



## PUTTING PRAYER IN CONTEXT: A PRACTICAL REFERENCE

Prayer...“is at the center of all the spiritual disciplines” and “...is our most fundamental spiritual activity.”

—Velma Ruch, *The Transforming Power of Prayer*, Volume 1, pp. 17–18

Prayer...“brings us into the deepest and highest work of the human spirit. Real prayer is life creating and life changing.”

—Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, p. 30

Prayer...“paying respectful and non-egocentric attention to something.”

—Richard Rohr, *Immortal Diamond*, p. 71

### I. Praying in Public Ministry

- Be intentional about language.
  - Offer prayer on behalf of the congregation; use “we” instead of “I” language.
  - Use simple, clear, modern language.
  - Avoid overused or trite phrases.
  - Speak with a clear, strong voice; make sure you can be heard.
  - Use a variety of images for God.
  - Use inclusive language.
  - Don’t repeat the same phrases over and over.
- Prepare
  - Pray.
  - Learn in advance about the nature and focus of the service.
  - Write down the prayer. It’s perfectly acceptable.
  - Practice your prayer so you can deliver it comfortably.
  - Jot reflections during the service. They may be helpful.
  - Listen carefully to the worship elements, including the prayers of others, as the service progresses. Be responsive to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

### II. Public Ministry Prayers

#### Invocation

1. May be offered by anyone.
2. Is addressed to God as worship begins.
3. Asks in prayer for a sense of God’s presence and guidance throughout the worship experience.
4. Pertains to this experience of worship—not a general prayer for broad concerns.
5. Invites worshippers to show up. (God is always present.)
6. Is short and focused on our need for God.

#### Prayer of Confession

1. May be offered by anyone with an understanding of repentance.
2. Is addressed to God.
3. Presents in prayer those things for which we genuinely are sorry and asks God’s forgiveness.

### Silent Prayer in Worship

1. Gives congregants time to pray silently.
2. Often begins and ends with the sounding of a chime or other signal.
3. May include instructions for a breath prayer, repeating a sacred word, positive imagination, praying with images, and many other spiritual practices.

### Prayer for Peace

1. May be offered by anyone with a commitment to peacemaking.
2. Is addressed to God.
3. Is a daily spiritual discipline as an expression of Community of Christ’s call to pursue peace and share the peace of Jesus Christ.
4. Usually includes a specific country for which to pray.
5. Often begins with a call to prayer: sounding a chime and lighting a peace candle.

### Blessing of Mission Tithes and Oblation

1. May be offered by anyone with an understanding of and investment in generosity.
2. Is addressed to God.
3. Gives thanks in prayer.
4. Presents offerings to God.
5. Blesses the offerings as “eucharistic”—bread for the world; in other words, we gratefully bless that which is offered for it to become like bread that feeds hungry souls.

### Pastoral Prayer

1. Often is offered by an evangelist, the pastor, or a member of the pastorate.
2. Is addressed to God.
3. Presents the needs and concerns of the congregation to God.
4. Connects, in a worship setting, the message of the day (scripture, theme, sermon) with concern for trying to live in today’s world.

### **Benediction**

1. May be offered by anyone with a sensitivity to Spirit and the people present.
2. Is addressed to congregants.
3. Proclaims blessing on God's people.
4. Usually is offered at the end of a worship experience.

Since this prayer form often is misunderstood, here are some examples:

- Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Amen.

—Colossians 3:15–17 NRSV

- The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

—Numbers 6:24–26 NRSV

- May the stars carry your sadness away,  
May the flowers fill your heart with beauty,  
May hope forever wipe away your tears,  
And, above all, may silence make you strong.

—Chief Dan George

### **Closing Prayer**

1. Is offered by anyone with sensitivity to the worship experience and the people present.
2. Is addressed to God.
3. Is a prayer for *this* people at *this* time as they leave *this* experience to go into God's world.

