

WEEK OF DIRECTED PRAYER IN A CHURCH SETTING

This manual is about doing a directed retreat in the local church setting. It contains things that you might like to copy and use for others. Go ahead! I tried to format it in such a way that you could photocopy some of the things without too much cutting and pasting. I composed the manual in 1984 and revised some of the materials in 1997.

John Veltri, sj

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WHAT IS THE WEEK OF DIRECTED PRAYER?

The Week of Directed Prayer is a way of making a directed retreat in the midst of daily living. It is such a simple structure that it can easily be used in a parish, school, university, or business office. And it works! This format is based on making only a half-hour prayer period on scripture each day and receiving spiritual direction for a half hour each day. Participants make their prayer exercise at home and come to their parish church or other setting each day for prayer direction for 30 to 45 minutes, Monday through Friday. On the beginning Sunday and closing Saturday, there is a group session.

The structure of the Week of Directed Prayer is very simple so let's start with that. Imagine a parish setting. You have a team of seven prayer guides. There are 35 persons who have signed up for this experience. On the team of prayer guides are both lay persons and professional people in ministry. The participants range widely in expectation and desire. But they have all come because they desire to deepen their prayer life or to learn to pray with scripture. Everything has been pre-organized. The hall is set up, the direction rooms or places have been assigned, and the prayer guides have a list of their directees. Both directees and prayer guides know, more or less, when the session of private prayer guidance will be held. So we begin:

OPENING SESSION Sunday, 1:30 p.m. 4:30 p.m

The goal of this session is to meet one another, to introduce the prayer guides, to get started, to give some tips on prayer, to attend to last minute organization, to SET THE TONE, and to begin to create or to continue the creation of a community of prayer. *If this Week of Directed Prayer does not both begin and end with some communal experience, there will be something missing.* During this session, the prayer guides meet with their directees to set up and finalize the interview times and places. By the end of this session, all the participants are motivated to make a half-hour spiritual exercise each day, have their scripture text(s), and have a fairly good idea of how to go about it. A possible format for the opening session will be found on pages 18-19.

WEEKDAY INTERVIEWS Monday through Friday

Each participant comes back to the parish to a designated room or place to receive prayer direction for 30 to 45 minutes each day, Monday through Friday.

continued >>>>>

The prayer material is based on scripture, according to either a suggested prayer pattern as on pages 16-17 or some other prayer pattern that might be helpful. As one discovers in any directed retreat, prayer direction also involves the experience of life which surfaces in or is related to the prayer.

On each of these weekdays, the team of prayer guides meets for an hour for a team meeting. An example of a workable format is on page 15. It might be helpful to have a meal together in addition to this meeting.

CLOSING SESSION Saturday, 1:30 p.m. 4:30 p.m.

The goal of this session is to round off the experience of the Week. Through it, the hope is to:

- a) Appropriate the experience of the Week;
- b) Give some tips for the future;
- c) Help those who may have had somewhat of a disappointing experience;
- d) Help establish or continue the development of a community of prayer;
- e) CELEBRATE;
- f) Suggest some resources that are available for a life of prayer.

PLEASE NOTE!

This manual is written from the perspective of a larger-type group using a team of prayer guides. However, this same program can be carried out by one prayer guide in those situations where there may be only a small number of participants. In other words, if you have only a handful of interested participants, it is still a worthwhile experience.¹

SOME ADVANTAGES OF THE WEEK OF DIRECTED PRAYER

The Week of Directed Prayer creates the possibility for participants to experience a directed retreat without leaving their daily life. For some, it is an excellent introduction to scriptural prayer. For others, it is an introduction to the Bible. Many have reported that this experience has taught them to integrate their life and their prayer.

It is amazing how this simple structure can dispose persons for almost the same depth experience as that of a five-day silent/closed retreat. The reason is this: the half hour of prayer each day focuses all the events of the day in such a way that the prayer is experienced with the whole day, distractions and all! Many participants look on this Week as a special week and they eliminate unimportant activities. They spontaneously make efforts to live in greater harmony with the prayer experience of their "special week with God."

For beginning prayer guides, this event is a way of growing in the art of spiritual direction. It is short enough so that, without too much inconvenience, busy persons are able to give their time to the experience of directing others. It is long enough so that training centres for directors are able to give the needed supervision.

This format may also be a good way to introduce persons to the directed retreat movement. Certainly this format can be one of the instruments used in preparing someone for the Spiritual Exercises according to Annotation 19, otherwise known as the Spiritual Exercises in Daily Life. It can also be used for screening persons for this experience.

The format can also be adapted in many different ways. For example, it could be used for a two-week directed retreat experience with interviews on alternate days and perhaps a group activity in the middle of the two weeks. In one parish, some of the prayer guides visited their directees in their homes. For mothers of young children, the interview time coincided with a children's television program. The aged who could not travel to the parish each day for the interview were also directed at home. Another possibility would be to start with the Week of Directed Prayer and then follow it up with three single days of group work a month apart. Your creative imagination will think of other adaptations for this format!

CHECKLIST OF ORGANIZATIONAL ITEMS

Though the actual Week of Directed Prayer is rather simple in structure when it is in operation, initially the organization can be rather complex. Here is a checklist of the elements which, one way or another, will have to be attended to before the Week of Directed Prayer takes place:

A meeting with the minister/pastor and parish team to establish the idea and seek their co-operation.

Advertisements, several months in advance, possibly including a couple of homilies; some examples are given on pages 31-34.

Cancellation of parish activities which might interfere with the space or energy of the Week of Directed Prayer.

Application forms, a suggestion for which is on page 29.

Assembling a team of prayer guides or directors and preparing the team by:

prayer;

discussions about on-going direction;

eliciting their support for the various elements (they may need to suggest alternate times and topics and ways of doing things);

parcelling out the various tasks for opening and closing sessions, such as:

- fifteen-minute presentations,
- song and music leader,
- worship service,
- over-all facilitator for the sessions.

Letters of acceptance, an example of which is on page 30.

Letters of regret, an example of which is on page 30.

Organization and freeing of all the spaces that will be used during the week for the large assembly and for the private interviews.

Decoration of the room for the large assembly.

Finding out what songs the participants know and preparing hymnals or sheets.

Assigning retreatants to prayer guides matching available times.

Arranging for supper for the prayer guides as circumstances allow.

Organizing the evaluation session for the prayer guides after the event.

Having a separate celebration for the prayer guides after the event.

THE DO'S FOR THE WEEK OF DIRECTED PRAYER

Make sure that the pastor or minister and his/her pastoral team are involved in the organization and carrying out of this event. If they can participate as prayer guides, all the better; but at least, they should be present at both the first and the last sessions. Otherwise, they will not understand and support what you are doing.

For the opening and closing sessions, it is helpful to decorate the hall or room where they take place. Perhaps this room could be set up as a kind of coffee room for the week, with some displays of books, pictures or handouts which might be useful for persons to

browse through if they happen to arrive before their interview time or stay around after it. Maybe this room could also have a prayer corner.

The meetings of prayer guides should be at least one hour. Inevitably some prayer guides will come late or leave a little early because of people they are directing, and so a shorter session will get even shorter as the week progresses. A good time for the meeting of prayer guides is late afternoon with a meal immediately following. This would mean that those prayer guides who can only direct in the afternoon will have the meeting immediately after their interviews; and those who can only direct in the evening will have the meeting to touch base with the other prayer guides before their interviews.

Arrange to have an extra prayer guide available in case one of the prayer guides has to drop out because of unexpected circumstances.

THE DO NOT'S

Don't expect this experience to replace a parish renewal experience. This kind of event is important for persons who have experienced renewal and desire to deepen what has already begun. It may also be the beginning of deeper commitment for some others.

Don't organize the different aspects of the event independently of the team of prayer guides. It is important that the members of the team have processed all the aspects of the event and feel somewhat comfortable with it.

With a team of beginning prayer guides, it is important not to rotate the chairperson at the team meetings; otherwise, the goals of the daily sharing of the prayer guides may get shifted and the different aspects of the team meetings will get short-changed.

