

Praying without Borders: A Day of Reflection

Objective

Through this day of reflection, participants will learn about solidarity through an introduction to the spiritual wisdom of people who are working for peace and justice in developing countries.

Activity Summary

The day of reflection runs three hours. It is ideal for a group of 20 to 30 people and is best used with older teens or adults.

This day of reflection is a companion to the book *Prayer Without Borders*, published by Catholic Relief Services in 2004. The prayers and stories used can all be found in the book.

Note: Prayer Without Borders can be ordered through SERRV (www.serrv.org).

Materials Needed

- copies of *Prayer Without Borders*
- copy of *Opening Prayer: To Have Hope* for each participant
- copy of *Blessed Are*
- copy of *In My Prayer*
- copy of *Closing Prayer: Light a Holy Fire* for each participant
- music
- music player
- computer
- pens/pencils for each participant
- bible
- candle
- cloth
- cross
- table
- additional faith symbols from around the world
- flipchart paper
- Eight pieces of poster board
- markers and craft materials
- magazines
- photos from developing countries
- glue
- tape
- paper
- candle for each participant
- matches

Preparation

Select a space suitable for small group work, large group discussion and presentations.

Set up a prayer table containing a bible, candle, and cloth and faith symbols from around the world.

Praying without Borders: A Day of Reflection

Procedure

Introductions

Begin with introductions and an icebreaker that helps participants feel comfortable with each other and fosters dialogue. Sample icebreakers can be found on the CRS Food Fast website (www.foodfast.org/plan/icebreakers).

Opening Prayer: To Have Hope

Preparation

Distribute a copy of *Opening Prayer: To Have Hope* to each participant or read the prayer from *Prayer Without Borders*, page 7. Choose two participants to read parts 1 and 2 of the prayer.

Consider inviting a team to create a reflective PowerPoint using music and images around the world that convey a sense of hope and our call to bring hope to places where there is need. Use this as the call to prayer.

A reflection is provided as a call to prayer to provide a context for the day. Use as is or adapt as you like.

Procedure

After introductions, invite participants around the prayer table. Begin with a call to prayer. Read or paraphrase the following:

Today we have an opportunity to reflect deeply on prayers and wisdom stories from the developing world. Most are written by people who are working for peace and justice in their countries. All serve as an invitation to stand on common ground with those who struggle with poverty, conflict and oppression.

But how do we stand in solidarity with people we have never met? How can we relate to people in countries we may never visit? How do we reduce a distance marked not only by miles, but by different languages, customs and religious beliefs?

As people of faith we know that prayer and stories can draw us into relationships that cross borders of time, distance and difference. Our oldest prayers and our ancient scriptures continue to resonate with us despite the gulf of years and cultures and miles. Our acts of worship bring us into unity with people engaged in similar gatherings throughout the world. Our universal longing for peace and justice in an ever more interconnected world rises as a united cry to a God who we believe hears us all, and loves us all completely.

*Today, we will use a variety of forms including communal prayer, storytelling, visual arts and quiet reflection to try to see the world as others see it, and to look for opportunities to stand on common ground. The pieces come from people whose lives and work are connected to Catholic Relief Services, the official humanitarian agency of the Catholic community in the United States. Catholic Relief Services compiled a number of these prayers and stories in the book *Prayer Without Borders*, and they serve as a basis for our day together.*

Praying without Borders: A Day of Reflection

“Blessed Are” Prayer Banners

Preparation

Cut the stanzas from *Blessed Are* and provide one for each group. Make a copy of the entire prayer for each participant, too.

Write the group reflection questions on flipchart paper and hang where everyone can see them.

Procedure

Divide into eight small groups with two to six people in each group. Provide each group with a stanza from *Blessed Are*, poster board, markers, pictures and other supplies needed to make their banners. (*Note: If you have a small group (less than 10 people), you can have participants work in pairs, and provide each pair with two stanzas.*)

Invite the groups to read and discuss their stanza for about 10 minutes using the group reflection questions as a guide.

- Who comes to mind when you read this stanza? Think of people in our faith tradition as well as people you have met personally embody or model this description through the way that they live.
- What challenges or obstacles might be faced by the people described in your stanza? What are their strengths?
- How do the people of your stanza contribute to the Reign of God? How will the world change as a result of their contribution?