...and many more

### **III. Sacrament Prayers Blessing of Children**

A Melchisedec priesthood member offers this prayer to God on behalf of the infant, parents, family, and congregation, expressing thanksgiving and asking for God's presence and guidance throughout the child's life. The prayer includes the family and congregation covenanting to support the child.

### **Baptism**

The prescribed wording of the prayer offered by a priest or Melchisedec priesthood member just prior to baptism:

Having been commissioned of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

—Doctrine and Covenants 17:21c

("Holy Spirit" is acceptable instead of "Holy Ghost")

### **Confirmation**

A prayer offered to God by a Melchisedec priesthood member acknowledges the grace and authority of Jesus Christ through which baptism occurs and bears witness to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, "which weaves people's giftedness into beautiful patterns of community to enrich their discipleship and to strengthen the fabric of the church" (Doctrine and Covenants 164:2e). The prayer also includes words of encouragement and support for lifelong discipleship and recognition of membership status within Community of Christ. The prayer encompasses the congregation covenanting to provide disciple and spiritual formation opportunities, as well as pastoral care during the candidate's life journey.

### **Communion**

The prescribed wording of prayers offered by a priest or Melchisedec priesthood member before the serving of bread and wine can be found at: [www.CofChrist.org/communion-prayers](http://www.CofChrist.org/communion-prayers) or in *Community of Christ Sings*, after the Preface. Those with responsibility for administering the sacrament of the Lord's Supper may choose which prescribed prayers to use.

### **Ordination**

The prayer offered to God by a priest or Melchisedec priesthood member, ordaining the candidate to a specific priesthood office, often includes thanksgiving for the person's giftedness and willingness to serve. The prayer encompasses recognition of God's calling and the ordinand's response in the form of a covenant. (See "Covenant Principles for Faithful Priesthood Ministry: web address [www.CofChrist.org/ministry-and-priesthood](http://www.CofChrist.org/ministry-and-priesthood)) The prayer includes the congregation covenanting to support and receive the ministry of the ordinand.

### **Laying on of Hands for the Sick**

Melchisedec priesthood members offer this prayer to God in two parts. The first involves anointing the recipient with consecrated oil, and the second is an intercessory prayer.

### **Anointing Statement**

Following the anointing, a prayer statement addressed to God invites the Holy Presence during the sacrament.

### **Prayer for Wholeness and Well-being**

This prayer addressed to God asks for wholeness and well-being on behalf of the recipient. While the word *healing* sometimes is used, healing can come in many forms. Care should be taken in the prayer to present the recipient to God, who best understands the person's needs.

### **Marriage**

Various prayers may be offered during a marriage ceremony. These generally are addressed to God (benediction is the exception) and may be offered by anyone. Possibilities include: invocation, pastoral prayer, prayer of blessing, and benediction. An example marriage benediction as adapted from Doctrine and Covenants 111:2d:

May God bless you and keep you to fulfill your covenants from this day forward. Amen.

### **Evangelist Blessing**

The sacrament of evangelist blessing includes a prayer offered by an evangelist or evangelists. It addresses the faith journey of individuals, couples, families, households, congregations, or groups. Much of the prayer is spoken directly to the recipient(s), usually with additional prayer language addressed to God in thanksgiving and recognition of the belovedness of all. For specific information see "Sacrament of Evangelist Blessing Guidelines" (2016) at [www.CofChrist.org/order-of-evangelist](http://www.CofChrist.org/order-of-evangelist).

## **IV. Other Public or Private Prayers**

### **Prayer of Blessing**

1. Is not a sacrament.
2. May be offered by anyone.
3. May or may not be offered within public ministry.
4. Arises from daily living, blessing a particular facet of the Sacredness of Creation.
5. Addresses God with thanksgiving.