Don't mix the final evaluation among the prayer guides with the closing session of the Week of Directed Prayer. The evaluation may come at a later date.

If you are working with a group of beginning prayer guides and desire that this event be a learning experience, it is important not to expect too much learning and theorizing during the actual event itself. **Learning sessions can come both before and after the Week of Directed Prayer.** Throughout the Week, the experience of prayer and of affective support for each other is far more important during the daily team meetings. Without this relaxed atmosphere of support and jovial interchange, learning can never take place.

Don't expect this experience to be a "WOW" experience by the end of the program. It should not be compared to programs such as Cursillo. As mentioned above, it is primarily for persons who have already experienced renewal and desire to deepen their personal relationship with God.

A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY

It really began when I was helping out with a workshop in Victoria. The workshop was part of a training program for prayer companions in the Diocese of Victoria. One day, Bishop Remi de Roo made the remark, "I'd like to find a way in this diocese to teach lumber jacks how to pray on the job!" That remark stayed with me.

I knew that the program in Victoria later developed in such a way that prayer companions used the directed retreat method at the parish level on weekends. But a weekend of directed prayer, to me at least, was never satisfactory. We had been experimenting in Guelph with a Weekend-In-A-Series, during which the same individual would come for three weekends separated by a month or so. Again this format did not seem practical enough for me.

So all these thoughts and wonderments were floating around in my mind when, in the summer of 1982, I was faced with a practical difficulty. I was responsible for the coming internship program at Loyola House² of the Guelph Centre of Spirituality; there were three weeks for which I had to supply some field work for six interns. Thus, the Week of Directed Prayer occurred to me as a practical way of occupying developing interns and achieving that hoped-for goal suggested by Bishop de Roo. Providentially, the first two persons I asked to investigate whether we could sponsor such an event in their parishes paved the way and gave us the required "go aheads."

The first person I asked was Jeannette Hiller, CND, who brought the idea to the pastor of Nativity Parish in Etobicoke, Toronto. Reverend Ted Fournier, the pastor, said, "Fine, let's go ahead," and so we did, beginning the last week of January 1983, when we ran a two-week format for 67 people. We called it a "Prayer-Mission."

The second person I asked was Reverend John Buttars, minister at Harcourt Memorial United Church in Guelph. He brought the idea to the education committee which also agreed to give it a try. So we conducted one in mid-January of 1983 in a one-week format. It was John Buttars who called it a Week of Directed Prayer and so we had a name for it.

FEEDBACK

What follows is feedback from our first experiment at Nativity Parish. It was written several weeks after the event and published in a Nativity Parish booklet.

From a male participant ...

There is little doubt that I approached the Mission on Prayer with more than a little trepidation. After all, I had honestly no idea what it was about, or what I should expect from it. Now that it's over, I can reflect upon the two-week experience and perhaps share what it meant to me. The first thing that came to me was the realization that prayer plays a much larger role in our lives than most of us realize. We somehow have the feeling that prayer is associated with going to church on Sunday, and for most of us, that's a once-a-week

experience. Quite the contrary. Prayer is really our relationship with God, and that's there twenty-four hours a day, every day. The Mission on Prayer helped me develop this relationship in a very quiet, unassuming way. No thunderclaps or peals of lightning, just a very pleasant expansion of the inner peace that comes from the knowledge that God is with us always. Working through the Scriptures, I gained a completely new understanding of the Bible. Instead of simply looking at the words of Scripture, the Mission on Prayer helped me to look into the words and to relate the thoughts to my own life." *

From a female participant ...

"The Mission on Prayer was a unique experience for me. It was really a directed retreat. For half an hour, three times a week, for two weeks, I was able to meet on a one-to-one basis with my spiritual director. At our first meeting we were able to zero in on what I should be praying for specifically in order to advance in my personal prayer life and relationship with God. I was directed to passages in the Bible that were related directly to my particular needs. These passages were used in the daily half hour of private prayer and during the day when a few precious moments were available for communication with God.

As a result of the Mission and my continuing efforts, I find that my trust and confidence in God's fatherly love for me and my awareness of God's constant presence are occasional extras loving gifts to me from a loving Father. I found the Mission to be mentally and physically exhausting but worth every minute of it. I recommend it to anyone who is searching for a deeper relationship with God through prayer." *

From the Catholic New Times, July 1983, *Directed Retreat Goes To Parish* by Sharon Doyle Driedger ...

The last time I had made a retreat was twenty years ago when I was in high school. Like most traditional retreats, it was a time of prayerful silence organized around a series of sermons geared to our age group. Since the Second Vatican Council, however, some retreat centres have offered "new" retreats with individual spiritual direction. Last January, I was one of more than 60 people fortunate enough to participate in the first individually directed retreat ever given in a Catholic parish.

When I first read about this special mission on prayer in the Sunday bulletin, I decided to register for it. It would be good for me, I

thought, like a spiritual vitamin pill. Within a few days, I had second thoughts. I am a busy mother of two young children and I rationalized that I didn't have time for the required half hour of daily prayer, plus meetings with a spiritual director every second day for two weeks. Besides, I had no idea what to expect in an interview with a spiritual director. My natural reserve made me wary of the possibility of revealing my private thoughts about God to a stranger.

In spite of my misgivings, I went to the introductory meeting in our parish hall on a rainy Saturday at the end of January. I was one of a cross-section of our community. As I signed in and found a seat, I

noticed the mood was expectant with a slightly anxious edge; an attitude that would be replaced by a relaxed openness at the final assembly of the retreat.

That first day, we were briefed on the details of the retreat and introduced to our spiritual directors. Most reassuring to me was the talk on the role of the spiritual director by Peter Oliphant, a management consultant, who is also a trained lay spiritual director. "A relationship with a spiritual director is a confidential one, but it is not a psychological or psychiatric analysis," he said. "The function of direction is to act as a catalyst ... to provide a perspective ... to clarify by feeding back in an objective way."

We learned that passages from Scripture would form the basis of our prayer during the retreat. We were encouraged to "pray the Bible," not merely to read it as an intellectual exercise. It was to become a vehicle of God's message to us. We were to listen with our hearts and to notice our feelings, our emotional responses to God.

We were also asked to take five or ten minutes, immediately after each prayer session to reflect on our prayer: to notice our

moods and the images that captured our attention or when we resisted; to watch for emergent patterns, like suffering, gentleness or challenge; to notice distractions and how we handled them. We were instructed to jot down our reflections in a prayer journal; these notes would provide a basis for dialogue with our directors. My director was reassuring and encouraging as I described my responses to praying the Bible, even when I felt unmoved or resistant to certain passages. She answered my questions, helped me sort out inconsistencies, and suggested ways to improve my prayer. Our conversations stretched from events in Christ's life to what was

happening in the world around us; our talks were low-key and informal but had positive results.

It's difficult to analyze, but this retreat touched me deeply. Prayerful concentration on the Bible, reflection, writing my responses in a journal, and dialoguing with a director provided a stimulating combination.

I grew in self-knowledge and gained glimmers of insight into what it means to have a constant loving relationship with God. Instead of feeling too busy to pray, I looked forward to the time I set aside for it each day. I felt an unexpected sense of peace and joy. More than just a spiritual tonic, this directed retreat was a gift from God. *

One year later ...

A year later, Sister Jeannette sent a questionnaire to some of the participants from Nativity Parish asking, "One year later, how do you feel when remembering your retreat of 1983?" Here are a few responses:

"I am grateful to God for inspiring the organizers of the retreat to do what they did and I am hungry for more. I have been able to continue what we began and have kept up regular prayer and regular scripture reading." *

"Very, very good. It is with fondness and gladness for the very good spiritual direction and special knowledge of the people that shared this experience. I have not kept up regular prayer periods each day but I do say the rosary each day in the car. I read scripture daily." *

"Very warm and very grateful. It was certainly my only introduction to the Bible as a means of prayer. I feel very much closer to God and am often comforted by the words of the Bible. I have made a sincere effort to continue the prayer and daily scripture readings. For the most part I do this even though I end up reading the Bible and praying late at night in bed." *

LOOKING BACKWARDS FROM 1997 ... SOME REFLECTIONS

It is now 1997 and the feedback over these past ten years is very similar to the kind of feedback we received at the beginning. The Week of Directed Prayer which began at Harcourt Memorial United Church is now being sponsored in Guelph by an ecumenical group of prayer guides, some of whom still come from Harcourt. It continues to be an annual event with leadership assumed by lay prayer guides and a few clergy from a variety of denominations.

