

# Guide to Evaluating Spiritual Programs

# Evaluating Spiritual Programs



## GOAL:

Increase opportunities for spiritual development.



**STRATEGY:** G1.A3 Develop a protocol to periodically evaluate existing spiritual programs.



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# Guidelines for Using the Evaluating Spiritual Programs Protocol

The following are guidelines on how to use the protocol for evaluating spiritual programs. It is important to read the guidelines before using the protocol as they provide resources that will help when using the protocol. It is strongly suggested that chairpersons of faith seek advice from their council's spiritual advisor or designate when selecting prayers, programs and workshops.

## Opening Prayer

As with all Catholic Women's League discernment processes, beginning the process by calling on the Holy Spirit for guidance is suggested.

Come Holy Spirit,

As we gather to evaluate our spiritual program,

may our ears be attentive to your voice that you may fill our hearts with love,

and our minds with your wisdom so that our lips will worship you and praise your name.

May it reflect the foundations and teachings of our Catholic faith, and may it increase in us a desire to go forth as we say:

*"Here I am Lord, send me"*

Amen.

## Foundation

The Catholic Women's League of Canada's spiritual programs must align with the core teachings of the Catholic faith. In this increasingly secular world, the temptation may be to create and/or use programs that conform to popular opinion or culture rather than the truth of Jesus Christ believed and taught by the church.

## Who is Responsible For Evaluating Spiritual Programs?

It is suggested that the chairperson of faith or equivalent complete this process in consultation with the council's spiritual advisor or someone well-versed in the core teachings of the Catholic faith. This protocol should be used at all levels of the League when creating or evaluating a spiritual program, including programs found on League websites, other websites or in resources such as books and magazines.

## When Should an Existing Program be Evaluated?

The Holy Spirit is at work in the church and understanding of the revelation of Jesus Christ may deepen over time. Therefore, when a person takes on the role of chairperson of faith, all previously existing spiritual programs should be evaluated using this process.

## Catholic Women's League Resources

The *Prayer Service Planning Workshop* PowerPoint is a useful resource for questions regarding topics such as copyright, the use of images, music, written text from the Internet, and different types of prayer.

If the chairperson of faith needs assistance in writing a spiritual program, she may use the *Prayer Service Planning Workshop* tools available from the national website. Many resources have been developed to help with research on the pillars of faith, service and social justice. In lieu of writing her own spiritual program, a chairperson of faith may use prayers found in the document *Prayers and Spiritual Programs* and on the national website.

## Other Resources

Other Catholic websites may be helpful when searching for or developing spiritual programs. The following are some examples; however, it is not an exclusive list.

- [Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops](#)<sup>1</sup>
- [Companions of the Cross](#)<sup>2</sup>
- [Jesuits of Canada](#)<sup>3</sup>
- [The Holy See Website](#)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [cccb.ca](#)

<sup>2</sup> [companionscross.org/](#)

<sup>3</sup> [jesuits.ca/](#)

<sup>4</sup> [vatican.va/content/vatican/en.html](#)



# Introduction

Members at all levels of the League create, source and borrow prayers and spiritual programs. It is important that these programs be produced and evaluated considering the new criteria in keeping with “the signs of the times.” This document will address the criteria that should be considered to assess all materials used by the League at all levels.

“Signs of the times” is a phrase strongly associated with the Second Vatican Council. It was taken to mean that the church should listen to and learn from the world around it. The council fathers reminded the faithful that the world is changing, and these areas need to be considered when sharing the faith. They spoke about changes from political and social struggles for freedom, an increase in the focus on science, the advancement of technology, the focus on women’s rights, the globalization of the world and the unfortunate decline in the religious practice of men and women.

The checklist at the end of this document is to be used when assessing a program. The following is an explanation of the criteria and gives examples, where appropriate, to assist in the evaluation of spiritual programs.

**Please note:** If the answer to the first question is no, the content must be changed.

## 1. Does It Agree With the Core Teachings of Our Faith?

Is the material in keeping with the Apostles’/Nicene Creed, scripture and Catholic social teaching? Keep in mind that customs and some parts of Catholic practice may change over time in response to a new understanding of revelation. For example, many changes were made after the Second Vatican Council, including Mass being said in the common language of the people, the priest turning to face the congregation and more. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is a good resource to use to determine whether something may be consistent with Catholic teaching. [Part Four: Christian Prayer](#)<sup>5</sup> may be particularly useful. The *New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition Bible* is the commonly used version for liturgical purposes.



