

## "Staying on the road less traveled: Spiritual guidance for the ministerial journey"

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### *Centering Prayer Guidelines*

- I. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within. (cf. Open Mind, Open Heart, chap. 5)
  1. The sacred word expresses our intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
  2. The sacred word is chosen during a brief period of prayer asking the Holy Spirit to inspire us with one that is especially suitable for us.
    - a. Examples: God, Jesus, Abba, Father, Mother, Mary, Amen.
    - b. Other possibilities: Love, Peace, Mercy, Listen, Let Go, Silence, Stillness, Faith, Trust, Yes.
  3. Instead of a sacred word a simple inward glance toward the Divine Presence or noticing one's breath may be more suitable for some persons. The same guidelines apply to these symbols as to the sacred word.
  4. The sacred word is sacred not because of its inherent meaning but because of the meaning we give it as the expression of our intention and consent.
  5. Having chosen a sacred word, we do not change it during the prayer period because that would be to start thinking again.
- II. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
  1. "Sitting comfortably" means relatively comfortably so as not to encourage sleep during the time of prayer.
  2. Whatever sitting position we choose, we keep the back straight.
  3. We close our eyes as a symbol of letting go of what is going on around and within us.
  4. We introduce the sacred word inwardly as gently as laying a feather on a piece of absorbent cotton.
  5. Should we fall asleep upon awakening we continue the prayer.
- III. When engaged with your thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.
  1. "Thoughts" is an umbrella term for every perception, including sense perceptions, feelings, images, memories, plans, reflections, concepts, commentaries, and spiritual experiences.
  2. Thoughts are an inevitable, integral and normal part of Centering Prayer.
  3. By "returning ever-so-gently to the sacred word" a minimum of effort is indicated. This is the only activity we initiate during the time of Centering Prayer.
  4. During the course of Centering Prayer, the sacred word may become vague or disappear.
- IV. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

1. The additional 2 minutes enables us to bring the atmosphere of silence into everyday life.
2. If this prayer is done in a group, the leader may slowly recite a prayer such as the Lord's Prayer while the others listen.

## ***1. Lectio Divina Shared in Community***

### **(A) Listening for the Gentle Touch of Christ the Word (The Literal Sense)**

1. One person reads aloud (twice) the passage of scripture, as others are attentive to some segment that is especially meaningful to them.
2. **Silence** for 1-2 minutes. Each hears and silently repeats a word or phrase that attracts.
3. Sharing aloud: [A word or phrase that has attracted each person]. A simple statement of one or a few words. **No elaboration.**

### **(B) How Christ the Word speaks to ME (The Allegorical Sense)**

4. Second reading of same passage by another person.
5. **Silence** for 2-3 minutes. Reflect on "Where does the content of this reading touch my life today?"
6. Sharing aloud: **Briefly**: "I hear, I see..."

### **(C) What Christ the Word Invites me to DO (The Moral Sense)**

7. Third reading by still another person.
8. **Silence** for 2-3 minutes. Reflect on "I believe that God wants me to . . . . . today/this week."
9. Sharing aloud: at somewhat greater length the results of each one's reflection. [Be especially aware of what is shared by the person to your right.]
10. After full sharing, pray for the person to your right.

*Note:* Anyone may "pass" at any time. If instead of sharing with the group you prefer to pray silently, simply state this aloud and conclude your silent prayer with *Amen*.

## **2. *Lectio* on Life: Applying *Lectio Divina* to my personal Salvation History**

***Purpose:*** to apply a method of prayerful reflection to a life/work incident  
(instead of to a scripture passage)

### **(A) Listening for the Gentle Touch of Christ the Word (*The Literal Sense*)**

1. Each person quiets the body and mind: relax, sit comfortably but alert, close eyes, attune to breathing...
2. Each person gently reviews events, situations, sights, encounters that have happened since the beginning of the retreat/or during the last month at work.