From Tarcia Gerwing, M.A.M.S., Guelph, June 17, 1994 ...

I have worked with this program four times in parish situations and four times in ecumenical situations. Each time I have been impressed with what happens in a person's life within a short week! Most people who come to these Weeks have had very little opportunity to speak of their faith life and are very eager to be heard. They are looking for methods of praying with scripture since they have had very little help with this. I have the feeling that both they and God were eager to meet on a deeper level.

The initial group meeting gives them a strong communal sense which supports their growth and caring for one another. It gives them courage in a new venture which can appear quite threatening to someone who has never articulated what is happening in his/her spiritual life. The 'Collatio' is a wonderful, non-threatening way to help people to start sharing. Throughout the Week, retreatants are given help to express their experiences. The closure meeting gives them an opportunity to discuss further needs of the group and to look at ongoing opportunities for growth.

When I first approached this program, I had doubts about discovering the dynamic or movement of the prayer when repetition did not seem to be built into the prayer times. However, it became clear to me that the dynamic happens within the context of daily life. Because of the heightened awareness which they develop from seeking a grace and from the daily consciousness examen, retreatants live more reflectively. I have always found it important to introduce some simple method of reflecting upon their experience each day during this Week. If retreatants are faithful to the process of the Week, a prayer guide can usually recognize a dynamic.

In comparing different settings, I have found that the effectiveness of the program is enhanced in those places where the program retains these aspects:

- Prayer guides know each other in advance;
- Prayer guides meet each day together in one locale;
- During these meetings, the prayer guides pray for each other and for the retreatants;
- Participants are aware of each other as belonging to the same community.

I also tried this program once with a parish group over the six weeks of Lent. Basically it was the same format, but instead of meeting with the retreatants each day, we met with each one once a week for the six weeks. Again, this was a very positive experience which I will repeat when possible. I found that, in doing the program in this way, it was important to meet with individuals for a short time on the first day to help them to enter into the retreat on a personal level. It was also important in the course of the first week to touch base even by

phone to encourage and call them to attentiveness to their feelings and to support the integration of life and prayer. I also found that the meetings, which were on a weekly basis rather than on a daily basis, needed to be a little longer than those we scheduled during the Week of Directed Prayer. *

From Dervilla Byrne, RSM, Dublin, Ireland, June 23, 1994 ...

(Dervilla brought this program to the Dublin setting and adapted it for the people on the margins the poor.)

My main concern when we were putting the Week of Directed Prayer together was that it would be something available to all, especially the poorer people. Therefore, everything about it needed to be simple and non-threatening and, as far as possible, non-churchy. A lot of the people from poorer areas whom I came across felt very alienated from the official church. They were often people who had had bad experiences in school with religious or around the whole area of church law, confessions, etc. with priests. Often, their experience of church somehow left them feeling less as people with the idea that they had little or nothing to offer and that they were always in the receiving position. Therefore, it is important for this large needy group that the Week of Directed Prayer be taken away from the church scene. A school or community hall which they consider their own is good.

It is always important to have lay directors among the team, and I found it was good if one of these directors opened the sessions and shared something briefly of his/her own journey and struggle in prayer. We were always conscious that in any group gathered, there was always a possibility that a certain number could not read hence the need to be aware and move within a group with great sensitivity.

The first night I met my group, I always told the Gospel Story in my own words using ordinary everyday language. I believe this story-telling is important whether people can read or not. In my work over the years, I discovered that there is a great need to stress the humanity of Jesus something people always respond to, but it seems to come to them as a surprise.

The directors need to move around the group and in the midst of the group because if we are trying to get across the humanity of Jesus, we also need to get across the humanity of the directors. Sharing a little of our own personal story and struggle can be a great help. Sometimes, directors, especially people who live and work in retreat houses, can send out messages that there is a certain sort of mystery about themselves and their lives, and while that may be a certain protection for the directors, it is not a help for anyone especially people who are trying to come to know more of a God who chose to become one of us.

Equally important to the personal meditation/prayer element in the Week is the community element. Also, I believe true prayer and meditation, with few exceptions hermits, for example lead to community in some shape or form. We found that it was usually when we got as far as the cup of tea on the opening night that people began to relax. They met and chatted with others about their hopes and desires for the Week and that really strengthened them for the Week. We found that having a tea room each night during the Week was **very** important. We always invited and encouraged the people to go to that room

for a cup of tea or coffee either before or after seeing their directors. Usually before the Week ended, they were going to the tea room both before and after their interviews. As a director, whenever I was free, I also went there for a cup of tea. It was just unbelievable to hear the conversations that went on between people. They were asking each other how the Week was going, how they were finding the prayer or meditation time at home. The level of sharing of the things of the Spirit was unbelievable. Neighbours talked to each other at a level which would have been unheard of before that Week! I must say it was an experience which always brought great joy to my heart.

For the closing session, we always asked the group to be responsible for the (tea) party that night and again it was an opportunity for them to show us what they had to offer and what they could do. Always at that final party on the closing night, the fruits of the Spirit were tangible in the group. You could not believe the transformation from the opening night where people came in fear and trembling. On the closing night, there was always that feeling that they could stand tall and that they, individually and as a community, mattered as people.

I stress all of these experiences because I feel very strongly that the individual experience of prayer is closely tied up with community. There is a need to get away from the God-and-me-only approach. I always stressed with the people:

The need to spend their time alone each day in prayer;

That prayer should lead outwards from family to community.

Directed retreats at retreat houses sometimes have created that God-and-me-only approach. There is this same danger for the people in congregations or parishes.

The closing session, where the people look at where they want to go from there, is of the utmost importance. Again, this is the time when the directors step back and let someone (leader) from the parish or group take over. I have always noticed that from their suggestions two things stood out:

The desire to deepen their prayer life in some way;

Something that would build them up as a caring community in their area. That community element can be noticeably absent from people's general experience of church, worship and liturgical celebration of the sacraments.

Regarding the interviews with the directees, I cannot stress enough the need to make the directees feel welcome and at home. I have noticed that some directees' hearts were pounding at the first interview. The first night, I just sit back and chat with them as if I had met them on a bus asking them about themselves and, where relevant, sharing a little about myself. Usually towards the end of that discussion, I ask them what they would like to get out of the Week. From that opening, tumble all sorts of things about themselves and their lives and their families.

I talk to them a little about how they may (or may not) have prayed and then I tell them that we are going to try another very simple way this Week. I then tell them the Gospel Story in my own words and show them where it is in their Gospels. If they can't read (which they may or may not admit) they still get to hear the story. Many times they have told me they have children or a family member to read it for them at home. I finish the session by doing a little stillness exercise and a simple prayer. I suggest to them that they begin their prayer time at home by doing the little stillness exercise again plus a prayer in their own words asking God to teach them how to pray and for the gift of prayer. People learn by doing so I

start my interview with people each day for the rest of the Week with a stillness exercise and a short prayer for two to five minutes it is time well spent.

The gift of these programs for so many, especially the poor, is that they have the opportunity to be heard and to be taken seriously. That is an extraordinary gift to offer anyone. One time I asked a woman what she got out of the Week. "Well," she said, "I don't know how well I did at the prayer, but if I could matter that much to you that you could take 30 minutes each day just to listen to me, then I must matter a lot to God." I was very insistent that the participants spend the full time for the prayer exercise at home. Also, I made sure that I met with the person each day.

Another thing we tried to do was to set up a prayer room in the school (or in whatever building we were using for the Week of Directed Prayer). It was very simple and we always asked local women to set it up for us. Sometimes we had the Blessed Sacrament exposed³ there during the evening while the interviews were in progress. Some women found it impossible to find a quiet corner at home, so they would go to the prayer room for 30 minutes before or after their interview. While we strongly encouraged them to pray at home, we felt that kind of presence in the building during the Week added something very special to the experience. Often when I was leaving at night at 9:00 p.m., I would drop into that room and find, in the darkness, people, here and there around in corners in the room, lost in meditative silence and prayer.