<sup>5</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, [vatican.va/archive/ENGO015/\\_\\_\\_P8Z.HTM](http://vatican.va/archive/ENGO015/___P8Z.HTM)

## 2. Does it Emphasize the Small Christian Community Model of *Pray, Reflect, Act*?

*“Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:6-7).*

This model, inspired by St. Paul, is understood to mean that a prayer or program includes an element of prayer or communication with God. It also includes an element of reflection, encouraging members to think deeply in order to understand more about their faith journey in light of their relationship with God. Finally, it includes an element of action. How will members, as women of faith, respond to this new understanding and incorporate it into their daily lives through service, further reflection or working for a more just world as they work together to further God’s kingdom?

For example, the Ignatian examination of conscience and the common prayer of contrition contains elements of prayer, reflection and fortified good action.

This Act of Contrition is a good example of a traditional prayer:

O my God,  
I am heartily sorry for  
having offended thee,  
and I detest all my sins,  
because I dread the loss of heaven  
and fear the pains of hell;  
but most of all, because  
they offend thee, my God,  
Who are all good and  
deserving of all my love.  
I firmly resolve,  
with the help of thy grace,  
to confess my sins,  
to do penance,  
and to amend my life.  
Amen.

*Catholic Book Publishing Company.  
Catholic Book of Prayers.*

This Act of Contrition uses contemporary language:

My God,  
I am sorry for my sins with all my heart.  
In choosing to do wrong  
and failing to do good,  
I have sinned against you  
whom I should love above all things.  
I firmly intend, with your help,  
to do penance,  
to sin no more,  
and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.

*The Rite of Penance, United States Conference of  
Catholic Bishops*



### 3. Is it Current and Relevant and Respects Adult Faith Development?

Does this material appeal to an adult Catholic woman, as Jesus would speak to her? Jesus taught adults with parables and stories. His teaching reflected five elements as expressed in the acronym, WATER:

**W:** welcoming

**A:** affirming

**T:** teaching

**E:** experiential (feeling or understanding something new)

**R:** response is the result: action!

*Dr. Kuzmochka, St. Paul University, 2020*

Water is the essence of life. Does this material contain these WATER elements?

*“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Cor 5:17).*

For example, the following prayers contain elements of adult faith development.

#### Prayer of St. Benedict<sup>6</sup>

Gracious and holy Father,

grant us the intellect to understand you,

reason to discern you, diligence to seek you,

wisdom to find you, a spirit to know you,

a heart to meditate upon you.

May our ears hear you, may our eyes behold you,

and may our tongues proclaim you.

Give us grace that our way of life may be pleasing to you,

that we may have the patience to wait for you

and the perseverance to look for you.

Grant us a perfect end—your holy presence,

a blessed resurrection and life everlasting.

We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

<sup>6</sup> St. George Chaldean Catholic Church, <https://stgeorgechaldean.com/prayer-of-st-benedict/>

## Guided by You<sup>7</sup>

Lord, grant that I may always allow myself to be guided by you,  
always follow your plans,  
and perfectly accomplish your holy will.  
Grant that in all things, great and small,  
today and all the days of my life,  
I may do whatever you require of me.  
Help me respond to the slightest prompting of your grace,  
so that I may be your trustworthy instrument for your honour.  
May your will be done in time and in eternity by me,  
in me, and through me.  
Amen.

## A Prayer for Our Earth<sup>8</sup>

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe  
and in the smallest of your creatures.

You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.

Pour out upon us the power of your love,  
that we may protect life and beauty.

Fill us with peace, that we may live  
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

O God of the poor,  
help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten  
of this earth,  
so precious in your eyes.

Bring healing to our lives,  
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,  
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and  
destruction.

Touch the hearts  
of those who look only for gain  
at the expense of the poor and the earth.

Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,  
to be filled with awe and contemplation,  
to recognize that we are profoundly united  
with every creature  
as we journey towards your infinite light.

We thank you for being with us each day.  
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle  
for justice, love and peace.

<sup>7</sup> Amended from *Daily Prayers*, [daily-prayers.org/angels-and-saints/prayers-of-saint-teresa-of-avila/](http://daily-prayers.org/angels-and-saints/prayers-of-saint-teresa-of-avila/)

<sup>8</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, [vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html)

## 4. Is Its Style/Content Forward Looking?

Keep in mind the “League of the Future” and synodality.

Envisioned Future – The Catholic Women’s League of Canada is an inclusive and engaged community of Catholic women inspired by faith. It is: a vital participant in the church, a valued partner for social justice, a respected advocate at all government levels and connected to the world.