### **(B) Gently Ruminating, Reflecting (*Meditatio - Meditation*)**

3. Each person allows the self to focus on one such offering.
  - a) Recollect the setting, sensory details, sequence of events, etc.
  - b) Notice where the greatest energy seemed to be evoked. Was there a turning point or shift?
  - c) In what ways did God seem to be present? To what extent was I aware then? Now?

### **(C) Prayerful Consecration, Blessing (*Oratio - Prayer*)**

4. Use a word or phrase from the Scriptures to inwardly consecrate - to offer up to God in prayer - the incident and interior reflections. Allow God to accept and bless them as your gift.

### **(D) Accepting Christ's Embrace; Silent Presence to the Lord (*Contemplatio - Contemplation*)**

5. Remain in silence for some period.

### **(E) Sharing our *Lectio* Experience with Each Other (*Operatio - Action; works*)**

6. Leader calls the group back into "community."
7. All share briefly (or remain in continuing silence).

### *The Guidelines*

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
3. When engaged with your thoughts\*, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

\*Thoughts include body sensations, feelings, images, and reflections

### *Some Practical Points*

1. The minimum time for this prayer is 20 minutes. Two periods are recommended each day, one first thing in the morning and the other in the afternoon or early evening. With practice the time may be extended to 30 minutes or longer.
2. The end of the prayer period can be indicated by a timer which does not have an audible tick or loud sound when it goes off.
3. Possible physical symptoms during the prayer:
  - a. We may notice slight pains, itches, or twitches in various parts of the body or a generalized sense of restlessness. These are usually due to the untying of emotional knots in the body.
  - b. We may notice heaviness or lightness in our extremities. This is usually due to a deep level of spiritual attentiveness.
  - c. In all cases we pay no attention and ever-so-gently return to the sacred word.
4. The principal fruits of the prayer are experienced in daily life and not during the prayer period.
5. Centering Prayer familiarizes us with God's first language which is silence.

### *Points for Further Development*

1. During the prayer period, various kinds of thoughts may arise.
  - a. Ordinary wanderings of the imagination or memory.
  - b. Thoughts and feelings that give rise to attractions or aversions.
  - c. Insights and psychological breakthroughs.
  - d. Self-reflections such as, "How am I doing?" or, "This peace is just great!"
  - e. Thoughts and feelings that arise from the unloading of the unconscious.
  - f. When engaged with any of these thoughts return ever-so-gently to your sacred word.
2. During this prayer we avoid analyzing our experience, harboring expectations, or aiming at some specific goal such as:
  - a. Repeating the sacred word continuously.
  - b. Having no thoughts.
  - c. Making the mind a blank.

- d. Feeling peaceful or consoled.
- e. Achieving a spiritual experience. (cf. Open Mind, Open Heart, chap. 6-10)

### *Ways to Deepen Our Relationship with God*

1. Practice two 20-30 minute periods of Centering Prayer daily.
2. Listen to the Word of God in Scripture and study Open Mind, Open Heart.
3. Select one or two of the specific practices for everyday life as suggested in Open Mind, Open Heart, chap. 12.
4. Join a weekly Centering Prayer Group.
  - a. It encourages the members of the group to persevere in their individual practices.
  - b. It provides an opportunity for further input on a regular basis through tapes, readings, and discussion.
  - c. It offers an opportunity to support and share the spiritual journey.

### *What Centering Prayer Is and Is Not*

- a. It is not a technique but a way of cultivating a relationship with God.
- b. It is not a relaxation exercise but it may be refreshing.
- c. It is not a form of self-hypnosis but a way to quiet the mind while maintaining its alertness.
- d. It is not a charismatic gift but a path of transformation.
- e. It is not a para-psychological experience but an exercise of faith, hope and selfless love.
- f. It is not limited to the "felt" presence of God but is rather a deepening of faith in God's abiding presence.
- g. It is not reflective or spontaneous prayer, but simply resting in God.