We always tried to encourage the clergy and religious⁴ of the parish or local area to make the Week with their people. Their participation was good for the people and good for the clergy and religious. I remember going into the tea room one evening and hearing a woman ask the pastor, as he walked in for a cup of tea, how he was getting on with his prayer/meditation that week and what had the prayer guide suggested to him that evening. For me, this is an experience of the early Christian community in Acts: "They remained faithful to the teaching of the Apostles, to the brotherhood and sisterhood, to the breaking of the bread and to prayers."

My experience with the Week of Directed Prayer was that people can feel very lost when it is over. They have a great desire to continue praying with Scripture but they are at a loss to know how to choose pieces. Usually they desire to come together (not all of them) as a group once every two weeks or once a month, but they need help and advice as to the best way of making that a prayerful and profitable experience. And now as I have been called to some other work, God's plan unfolds. *

From Rev. Bruce Seebach of the United Church of Canada ...

(In January 1997, I asked for information about the way the *Lowville Prayer Center* of the United Church has used the idea of the Week of Directed Prayer.)

Weeks of Guided Prayer under the direction of the Lowville Prayer Center began in 1985 with one congregation and a team of spiritual directors led by John Haley from the Guelph Centre of Spirituality. At that time, the Week was called a Week of '*Directed*' Prayer and each of the prayer guides was a supervised trainee or an experienced spiritual director. When this idea was adopted by the United Church leadership, the title was changed to the

Weeks of *'Guided'* Prayer, and the trainees were designated as Companions. Since that time, the persons chosen to be Companions are persons who are gifted with the capability of giving attention to the work of the Spirit in the life of a retreatant but not qualified to give the more intense guidance of a spiritual director in a local congregation. These changes allowed both trainees and those more fully trained to minister on these retreats.

And so we developed a training program for gifted persons to fulfil this Companion role. We developed four two-hour sessions for them which focused upon:

- The philosophy of the Week of Guided Prayer and its organization;
- The role of a Companion and how it differs from counselling and spiritual direction;
- Praying the Scriptures and journaling;
- Introduction to the theme of the Week of Guided Prayer;
- Listening skills;
- Grief work and forgiveness;
- Practice sessions of Companioning.

The training encouraged lay participation which was rewarding and significant in the growth and witness of this outreach ministry. As a result, the number of congregations requesting a Week of Guided Prayer has increased to thirteen across three Conferences within the United Church.

Significant also has been the creation of *'Theme'* materials with daily handouts of suggested scriptures so that Companions with less extensive biblical background can be supportive of retreatants. Companion training programs, open to other denominations, currently center at the Retreat House at Five Oaks but may be regionalized to accommodate the needs of clusters of churches in geographical areas.⁵

Here is an overview, taken from our brochure, of how the Week of Guided Prayer is organized in a local church:

A Director and Co-Director, recommended by the Lowville Prayer Centre, oversee the Week and provide support for the Companions. Companions meet daily with the Directors to share in a communal meal, to reflect upon the experience of the Week, and to pray together. The Directors companion the Companions on Tuesday and Thursday to enhance their spiritual journey. The Companions guide the Retreatants in their attention to God during the retreat.

A Planning Committee of about five persons prepares publicity, encourages and receives registrations, and arranges locations for the various meetings. It encourages congregational participation in praying for Retreatants and in maintaining quietness throughout the building during the Week. The Planning Committee establishes a budget for materials, honoraria and advertising. These costs are usually covered by the registration fee of about \$20.00 per Retreatant. Retreat materials, including posters, registration forms and daily prayer sheets, are prepared specially for each participating congregation. *

SHOESTRING RETREATS

Rev. Hilary Alflatt, an Anglican priest, was pastor of an inner city parish in Sheffield, England.⁶ In 1989, he began the **Shoestring Retreat**, called by that name because it was run "on a shoestring." Since he knew of no one else working in Ignatian spirituality in the city, he could not organize a team from the area to offer the Week of Directed Prayer. Therefore he sought another way of doing it. What follows is his description of the **Shoestring Retreat**.

"The pattern was simple. The retreat lasted from 9 am – 5 pm, Tuesday to Thursday, but those hours could be adjusted to meet the needs of each retreatant. The retreatants each had a daily meeting with the director and spent the rest of the day in church or walking outside. Beverages and biscuits were available but retreatants brought their own lunch. Eucharist⁷ was celebrated each day, and on the final day there was a closing liturgy timed to take place before the first retreatant departed. Silence was maintained. After her/his daily meetings with retreatants, the director was available for those who needed more help in prayer. This proved to be important as many retreatants were new to both retreats and to the patterns of prayer.

"I was fortunate at first in being able to use my own church, a large building which had just been renovated and was quite adaptable for such a retreat.... I have since found, however, that almost any church can be made suitable by the use of icons, pictures, etc., to create prayer places. The only basic requirements are toilets, a place

to make beverages and private rooms for the interviews. I have now organised many such retreats and have found that, with two directors, up to a dozen retreatants can happily use most churches.

"Like the Week of Directed Prayer, the **Shoestring Retreat** is valuable for those who cannot afford the time or the money to go to a retreat house and for those to whom the retreat house seems threatening. For some it has been the first step to a longer experience in a retreat house. The **Shoestring Retreat** is even able to offer many a deeper experience of prayer than the Week of Directed Prayer can. To date I have always worked on the above time basis, but clearly, the pattern of either the number or the length of days can be varied to suit circumstances. Similarly, I have always given open ecumenical retreats but the pattern could be used with a group from within a parish; it could also be offered at the same time as a Week of Directed Prayer. Some who have experienced a Week of Directed Prayer might like to move on to a Shoestring.

"My experience of directing such retreats, as well as the experience of those who have worked with me, has been comparable to directing a three-day retreat in a retreat house but with the added dimension of the ongoing integration of life and prayer." *

TEAM MEETING OF PRAYER GUIDES A POSSIBLE FORMAT

Phase 1 Settling-In Time

Phase 2 Round Robin

Everyone is asked to share briefly (a minute or two) how things are going. One person might say something like: "Pretty fair I got through my interviews with less trouble than I thought, but there are one or two things that I still feel nervous about." Another person might say: "I have been really amazed at how well the directees are settling in I feel fairly comfortable."

Phase 3 Shared Prayer

This might be introduced with a hymn or a reading from scripture.

Step 1 Thanksgiving as in the beginning of the awareness exercise: "Let's place ourselves in the presence of the Holy One with an attitude of gratitude."

Step 2 Praying for what we need at this time: "Having placed ourselves in God's presence with gratitude, let us ask here for what we might need some gift or grace, perhaps, some insight, some light...."

Phase 4 A More Particular Sharing Of Present Feelings

Here some of the prayer guides will want or need to share what is going on in themselves as they are listening to their directees. Not everyone will have an issue, but we are here to support one another and to help each other in the work of direction. So: "How is it going?"

Phase 5 Business

Save some time for the nuts and bolts; but if you spend too much time on this at the beginning, you will have very little time for the more important prayer and sharing.

A SCRIPTURAL PRAYER PATTERN FOR THE WEEK OF DIRECTED PRAYER

Theme 1 Surrounded by God who is always there for us

It is good to enter into the time of meditative prayer with a spirit of quiet and relaxation. Let the mystery of God be near you, and let yourself be open to God's gift of the Spirit. Choose one of the following readings to help you become aware of God's loving concern:

- Psalm 139:1-18 Your mystery surrounds me, and you understand me through and through.
- Psalm 23 As a shepherd, you desire to protect me and to be for me a loving host.
- Luke 11:1-13 You desire to be even more than a nurturing parent; you desire to give me your Spirit.

Theme 2 Dependent and yet in a personal relationship with God

If some passage of scripture has been meaningful to you from yesterday, stay with it.... Or if some way of relating to God was meaningful to you, remain there.... On the other hand, you may want to consider pondering these questions with God:

If I were God, I would have arranged things differently! ... Has this thought ever flashed through your mind? Spend some time expressing to God how, IN FACT, you feel about this.... Then spend some time quietly listening to God expressing how God feels about you.