Have groups illustrate the meaning of the stanza and the people who live by that message on a piece of poster board. Encourage them to be creative, using drawings, colors, or photos and images from magazines.

As each group finishes, hang their banners on the wall in the order that “Blessed Are” appears. Invite each group to share briefly some of the insights from their discussion and their work.

Close by saying reciting “Blessed Are”, having each group read their stanza in order. “Blessed Are” can be found on page 24 of *Prayer Without Borders*.

Wisdom Stories

Procedure

Distribute a copy of *Prayer Without Borders* to each small group and assign each group a story.

- The Lion’s Whisker (pg. 10)
- The Marks of the Nails (pg. 41)
- Strength (pg. 72)
- The Sound of Justice (pg. 98)
- Thy Wisdom is Indeed Great (pg. 57)

Praying without Borders: A Day of Reflection

Have the groups read the story and discuss among their group. They should then develop a short skit depicting the story. Skits are best acted out as one of the group members reads the story aloud.

After groups have had enough time to plan, invite them to share their skits with the large group. After each story, take 3-5 minutes to reflect on the questions below with the entire group:

- What was true in this story?
- What was going on inside you while you watched?
- Was there anything that left you feeling uncomfortable or inspired?

Break

In My Prayer

Preparation

Choose in advance one or more participants to read “In My Prayer”.

On flipchart paper write the following phrases and hang where everyone can see. Cover until after the prayer is read.

- In my prayer make me :
- That I may understand:

Procedure

Invite participants back to the prayer space and share the following in your own words:

The prayer we are about to share started out as a brief prayer featured on the rice bowls that Catholic Relief Services distributes as part of Operation Rice Bowl, its Lenten program. When Attique Swati, who works for CRS in Pakistan, saw the prayer, he expanded it to include images and stories of Pakistani women. In Attique’s country of Pakistan, women and girls are among the most vulnerable members of society, facing early childhood marriages, exclusion from schooling, domestic violence and limited access to health care. As the prayer is read, imagine the women that Attique is describing. Call to mind an image and sit with it a moment.

Have the reader read “In My Prayer”, pausing after each stanza for the group to visualize the women that are mentioned.

Praying without Borders: A Day of Reflection

After the prayer, read the following slowly and meditatively, asking participants reflect on what they are hearing.

Stay with Attique's prayer for a moment. What if you prayed a similar prayer based on the community you live in? Who would you pray to become?

Quietly call to mind people within the circle of your life. Consider people in your reach who need help right now. Consider people in your reach but whom you have never reached before, people that cry out to be known, understood, and loved. Imagine their faces, let their stories fill your mind.

On the paper you have received, you are invited to write your own prayer using the same format in the prayer we just shared:

*In my prayer make me (describe a person in your community) _____
That I may understand: _____*

Show the statements written on the flipchart paper to allow participants to copy them on their own paper. Invite participants to write these statements in completed form on their paper and to lightly decorate it if time allows. Depending on the size of the group, invite participants to share their statements in small or large group.

Discussion

This final discussion provides the participants time to process the experiences they have had. Encourage participants to explore any insights, revelations or changes brought about as a result of this experience. Invite them to consider how the day has informed their concept of "solidarity". Use or adapt the questions provided to start the discussion.

In order for participants to consider more carefully what they have heard today, invite a sharing using the following questions as a guide for discussion:

- *Given what you have heard and prayed today, what are people in the developing world praying for? Or, given the stories that were shared, what do they value?*
- *What did you hear today that matches your experience that resonates with things that you pray for or things you value?*
- *What did you encounter today that does not match your experience? Were there prayers or situations that you couldn't personally relate to?*
- *Given what you've experienced today, what do you think it takes for all of us to live as "one human family"? In light of this time together, what does it mean to live in solidarity with our brothers and sisters across the world?*
- *What might you do differently as a result of today's time? What are concrete ways that you can put yourself in solidarity with people who society usually looks down upon, ignores or judges harshly?*

Praying without Borders: A Day of Reflection

Closing Prayer

Procedure

To begin the closing prayer, take a few moments to wrap up the day of reflection, recalling the work that people did, pointing out insights that were shared, reinforcing the call to solidarity and further extending the invitation to join the world in its prayer for peace and justice.