Examples:

Blessing animals  
Blessing at bedtime  
Blessing a cornerstone (or new building)  
Blessing the Earth or land  
Blessing a farm or orchard  
Blessing food  
Blessing a friendship  
Blessing the harvest  
Blessing a home  
Blessing a new day  
Blessing a new venture

Blessing a relationship  
Blessing one who sneezes  
Blessing before travel  
Blessing a vehicle  
Blessing a water supply  
...and many more

### **Intercessory Prayer**

1. Is not a sacrament.
2. May be offered by anyone.
3. May or may not be offered in public ministry.
4. Shares concerns, needs, and problems with God, often in the form of a request for help. A pastoral prayer is a specific type of intercessory prayer.
5. Is addressed to God on behalf of others.

### **Prayer for Wholeness and Well-being**

1. Is not a sacrament.
2. May be offered by anyone.
3. May or may not be offered in public ministry.
4. Shares the need for wholeness and well-being, often arising from illness or crisis.
5. Is addressed to God on behalf of others.

...and many more

## **V. Prayer (Spiritual) Practices**

The discipline of regularly "practicing" prayer has developed over centuries in many forms for individuals and within community. Some recommended texts for learning more about prayer practices:

- *Creating a Life with God: The Call of Ancient Prayer Practices*, by Daniel Wolpert, [Nashville, TN, Upper Room Books] 2003. ISBN 978-0-8358-9855-3
- *Fully Awake and Truly Alive: Spiritual Practices to Nurture Your Soul*, by the Reverend Jane E. Vennard, [Woodstock, VT, SkyLight Paths] 2013. ISBN 978-1-59473-473-1
- *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*, by Marjorie J. Thompson, [Louisville, KY, Westminster John Knox Press] 2014. ISBN 978-0-664-23924-4

Some ancient prayer practices from the Christian tradition:

- Solitude and silence
- *Lectio divina*
- The Jesus Prayer
- Apophatic (without images) prayer:  
Be Still and Know

- Prayer of *examen*
  - Creativity
  - Journaling
  - Body prayer
  - Walking toward God
  - Praying in nature
  - Prayer and life in the world
  - A praying community
  - *Visio divina*
- ...and many more

**Note to Evangelists:** Given the diversity of prayer forms and practices, it may be helpful to clarify the intent of prayer requests you receive. Spend time in discussion and discernment to determine the appropriate prayer form to meet the request.

- Is this a request for the sacrament of evangelist blessing? (see “Definition of Sacrament of Evangelist Blessing, Sacrament of Evangelist Blessing Guidelines 2016”; [www.CofChrist.org/order-of-evangelist](http://www.CofChrist.org/order-of-evangelist))
- Might the request be more appropriately met through the use of the sacrament of laying on of hands for the sick or an intercessory prayer?
- Would it be helpful to offer education for worship planners, priesthood, members, and friends on the forms and practice of prayer?
- Are there those who would be willing to engage in regular prayer practices with your leadership?

**Example:** An evangelist is asked to offer a blessing on a newly built house. After discussion and discernment, the evangelist decides a prayer of blessing over the physical building is being requested. This is not the sacrament of evangelist blessing for a household. It is a prayer of blessing that involves

praying over the rooms of the house and can be accomplished without extensive preparation time. It is not recorded and submitted as a sacrament. Generally, this prayer is about the building, not the people.

**Example:** An evangelist is asked to offer a blessing on a congregation during a worship service. After discussion with the presider and a period of discernment, the evangelist decides a pastoral prayer is being requested at the end of the service. This is not the sacrament of evangelist blessing for a congregation. It does not include a period of extensive preparation and is not recorded and submitted as a sacrament.

**Example:** An engaged couple ask an evangelist to offer a blessing as part of their marriage ceremony. After discussion with the couple and the officiating minister, the evangelist decides a prayer of blessing is being requested. This is not the sacrament of evangelist blessing for a couple. It does not include a period of extensive preparation, occurs within public worship, and is not recorded and submitted as a sacrament.

**Example:** An evangelist is called to the hospital and asked to offer a blessing on a patient awaiting surgery. After discussion and discernment, the evangelist decides the sacrament of laying on of hands is being requested. It is not the sacrament of evangelist blessing for an individual. It does not include extensive preparation. It is not recorded and submitted as a sacrament.

...and many more.