When you are ready, you may want to choose one the following scripture texts to help you listen to God:

- Psalm 8 Before you, I am filled with wonder. I am baffled by my very existence.
- Is 43:1-7 Through every experience of life, you have been with me.
- Jn 20:11-18 God is like Jesus, who stands behind Mary weeping before the empty tomb. Like Jesus, God calls me by name.

Theme 3 Letting God continually share and heal our brokenness

Sometimes we cannot allow our hearts to be more open to the Holy One because we carry hurts that need healing. We cannot understand how our God can love us even when we are not all fixed up. We forget how Jesus said that God was more present to people on the fringe of society and to those who are broken, than to the powerful and healthy. We

often cannot forgive ourselves. We forget that forgiveness is both the gateway to God and the climate of life with God. Forgiveness and healing go together. We are sinned against and we sin against others. Jesus comes to unbind us and to save us from ourselves. In what areas of our life, do we need to experience the healing/forgiving touch of Jesus?

- Psalm 103 As the heavens are high above the earth, so surpassing is God's kindness. God heals our ills and frees us from our iniquities.
- Luke 15:11-32 Sometimes we are like the prodigal younger son and his self-righteous older brother.
- Luke 19:1-10 Jesus loves Zacchaeus even though everyone else scorns him.
- John 8:1-11 Jesus takes the side of the woman whom others want to condemn.

Theme 4 We are called beyond ourselves

As Ignatius of Loyola taught us, it is not many ideas and thoughts that fill and satisfy our hearts but the intimate appreciation and enjoyment of God. Therefore if some scripture text or way of relating to God has been meaningful to you thus far, you may be helped by staying with it unless you sense you should move on to another scripture text. If so, you could choose one of the following scripture texts on how God's Spirit calls each of us beyond ourselves: beyond our own righteousness beyond our own weaknesses with our weaknesses in spite of our fears beyond our pet ways of looking at things and doing things to be more human to be more caring to surrender our resentments.

- Luke 1:39-56 Perhaps I am called like Mary who responds to her cousin Elizabeth's need in the hill country;
- 2Cor 12:7-10 Or perhaps I am called like Paul to accept myself as I am in order that God's power can operate through my weakness;
- Matt 14:13-21 Or perhaps I am called to help distribute food in the wilderness.

Theme 5 Though wounded ourselves, we are called to continue our journey and be like Jesus, a healer for others

- John 13:1-15 Jesus gives us the example of washing one another's feet.
- Phil 2:1-11 In his letter to the Philippians, Paul uses the image of God divesting God's very self.
- 2Cor 5:14-21 Because we are a new creation and in Jesus' Spirit, we can exercise a ministry of reconciliation and healing.
- John 20:19-29 Whenever we release others from our non-forgiveness by forgiving their sins against us, we make them freer for God.
- John 15:1-17 As we do all this, Jesus continues to be the vine since we are the branches.

OPENING SESSION

A POSSIBLE FORMAT FOR GETTING STARTED WITH THE WHOLE GROUP ON SUNDAY, 1:30 P.M. 4:30 P.M.

- 20 min 1. **Welcome**
Introduction about why we have come, an overview of the Week, and some idea of the format of the afternoon.
Short ice-breaker to meet each other.
Introduction of prayer guides.
- 10 min (+) 2. **Opening Prayer**
Spend some time in prayer for this event and for one another.
- 15 min (-) 3. **PRESENTATION: Our Attitude During This Week**
A dispositional talk on willingness to be surprised, letting go, and God's desire for us.
- 15 min (-) 4. **PRESENTATION: Praying With Scripture**
How does one pray with scripture? Introduce the method of pondering the scriptures like one ponders a love letter.⁸
Just a few very practical and witness-like observations that will help them rather than confuse and scare them. Not too many mechanics!
Introduce the Collatio⁹ and set up small groups as appropriate.
- 45 min 5. **COLLATIO**
This is explained on pages 20-21. It is a simple method of shared prayer that gives participants an immediate experience of praying with scripture.
- 20 min 6. **Break For Refreshment, Pacing, And Interchange**
- 10 min (-) 7. **PRESENTATION: The Review Of Prayer**
Just a few observations on making the Review and the prayer journal ... write a few lines only on what went on during prayer time moods, feelings, thoughts.
Give them pencil and paper and ask them to write out a few of their reactions to the Collatio.
- 15 min (-) 8. **Small-Group Work**¹⁰
Participants return to the small groups in which they made the Collatio and share what they have written.
The group leader asks reflective questions, such as:
When we were doing the Collatio, where did you experience moments of prayer and moments that were not prayer?
What was there in your experience that made the difference?

After this discussion, the group leader gives a few ideas about what goes on during the daily interviews.

Some remarks about: confidentiality; how the prayer guide listens to the experience of prayer and builds on it; even when nothing is happening, something is happening; every experience being a good experience.

20 min 9. **Assignment Of Retreatants And Prayer Guides**

Then the prayer guide brings his/her group to the interview room. Introductions. Check on whether everyone is certain of interview time each day. Perhaps some last minute re-arranging may be necessary. Then give everyone the same scriptural material for prayer and a word of encouragement. If helpful, a prayer guide could hand out *Some Tips For Prayer*, page 26.

Some Observations, Suggestions, And Variations For The Opening Session

The above format can be expanded or contracted according to the kind of group. The format here works well with groups that are not very free with each other. Remember that beginning a Week of Directed Prayer may be frightening for some people! In some instances, it is possible to have short, private, five-minute interviews during the ninth step. If so, then you will have to create an activity for those who are waiting for the interview.

In those places where this Week of Directed Prayer has been offered annually, a common complaint about this opening format has been made by people who have returned from former years: "I have heard the opening remarks before!" Consequently, there have been various experiments with changing the content and format of this opening session by:

Using music and slides to introduce the topic of listening.

Incorporating a full interview between prayer guide and each of her/his directees in this opening session of the Week of Directed Prayer.

Separating 'the beginners' from those who have previously made this Week for part of the opening session. Then the opening session could remain the same for the beginners and be different for those who have returned.

Another approach is to use a three- or four-year cycle for the annual opening session. So over a four-year period, people could return and not be faced with the belief that they will be receiving exactly the same thing each year. An example of a four-year cycle:

Cycle A As suggested above;

Cycle B Using the Praying-Over-Your-Own-Experience Approach (an idea for this is described in the Appendix, pp.35-36);

Cycle C Using the Gospel-Contemplation Approach (some ideas for this are described in the Appendix, pp.37-38);

Cycle D Using the Blessed-History Approach (this approach is described in the Appendix, pp.39-41). This Cycle-D approach would be excellent if all the participants have made at least two of the above. Some aspects of this approach might even be used for Cycle B.

THE COLLATIO¹¹

Set aside about 45 minutes and select a short passage from the gospels, preferably some concrete event filled with activity from Jesus' life.

The setting is often important: dim lights, candles, decorative bible, flowers, etc.

One or more suitable hymns may be sung at the beginning. Once again this depends on the nature of the group.

1. The reader invites those present to relax and be comfortable and to listen carefully to God's word, reminding them of Jesus' assurance: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am with them."
2. The reader then reads the scripture passage aloud, slowly and distinctly, with pauses, so that each phrase can sink into the listeners. After the reading, there should be a gentle silence. Then each person is invited to repeat a word or phrase that strikes her/him personally.
3. After this first round of sharing, the same passage is read aloud again slowly by the same reader. (It is a richer listening experience this time because the word each one shared has enriched the passage for the others.) After this second reading, each person is invited to make an application to him/herself; e.g. "I sense that the Spirit wants me to trust more." ... "I feel caught by a blindness similar to the blind person here!"

In the preliminary instructions to the group or in the instructions at this point, the facilitator can make some of the following suggestions: "Your contributions here are shorter rather than longer. They are personal and honest using "I" rather than "we." Be careful not to make this a discussion.... That will kill the prayer experience. Rather peacefully, humbly, and sensitively listen to God's word and share what it said to you personally.... The silent moments are golden and afford rare opportunities for letting God's message resonate and slowly deepen in us.... Relax and savour God's word or someone's contribution during the silences...."

