride and, in humility, acknowledge that our gifts alone are not enough. But if we offer them to God, He will return them in ways and means that we could not even imagine.

Questions to Prayerfully Consider:

Can you think of a time when you could have done a project easier or faster alone but instead allowed others to help? How did that turn out?

Can you think of a time when you offered something small that later had significant consequences? Do you feel the Holy Spirit had a hand in that situation? How?

In what situations do you feel you have to do it yourself? Has there been a time that despite the inclination to go it alone, you surrendered your gifts to God with an unexpected outcome?

Are there any gifts that the Holy Spirit has been prompting you to share?

What other thoughts struck you about this passage?

Call to Action:

Over the next few weeks, take some time in prayer to re-read the passage and ask God to show you your gifts, to show you the loaves and fish He is asking you to share. Ask Him how

you can offer them for the glory of His kingdom. Share with Him your fears in letting go of control, of feeling you have to do it all. Ask Him for the grace to surrender those gifts to Him so that He can multiply them beyond all expectations.

Closing Prayer:

Almighty God, thank You for this time together. Thank you for the opportunity to delve into Your word and share our experiences with each other. May Your Holy Spirit remain with us as we search our hearts to discern our gifts and how to share them for the glory of Your kingdom. All this we ask in Jesus' name when we pray together, "Our Father who art in heaven...."

Who Is In Your Saint Circle? Facilitator's Notes

Theme:

“Follow the saints, because those who follow them will become saints” (Pope St. Clement I).

This is meant to be a fun and interactive program to consider why we should pray with and through the saints and who might be in our personal saint circles.

Intended Audience:

This reflection is tailored for group discussion. The leader will lead the participants through the reflections and considerations. The group is encouraged to participate and share experiences they have had. Participants are encouraged to bring further contemplation to private, personal prayer.

Intended Time of Year:

This can be done any time of year but may be particularly appealing leading into All Saints Day on November 1st or leading into the new calendar year.

Expected Time for Completion: 20 minutes

Who Is In Your Saint Circle?: Prayer Service

Opening Prayer:

Come Holy Spirit. Come Holy Spirit. We invite you into this space, into this meeting and our hearts. As we discern and contemplate the communion of saints, we ask for the intercession of all the saints and angels. We pray that our conversation will be lively, enlightening and holy. We ask this in Jesus' name as we pray together, "Our Father..."

Catechism Passage:

Let us read and consider what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (956) says about the intercession of the saints:

"Being more closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven fix the whole church more firmly in holiness.... They do not cease to intercede with the Father for us, as they proffer the merits which they acquired on earth through the one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus.... So by their fraternal concern is our weakness greatly helped.

'Do not weep, for I shall be more useful to you after my death and I shall help you then more effectively than during my life.'
(St. Dominic, dying, to his brothers)

'I want to spend my heaven in doing good on earth'
(St. Thérèse of Lisieux)."

Reflection:

(The leader reads and encourages interaction and sharing of participants' experiences with the saints' intercession. In particular, pause between each category to allow for conversation. Feel free to share your own experiences and ask for input from others).

One of our greatest Catholic traditions is the communion of saints. We know the saints are men and women who lived holy and righteous lives on Earth and now reside for all eternity in heaven. Not only are their earthly lives an example for us today, but they constantly pray for us and our future salvation.

They were regular men and women who, like us, had trials and struggles and overcame diversity. Like the universal church, they come from all backgrounds and experiences, from all vocations and professions. But what they all have in common is that they lived (and sometimes died) for Jesus and had their eyes set on heaven.

God delights in our praying with and through the saints. He does not get jealous of this relationship; quite the opposite! Imagine if you came into the room and witnessed your older child helping his younger sister tie her shoes. You would not get annoyed and think, "That's my job, and I need to tie her shoes." Of course not! You would be happy that they were helping each other. That is how God feels about us praying with the saints. We ask our earthly friends to pray for us in good and hard times; how much more efficacious are the prayers of these holy men and women who are now so close to God.

Who is in your circle? Who are your go-to saints? Who are the saints with who you can start to develop a deeper friendship? This little exercise is to get you thinking, and you certainly do not need to have a whole circle if that is intimidating. The list below is to get you started, especially if you do not know where to begin. Let us share our experiences and, as always, be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Saints to consider for your Saint Circle:

Your Favourite Title for Mary: Out of love for us, Jesus gave us (His beloved disciples) His Mother while He was dying on the cross. She is our Heavenly Mother for all eternity and wants nothing more than to bring us closer to her Son.

“Never be afraid of loving the Blessed Virgin too much. You can never love her more than Jesus did” (St. Maximilian Kolbe).

Mary has many titles for many different reasons. Explore some of them and see which one appeals to you in this time and season of your life. Some considerations are Our Lady Undoer of Knots if there are problems too big for you to resolve alone. Our Lady of Peace, if there is disharmony in your life. Our Lady of the Rosary, if you have a particular devotion to this prayer. To help, look up Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary for dozens of titles.

Your Name: Does a saint share your name? Just think, when you meet someone on Earth who has your name, you have an instant connection. How much more so when we connect with our friends in heaven? If not your name, how about the name of your spouse or your kids or your best friend?

Your Primary Vocation: Look into the saints who share your primary vocation, whether single, widowed, married or religious. Are you a mother, grandmother or spiritual mother? They have been there, they know.

Do you have children who are away from the church? St. Monica is a powerful intercessor; she prayed for St. Augustine for almost 20 years to return, and he turned out to be a great saint himself.

Your Challenges: What challenges are you facing in your life right now? Illness or injury, estranged relationships, financial difficulties? Again, the saints have been there and can empathize with you. They can help you pray through the challenges.

Your Confirmation Saint: You chose a saint when you were confirmed for a reason. Try to remember why, what appealed to you about him or her? Like our earthly friendships, sometimes we grow apart, but often when we see our childhood friends again years later, it is like coming home. The same is true of your confirmation saint. Check-in with them, renew that friendship.

Your Profession: Are you a teacher, police officer, doctor, lawyer, student? There are patron saints for all of them and more.

Your Interests: What are your interests? Quilting, reading, hiking, swimming, dancing. Saints were people too and had interests and hobbies. Share that with them.

Saints You Admire: They are saints for a reason. If someone in particular appeals to you, explore that. Read about their lives and learn from them.

Your Guardian Angel: This one you do not choose; they are chosen specifically for you. As the Catechism (336) says,

“From infancy to death human life is surrounded by their watchful care and intercession. Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life. Already here on earth the Christian life shares by faith in the blessed company of angels and men united in God.”

Your guardian angel is always with you. Ask for their intercession. Ask for their protection. Ask for their knowledge. If you cannot go to mass, your guardian angel is in the eternal mass and can bring you with them, if you ask!

The Saint(s) Who Adopt You: Yes, they want to be our friends too, and they will let you know in subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) ways. Be open to the Holy Spirit and be on the lookout. If a saint seems to be everywhere (you see their picture, read one of their quotes, a friend recommends a book about them), it's not a coincidence. They are reaching out to you and want to be your friend.

Call to Action:

Over the next few weeks, take some time in prayer to review this list of potential saint friends. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you which saints are looking out for you from heaven. Look into their stories and prayerfully consider letting them into your circle. And over the coming months, get to know them, pray with them, and ask for their intercession. And then share your stories with others.

Closing Prayer:

Almighty God, thank You for this time together. Thank You for the fellowship and the conversation. Thank You for the communion of saints who are constantly praying for us and interceding for us. We ask the Holy Spirit to remain with us always as we discern who and how the saints can help us to always remain close to You.

All You holy men and women, pray for us.





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