



GUIDELINES FOR A PRAYER SERVICE

A Prayer Service takes place in the gathering of the faith Community, united in raising their hearts and minds together in worship. Sometimes, the community may have a particular occasion like ‘Parents Day’ or a particular intention to pray for; (the sick, or the victims of war and violence, or in times of a pandemic). At other times, it may be regular community worship. In any case, the Prayer Service follows a set order with designated parts like the Leader, Reader and All/Congregation. In general, Prayer Services follow a basic pattern:

Introduction—Song, Greeting, Opening Prayer

The Word of God—Scripture Reading, Reflection, Silence

Shared prayer—Petitions, Traditional Prayers, Litanies, Composed Prayers, and so on.

Conclusion—Closing Prayer, Blessing and a Song

THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit animates every Prayer. Romans 8:26-27 says, “*Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*”

SCRIPTURE

Prayer Services should always involve the Word of God so that participants can listen to God speaking to them. God speaks to us through His Word, (2Tim 3:16-17) and we respond to Him through our prayer, leading to true communion (Ps 145:18; Jn 15:7) God’s Word enables us to pray in keeping with God’s will. How will we know what His will is unless we are in His Word? (Jn 14:13-14, 1 Jn 5:14-15)

MUSIC “Make a joyful noise unto the Lord. ...” (Ps 98:4) Music connects us to God in a unique way, it uplifts the human spirit. Most of us find that music reaches and expresses the deepest moods and feelings of the soul far more powerfully than words.

GESTURES AND POSTURES

We use gestures and postures such as, kneeling, sitting, bowing, lifting our hands or folding them while praying, and by doing so, our prayers are not confined to our thoughts, feelings and voices, but it is expressed by our whole being.

ASSEMBLY PARTICIPATION

Don’t think of just what you are doing during prayer. Ask yourself what the assembly is doing. Be sure to involve the assembly as a whole in prayer, not just those taking the Leader or Reader roles.

LITURGICAL FEASTS AND SEASONS

Pay special attention to the time of the liturgical year (Advent, Lent, Feasts, Solemnities) when selecting themes, hymns and prayers.

KNOW YOUR ASSEMBLY

Be mindful of the prayer group; know their age, their faith level, as well as their level of human maturity so as to make the prayer service a personal and meaningful one.

PREPARE

A Prayer Service is not a performance, but that does not in any case, take away the need for planning and preparing. Be sure of your focus, theme, and goal. Envision the prayer, feel the flow, get a sense of space, time, sound, silence, and so on. Select Readers and assign roles ahead of time. If possible, rehearse with those chosen to read.

INCLUDE SILENCE.

Profound inner stillness and external silence create space for deep listening and assimilation. Our lives are noisy already. Much of our prayer is too wordy. Be sure to include moments of silence during the Prayer Service, perhaps after the Gospel reading.

BE CREATIVE.

Consider using appropriate audio or visuals (Video Songs, Audios, PowerPoint Presentation, and so on) as and when needed.

ENCOURAGE SPONTANEOUS PRAYER

Not everyone is comfortable with spontaneous prayer, but it is a form of prayer that needs to be encouraged and fostered rather than always reciting the printed common prayer.

PROCLAIM

Throughout the Prayer Service speak clearly and slowly. Proclamation is more than merely reading the text and less than a dramatic performance. As you speak, try not to bury your head in the text; look at the assembly as much as possible. Speaking in this way will help to involve the participants.

SENSE OF REVERENCE AND SACREDNESS

When a Prayer Service is conducted outside of the Church, (School and Parish Hall or elsewhere) make sure that a sense of reverence and sacredness is created before and during the Service. Lighting of lamps, having the Bible opened and enthroned in a prominent place, with flowers in front, playing a soft and prayerful instrumental etc. can help us get into the spirit of prayer. These are some simple guidelines that can facilitate a meaningful and participative Prayer Service in a group.

-Commission For Liturgy
Archdiocese of Bombay