4. Then the same passage is read slowly a third time (the last time) by the same reader. After this third reading, the participants are invited to speak aloud spontaneous prayers directly to the Father or to Jesus or to the Spirit, etc.; e.g., "My God, I am grateful...." Not: "I'd like to tell Jesus...."
5. After all of this, each is invited to enter into the silence with a grateful heart. This is the time to 'taste' the goodness of God among us. (This resting is a moment of 'Contemplatio' the goal of the process of 'Lectio Divina.' Thank you, Tarcia Gerwing, for pointing this out and suggesting this final step as part of the Collatio.)

Summary Of The Collatio¹²

This approach will work well with seven to ten persons.

Choose an action passage where Jesus is involved.

The size of the passage should be about the same size as that of *The Wedding at Cana* (Jn 2: 1-11) or *The Walking on the Water* (Matt 14: 22-23).

The same scripture text is read through three times.

Generally it is better for the same person to do the three readings so that the reading itself is not a distraction.

Each time, the passage is read slowly with pauses. Silences are definitely part of the Collatio.

After the 1st reading, participants are invited to repeat a word or phrase that struck them personally.

After the 2nd reading, each is invited to make an application to him/herself, e.g., "I sense that God is calling me to some form of newness...."

After the 3rd reading, each is invited to offer a spontaneous vocal prayer to the Father, Jesus, the Spirit, or to one of the saints....

After all of this, each is invited to enter into the silence with a grateful heart. This is the time to 'taste' the goodness of God among us.

In some settings where the Collatio is frequently used as a method for communal prayer, there will inevitably be variations and applications of the above. For example, anyone may invite the group to sing a suitable hymn at any time before, between, or after the readings. More mature groups might pray spontaneously between the readings. The suggestions in the method described on the previous page and in the summary above are particularly useful and effective with beginning groups.

CLOSING SESSION A POSSIBLE FORMAT FOR THE ENDING

Saturday, 1:30 p.m. 4:30 p.m.

- 15 min **1. Welcome**
 Explain the format of the afternoon.
 Prayer.
- 45 min **2. Faith-Sharing Session**
 Use an exercise, like the one on page 24 or the one on page 25, in groups of 6-8 persons with a facilitator. Don't place prayer guides with their own directees.
 It is helpful if the prayer guide has given his/her directees this sheet the day before in preparation for this session.
 A good way to use the exercise from page 24 is to share around one question at a time. Remember that this exercise is intended to help the directees notice what was happening in themselves during the past week.
- 20 min **3. Break For Refreshments**
 Not only for a personal break but for interchange with each other in a non-threatening context.
- 15 min **4. PRESENTATION: Prayer And Daily Living**
 Here give a talk or some other form of presentation on this theme. It should be practical; for example, a presentation on the Daily Awareness Exercise (page 28).
- 20 min **5. Interchange With The Prayer Guides**
 Here some of the prayer guides act as a panel which fields questions from the assembly. One of the panel should act more as a facilitator to keep this interchange happening. Perhaps the panel facilitator asks a few questions him/herself in addition to inviting questions, information or comments from the assembly; for example, "How can the Daily Awareness Exercise foster spiritual growth?" or "What opportunities are there in this community for spiritual growth?" or "How do you keep choosing prayer texts for daily prayer?" (Perhaps someone from the floor or from the panel can begin to address one of these.)
- 10 min **6. Hand Out Useful Resource Materials**
 Perhaps a book list geared to participants' level of skill and growth.
 Brochures and announcements of relevant resources.
- 20 min **7. A Communal Worship Service**

Some Notes, Observations And Variations About The Closing Session

This is the basic format and it contains the essential closure elements. For busy persons and for groups that do not know each other well, it works. There may be other situations in which one could:

- Expand the format with songs and atmosphere.

- Use play-dough during a closing communal worship. Through sculpting the play-dough, the participants can express the attitude of their hearts during a few minutes of silence, and then at another point in the worship service they can place their sculptures on a symbolic table or altar.

- Expand the format with two or three shorter presentations on topics such as:

- Choosing scripture for prayer;

- Family prayer and use of the 'Collatio' at home;

- Community resources for spiritual growth.

- Have a Eucharist and end with a party.

- Debrief the whole assembly after step 2.

- Cancel or shorten the interchange of step 5.

The Faith-Sharing Session is very important. With certain groups, such as secondary school students, you might suggest *Walking Down Memory Lane* (page 25) for a silent period before the small group activity. After this silent period, the participants meet in their small groups and share from some of the drawings they have made in each of the squares.

AN AWARENESS EXERCISE FOR THE END OF THE WEEK OF DIRECTED PRAYER

Some spend time with God reflecting upon the experience of the past several days. Use one of the following approaches if it helps.

- A. Perhaps completing these thoughts may help you reflect upon this experience:
- My most difficult time during these days ...
 - My most consoling time during these days ...
 - For me, scriptural prayer has meant ...
 - By articulating my interior experience to someone else, I found that ...
- B. What key grace or enlightenment have I received during these days? Perhaps the following phrases will help:
- deepening of trust; strength; awareness of my helplessness; deeper sorrow and acceptance of my sinfulness; enlightenment; experience of my own weakness; deeper appreciation of Jesus' humanity; experience of praying the scriptures; sense of freedom; union; direction; learning to talk about my experience; etc.
- C. In what ways did my appreciation change?
- For example, my role and God's role in prayer; letting go; intimacy; quieting down; response; conversation; blocking God's action in me; praying for a grace.
- D. Did I experience interior movements during these days? Some examples may help:
- From fear or anxiety to "I'll give it a try," to desire, to let go in prayer, to trusting.
 - From fear of my sinfulness/weakness through discouragement to acceptance of my sinfulness/weakness.
 - Moments of peace, of joy, of struggle.
 - From a sense of helplessness to a movement of hope and meaningfulness.
 - From confusion to enlightenment.
 - Other ...

WALKING DOWN MEMORY LANE

" In each of the squares below, recall and record what your experience was. Focus on each day. Write or draw a picture that expresses it....

" Before you do this, express your thoughts and feelings to God....

" Wait in stillness with them....

" Decide whether and how you might share some of this with others in a small group later on

Sunday	Monday
Tuesday	Wednesday
Thursday	Friday

SOME TIPS FOR PRAYER

These ideas are meant to be a help.... Use them only if they help....
Please don't try to get them all in.

On Entering Into Prayer

Find a suitable place.

Realize that harmony of body and spirit is important; take a peaceful, relaxed, and meaningful position.

Spend a few moments quieting yourself, becoming aware that you are placing yourself in the presence of God in a special way.

Ask for the grace you most desire.

Read slowly the scripture passage (or proceed with whatever method you have chosen for prayer).

Try not to think or figure things out on your own, but let the Spirit pray through you (Rom. 8: 26-27).

Pause and savour wherever you feel drawn or moved.

Respond ... from your heart.

After Your Prayer Is Over

After the period of prayer is over, it is helpful to make a review for a few minutes. You might use one or another of these questions to help reflect on your experience:

What passage did I choose?

What were my reactions, changes in mood, thoughts, etc.? In other words, what struck me?

How did I feel enjoyable, distasteful, moving, anger, tears, comfort about what struck me?

What grace did I ask for? Did I receive this grace?

Where did I sense God's presence or absence?

Is there something to which I should return in my next period of prayer?

On Keeping Yourself In Harmony With The Mood Of This Week

Finally, here are some other ideas that may help you live in harmony with this Week of Directed Prayer:

Create a prayer corner a special place with chair, candle, table, etc.

Shut off the phone; unplug it or soften the bell ten minutes before until ten minutes after the prayer period!

Don't watch TV immediately before the prayer period.

Try lighting a candle and pulling down the blind in order to create a mood.

Talk to your family about the importance of this week for you and enlist their cooperation in protecting your special prayer time and place.

At some convenient time before your interview, spend some moments reflecting on the day as a whole: Where has God been throughout the day?