Synodality – Listening with open hearts and minds, sharing our own lived experiences and making space for the voices that are often marginalized or excluded. The theme of the Synod on Synodality is *For a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission*.

## 5. Is the Title of the Program Informative and Accurate?

For example:

“A Thanksgiving Reflection” will be a reflection, a collection of thoughts about Thanksgiving, and not an actual prayer.

Also, there may be an introduction that happens before prayer, and it should be noted that it is an excerpt, reference or reflection that happens before the actual prayer service begins to avoid confusion.

## 6. Does It Use Inclusive Language and/or Images Appropriate to Our Culture?

Does the material use inclusive language that is friendly to women? Consider the order in which words are used. For example, “For us men and our salvation....” The word “man/men” is no longer accepted as inclusive of men and women. Women are now actually mentioned, or appropriate inclusive words are used. If this text were written today, it would hopefully say something like “For us all, and for our salvation....”

The use of inclusive language has made people conscious of certain words that many feel need to be avoided. Without wanting to, the use of male-oriented words in reading the scriptures can cause concern and sometimes annoyance for some. It is generally expected that organizations use language that includes both sexes and avoid using words that focus on the male. Where there is the word “brother”, instead, say “sister and brother”, and “woman and man” instead of “man,” if appropriate. Images should be in line with current times. For example, women and men are pictured as equal while respecting each other’s differences.

## 7. Are the Responses and Blessings Appropriate for the Presenter (Ordained/Lay)?

A layperson may not use the phrase “The Lord be with you.” Instead, phrases such as “The Lord be with us” may be used. The sign of the cross and blessings at the end of services/programs are different for ordained and lay persons. A lay person may only make the sign of the cross for themselves, inviting others to also do the same, while a priest has a physical outward motion using the sign of the cross to bless others in *persona Christi*, while those in attendance would make a personal sign of the cross.

## 8. Is the Format Easy to Use and to Follow?

The presenter must be comfortable with the way the program will be presented. Some people may not be comfortable with presentations that need computer knowledge. How it is presented must also suit the audience in the particular venue.

It is important to remember that not all members have the same comfort level with technology. If the presentation involves technology, it is important to decide whether those presenting and in attendance will feel uncomfortable with how the content is presented. All resources must also be easy to use and presented in a clear and easy-to-read format. Good resources to help with this discernment are the *Train the Trainer Guide* and *Prayer Service Planning Workshop*, both available on the national website.

## 9. Will the Proper Equipment be Available to Deliver the Product?

In this era of technology, it can sometimes be taken for granted that technology will be available in all venues. This is not always the case, especially in some rural parishes. Always double-check that all the equipment that will be needed will be available and arrive early enough to do a trial run before presentation time. Help with this information can be found in the *Train the Trainer Guide*, available on the national website.

## 10. Does It Comply With Copyright Laws?

In the simplest terms, “copyright” means “the right to copy.” In general, copyright means the sole right to produce or reproduce a work or a substantial part of it in any form. It includes the right to perform the work or any substantial part of it or, in the case of a lecture, to deliver it. If the work is unpublished, copyright includes the right to publish it or any substantial part.

The source must always be documented within the program. Copyright exists in Canada during the author’s lifetime and for 70 years following his/her death. After that, the work is in the public domain, and anyone can use it. This is true for most works, but there are exceptions.

When using content found in other resources, such as in a book or on the Internet, it is important to see if the author, artist or musician permits their work to be used by others. Sometimes, obtaining permission from the creator may be possible by contacting them and for asking permission. In the case of music, many churches purchase the rights to use songs by way of a projector in their parish celebrations, but that does not necessarily mean that the League may use those same songs at meetings and conventions. It is okay to use hymnals as they come with copyright permission, but it is not okay to photocopy from hymnals for presentations. A separate copyright permission is often purchased for special events such as conventions.

More information on this subject is available in the *Prayer Service Planning Workshop* on the national website.



# Evaluation Form

Use the notes for clarification and to help you respond to these questions.	Yes	No
Does it agree with the core teachings of our faith?		
<b>If the answer to this question is no, the content must be changed.</b>		
Does it emphasize the small Christian community model of pray, reflect, act?		
Is it current and relevant and respects adult faith development?		
Is the style/content forward looking (focused on the “League of the Future” and synodality)?		
Is the title of the program informative and accurate?		
Does it use inclusive language and/or images appropriate to our culture?		
Are the responses and blessings appropriate for the presenter (ordained/lay)?		
Is the format easy to use and to follow?		
Will the proper equipment be available to deliver the product?		
Does it comply with copyright laws?		

## NOTES

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