Provide everyone with a candle. Invite participants to come forward one at a time to light their candle from the central candle on the prayer table. As they do so, ask them to make a commitment to remember something or to do one thing as a result of this day.

Play some meditative music in the background as they share.

When all have lit their candle and made a commitment, ask the group to read the prayer "Light a Holy Fire".

Close with "Marching in the Light of God" or some other appropriate song.

Opening Prayer: To Have Hope

Reading: Romans 5: 1-5

Reader 1: We believe that

All: To have hope

Reader 2: Is to believe that history continues to be open to the dream of God and to human creativity.

Reader 1: We believe that

All: To have hope

Reader 2: Is to continue affirming that it is possible to dream a different world, without hunger, without injustice, without discrimination.

Reader 1: We believe that

All: To have hope

Reader 2: Is to be a courier of God and a courier of men and women of good will, tearing down walls, destroying borders, building bridges.

Reader 1: We believe that

All: To have hope

Reader 2: Is to believe in the revolutionary potential of faith, is to leave the door open so that the Spirit can enter and make all things anew.

Reader 1: We believe that

All: To have hope

Reader 2: Is to believe that life wins over death.

Reader 1: We believe that

All: To have hope

Reader 2: Is to begin again as many times as necessary.

Reader 1: We believe that

All: To have hope

Reader 2: Is to believe that hope is not the last thing that dies.

Reader 1: We believe that

All: To have hope

Reader 2: Is to believe that hope cannot die, that hope no longer dies.

Reader 1: We believe that

All: To have hope

Reader 2: Is to live.

All: Amen

From *Prayer Without Borders*, Catholic Relief Services © 2004

Blessed Are

Blessed are those who are on the move,
transforming exodus and flight in energy for a new search.
From the victims will come the protagonists of history.

Blessed are those who, forced to wander without direction,
with wisdom learn and teach the lessons of the road.
They will be the architects of a new time.

Blessed are those who suffer pain, nostalgia and loneliness,
yet know how to make of every arrival a new beginning.
They shall act with faith, hope and life.

Blessed are those who open borders
and mix the anthems, flags, races and creeds without discrimination,
they make the world everyone's home

Blessed the wayfarers of all roads
in the tears, sweat and the work of their hands.
They prepare a tomorrow of justice and right.

Blessed are those who open the door to pilgrims,
making solidarity the passport to our common homeland.
They are constructing a new citizenship.

Blessed are those who foment encounters & re-encounters,
sowing peace.
They will harvest flowers & stars in the new heaven & the new earth.

Blessed are the excluded, without opportunities and without voice.
They will be the first guests in the great banquet,
where bread will not be lacking on anyone's table.

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In My Prayer

In my prayer,
make me a baby girl
who when born is considered to be a burden or curse on the family –
that I may know what it is to feel unwanted.

In my prayer,
make me a girl whose brothers are the only ones sent to school –
that I may understand:
before our creator we are equal; still one is deprived.

In my prayer,
make me a young girl who is not married –
that I may know the fear
of how property will hinder my choice for marriage.

In my prayer,
make me a young girl married in a family exchange –
that I may experience how miserable it is
to marry a person of double or triple my age.

In my prayer,
make me a widow who has no source of earning –
that I may understand:
without any source of income, how can I bring sweets for my children?

In my fast, make me an empty bowl –
that you may fill the hollow space in me with love.

In my almsgiving, make me a grain of rice –
that in the company of others, my gifts may feed a starving world.

O our Lord, give me strength –
that I can share the sadness of my fellow beings
and bring a light of hope for them.

Amen.

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Closing Prayer: Light a Holy Fire

Receive this holy fire.
Make your lives like this fire.
A holy life that is seen.
A life of God that is seen.
A life that has no end.
A life that darkness does not overcome.
May this light of God in you grow.
Light a fire that is worthy of your heads.
Light a fire that is worthy of your children.
Light a fire that is worthy of your fathers.
Light a fire that is worthy of your mothers.
Light a fire that is worthy of God.
Now go in peace.
May the Almighty protect you today and all days.
Amen.

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