Where did I notice that God was present or absent?

Use any other suggestion you can think of that would help you live in harmony with this Week of Directed Prayer.

PONDERING THE SCRIPTURES WITH YOUR HEART

A very good way of pondering a passage of scripture with your heart is to approach the scripture text as you would a love letter. Read the passage slowly, aloud, or in a whisper.... Let the words wash over you.... Savour each phrase or word.... Re-read the passage lovingly as if you were reading a letter from a dear friend.... Stay with the words or phrases that especially catch your attention.... Absorb them the way the thirsty earth receives the rain....

Allow your heart to be moved; when a thought or feeling resonates deeply, stay with it.... Allow it to penetrate your being.... Express it to God....

Occasionally you might want to ask yourself questions concerning this passage: why? how? when? how might this apply to me now? Let further feelings and thoughts well up in your heart as you ponder to find deeper meaning or understanding or a different way of seeing things.

Respond authentically and spontaneously as in dialogue.

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HAVING A DIALOGUE WITH GOD

In every prayer period, it is helpful to have a dialogue with God. Sometimes the word 'colloquy' is used as a fancy name for this dialogue. It is a term that describes the intimate conversation between God and me, Jesus and me, and so on. This conversation happens on the occasion of my putting myself as totally as I can into the setting of the prayer; I will find that I speak or listen as God's Spirit moves me - sometimes as sinner, sometimes as child, at other times as lover or friend, and so on. As with all conversations, the colloquy goes both ways. I say something to Jesus and then I give Jesus time to say something back to me. Sometimes it even may be helpful to imagine Jesus responding as if he were sitting beside me. At times, this little technique really helps establish the two-way flow of conversation. A colloquy takes place at any time during the period of prayer.

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BODILY POSTURE DURING TIMES OF PRAYER

Formal prayer can be made in almost any bodily position. Certain positions are more helpful for some people than for others, just as certain positions are more helpful at one time in prayer than at another. The important aspect of posture is whether I can be at ease and yet attentive, reverent and yet relaxed. And so kneeling, sitting, standing, lying prostrate are all potential positions for prayer. Once I have adopted a posture for prayer and my prayer is going well, I should not readily change position because again the outward restlessness or shifting of position can jar the inner calm of prayer. Often a certain rhythm of kneeling, sitting, standing, or walking is helpful according to the moods during the time of prayer.¹³

A DAILY AWARENESS EXERCISE

Settle Into Prayer With An Attitude Of Gratitude

I begin by placing myself in the presence of God, who is father and mother to us and so much more than we can imagine. I try to become aware of God beholding me.... I thank God for accompanying me on my journey whether I recognize God's constant presence or not.

Ask For What You Seek And Desire

I ask for the guidance of the Spirit to help me get in touch with what has been happening in me and around me today. I ask for the ability to recognize how the Spirit is leading me through these happenings.

Reflect On Your Experiences Of The Day

1. I remember various moments of the day. On what one event or experience do I want to focus? For example, enjoying, or being repulsed by, or being attracted by some person, event or thing?
2.
 - a) What did I feel as the incident happened? There may have been a mixture of feelings or a noticeable lack of feelings. Was I aware of my feelings as it happened or did I become aware of them later?
 - b) How did I respond to these feelings? Suppress them? Laugh? Cry? Take them out on others? etc.
 - c) What are the aspects of the event that help me understand what went on within me and outside me?
3. How is the Spirit of God present for me in this?

Are there any signs of the Spirit that I recognize in that experience? Are there any indications that some parts of the experience were not in harmony with God's Spirit? What does this indicate? For example, my own needs? the needs of others? questions? awareness of fears? awareness of gifts? etc.

Respond To God

I dialogue with God who is with us and loves us profoundly in the midst of this reality. I talk over with God how I am being called now.

Sometimes you may want to read a passage of scripture to let the Word shed light on your experience.

A SAMPLE APPLICATION FORM

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Have you had any form of guided prayer before? ____ When? Where? What do you remember about it that you found helpful?

In one-on-one meetings with my guide, I would prefer:

- morning evening
 afternoon anytime

I would prefer a guide who is:

- a man a woman no preference

Please submit this form and the registration fee of \$10.00 to:

Jim Jackson, Rainbow Community Church
100 East Road, Guelph. Ph. --- ----
by Sunday, February 16th, 1996

POSSIBLE TEXT FOR AN ACCEPTANCE LETTER

Dear

I am happy to inform you that you have been accepted for the Week of Directed Prayer. Our first meeting will be in _____ at 1:00 p.m. on Sunday, January 23rd. At that time you will be given further information about the retreat, and you will meet your director for the first time.

To prepare for the retreat, please be sure you have a Bible and a notebook which you can use as a retreat "diary" or journal. It would also be helpful if you would spend 5-10 minutes in quiet prayer each day during the week before the retreat.

Finally, please set aside the following dates and times for group meetings during the retreat: Sunday, January 23rd, 1:30-4:30 p.m., Introductory Group Session; AND Saturday, January 29th, 1:30-4:30 p.m., Concluding Group Session.

On behalf of the directors, I assure you that we are already praying for you and we look forward to meeting you,

Sincerely,

Margaret Smith
Retreat Coordinator

POSSIBLE TEXT FOR A LETTER OF REGRET

Dear

I am sorry to inform you that the limit of fifty people for the Week of Directed Prayer has already been filled and that I will not be able to accept your application. I will place your name on the waiting list in the event that someone might cancel his/her application.

Although this will be a disappointment to you, I hope that you will pray for those making this retreat and for the directors. With such great interest in this program, perhaps we will be able to offer it again in the coming year.

Thank you again for your interest.

Sincerely,

Margaret Smith
Retreat Coordinator

**EXAMPLES OF ANNOUNCEMENTS IN BULLETINS FROM ONE CHURCH,
NATIVITY OF OUR LORD PARISH,
TWO OR THREE MONTHS IN ADVANCE**

First -- In Early November ...

Jesuits will be giving the homilies here at Nativity, November 13 & 14 and December 4 & 5. These will be about PRAYER in our lives and will help us understand and appreciate the program that we will sponsor for you in January and February. A good preparation for LENT! for the REST OF OUR LIVES!!

Second -- In Late November ...

From January 23 - February 5, a team of lay people, sisters, and priests, sponsored by the Guelph Centre of Spirituality, will come to Nativity to direct a two-week retreat for sixty or so interested parishioners. The retreat, which is done at home, will begin with a group meeting on the afternoon of Sunday, January 23, and conclude with a group meeting on the afternoon of February 5. During the two weeks, each person on the retreat will meet for a one-half hour interview, every second day, with his/her retreat director. The interviews will be held at the parish, during the day or in the evening, at your convenience. Your director will discuss prayer with you and will suggest material for you to pray with during the two days until your next interview. The only requirement is your commitment to pray for approximately one-half hour each day of the retreat and to meet with your retreat director. There is no charge to you for the retreat because the parish is covering our expenses. For further information, contact Sister Jeannette Hiller. Application forms will be distributed in the bulletin later this month. We can accommodate the first sixty applicants, so please send in your forms early.

Third -- In Early December ...

If you want to deepen your life of prayer but can't get away for a retreat, sign up for the Parish retreat which will be held at Nativity of Our Lord from January 23rd to February 5th. A team of lay people, sisters, and priests, sponsored by the Guelph Centre of Spirituality, will come to Nativity to help lead a two-week retreat for the first SIXTY or so interested PARISHIONERS who mail in their applications early! Application forms available in Parish Office.

During those two weeks, the team of prayer guides will provide private guidance in prayer for interested members of the congregation. This is a retreat you can do at home. Watch the bulletin for further information in the coming weeks.

continued >>>>>>

Then later ...

**MISSION ON PRAYER
A REMINDER!**

All registration forms for our MISSION ON PRAYER should be in to Sister Jeannette Hiller before December 31st. If you do not have a registration form, they are available at the parish office. Nativity Parishioners have first preference and then the Mission will be open to others. Please sign up now.

KEEP JANUARY 23, 1983 TO FEBRUARY 5, 1993 FREE

**From HARCOURT UNITED CHURCH
----- Another Example Of An Advance Notice -----
In Mid-November ...**

What is your life of prayer like? Or maybe prayer is an unknown quantity? Or maybe you appreciate what prayer life you have but would like it enriched? Harcourt will be experiencing a Week of Directed Prayer. Sponsored by the Christian Education Committee, it will be led by John Buttars and John Veltri, SJ (with few a few others from Loyola House Retreat Centre). The Week begins with a group meeting on Sunday, January 16 at 2:00 p.m. and concludes with a second group meeting on Saturday, January 22 at 2:00 p.m. During the week, each person on the retreat will meet for a personal interview once a day with his or her own director. The interviews will be held at Harcourt (depending on space and numbers involved), during the day or in the evening, and last about thirty minutes. Your director will discuss prayer with you and suggest material for you to pray with during the next twenty-four hours. The only requirement is your commitment to pray twice a day for approximately fifteen (15) minutes each time and to meet with your director. Application forms giving full explanation of this event will be available in December. This Week of Directed Prayer is a totally new venture in Harcourt. Please speak to John Buttars for clarification. Consider taking part. It is a unique opportunity.

MORE MATERIAL THAT CAN BE USED FOR THE ADVERTISEMENTS

WHAT IS PRAYER DIRECTION?

The practice of guiding others through their prayer experience is part of a wider spiritual skill called 'spiritual direction.' It began in the early Christian Church after the age of martyrdom when the following of Jesus became less clear. (It's easier to know your Christian identity when you are being put to death for it!) As the art and need for this skill grew, certain persons, both lay and clerical, were perceived to have this gift and they became the spiritual guides or friends of others. Little by little, the practice of spiritual guidance decreased as religious experience was being replaced by religious structures, though it continued somewhat in monasteries and religious orders.

With the breakdown of our present societal structures, there is once again a great interest and need for the understanding of interior religious experience through which persons hope to discover their religious spiritual roots. In the last thirty-five years, there has been a rediscovery of this art of spiritual direction and one of its instruments prayer guidance.

Prayer guidance is not counselling, although the style of interpersonal dialogue may be similar. Prayer guidance is not psychotherapy, although people receiving prayer guidance or spiritual direction often experience healing. Prayer guidance is not problem-solving or teaching or probing. It is not looking into our deep dark secrets or the skeletons in our closets as it were. Prayer guidance has to do with interior reactions that a person experiences when she/he **truly listens** to God's word.

Listening is not just the study of God's word. Interior movements take place in one's heart when one is meditating or contemplating the Word. These interior reactions are the indicators of God's personal communication with us. When a person speaks of these interior reactions and when another person listens to them with openness and faith, there is spiritual growth.

Would you get anything out of this week? We don't know! We have prepared a number of comments about prayer. Maybe you can identify with some. If so, this week might be helpful for you.

WOULD I GET ANYTHING OUT OF THIS WEEK ?????

Here are some comments people make about the need for learning more about praying the scriptures:

1. I have always wanted to learn to meditate, but I thought you had to go to India to learn.
2. I don't pray except in church, but I wish I could.
3. I feel rejected by so many people in society it would be nice to know that God loves me just as I am.
4. My grandmother had a strong faith. I envy her.

5. I want to be real with God and I need help to do that.
6. I would like to be able to pick up the Bible and listen to God's word for me here and now.
7. I need to grow in trust and freedom from my fears.
8. I need to pray over a situation towards which I feel resentment.
9. I need time to reflect on how God is calling me at this time.
10. There has been suffering in my experience and I want to find God in it.
11. I find myself fearful and rigid in my relationships.
12. The world is changing so fast that I think that I would like to get off.
13. I'm looking forward to one-on-one sharing in order to grow closer to God.
14. My work life is one thing and my prayer life is another. I'd like to get the two together.
15. I have a sense of failure which I blame God for, and I really want to bring this into my prayer.

If you can identify with any one of these, then this Week might be helpful for you.

For further information contact:

Rev. Elaine Smith (--- ----) or Rev. Jim Jackson (--- ----).

THANK YOU TO

Jeannette Hiller, CND; Margaret Kane, CSJ; Ruth Cornwell; Rev. John Buttars; Rev. Ted Fournier; Robert Gaudet; Marilyn Von Zuben, CND; Nick Di Cicco (R.I.P.); Harry Somerville (R.I.P.). Without them, the original Weeks of Directed Prayer would never have taken place because they took on the responsibility of adapting the materials and of organizing and supervising the events. Particularly I would like to thank Rev. Jean Mitchell who helped me with the present revision.

APPENDIX OF IDEAS AND RESOURCES

Here is an idea for a `B Cycle' Opening Session
which you could use with participants
who have made the Week of Directed Prayer before.

The Praying-Over-Your-Own-Experience Approach

- 20 min **1. Welcome**
Introduction about why we have come, an overview of the Week, and some idea of the format of the afternoon.
Indicate that the prayer guides will meet up with their directees during the refreshment break.
Short ice-breaker to meet each other.
- 10 min (+) **2. Opening Prayer**
Spend some time in prayer for this event and for one another.
Perhaps a ritual around the theme of *Praying Over Your Own Experiences*.
- 15 min (-) **3. PRESENTATION: Our Attitude During This Week**
A dispositional talk on willingness to be surprised, letting go, and God's desire to be in closer relationship with us.
- 15 min (-) **4. PRESENTATION: Praying Over Your Own Experiences**
Explain or give a witness talk why one prays over one's own experience and what happens when one does.¹⁴
- 15 min **5. Explanation Of An Exercise On Praying Over Your Own Experience**
Choose only one of the following for this exercise:
The *Daily Awareness Exercise* on page 28 of this manual; or
One significant event of one's own life from the past month.¹⁵
Say a few words about the Review¹⁶ to be made after the prayer exercise is over.
- 20 min **6. Time Of Private Prayer**
If appropriate, directees could be invited to move to different parts of the hall or church.
- 20 min **7. Break For Refreshment, Pacing, And Interchange**
Remind the directees to find their prayer guides and vice versa. If the assembly is large, perhaps name tags could be color-coded in order to help prayer guides and directees connect with each other.

30 min (+) 8. **Small-Group Work**

Directees go to an assigned small group with their own prayer guide. Complete whatever introductions may still be necessary to settle into this group sharing.

Facilitate a discussion/sharing about their experience of the exercise (#5 and #6 above). Prayer guide may have to suggest reflective questions, such as:

How did the exercise go?

What happened in you as you did this exercise?

How did you respond?

How was God present or not present while you were making this period of prayer?

Depending on whether or not directees are familiar with the Week of Directed Prayer, give a few ideas about what goes on during the interview.

Some remarks about: confidentiality; how the prayer guide listens to the experience of prayer and builds on it; even when nothing is happening, something is happening; every experience is a good experience.

Last minute organization:

If the above was done in the large assembly room, the prayer guide brings his/her group to the interview room. Check on whether each directee is certain of interview time each day. Perhaps some last minute re-arranging may be necessary. Then give everyone the same scriptural material along with suggested focus for prayer and a word of encouragement. If helpful, a prayer guide could hand out *Some Tips For Prayer*, page 26.

Closing Prayer with and for each other.

Here is an idea for a 'C Cycle' Opening Session
which you could use with participants
who have made the Week of Directed Prayer before.

The Gospel-Contemplation Approach

- 20 min **1. Welcome**
Introduction about why we have come, an overview of the Week, and some idea of the format of the afternoon.
Indicate that the prayer guides will meet up with their directees during the refreshment break.
Short ice-breaker to meet each other.
- 10 min (+) **2. Opening Prayer**
Spend some time in prayer for this event and for one another.
Perhaps a ritual around the theme of *Gospel Contemplation*.
- 15 min (-) **3. PRESENTATION: Our Attitude During This Week**
A dispositional talk on willingness to be surprised, letting go, and God's desire to be in closer relationship with us.
- 15 min (-) **4. PRESENTATION: Gospel Contemplation**
Give a witness talk on how our imagination can be a way to meet God as we pray the scriptures.¹⁷
- 15 min **5. Introduction Of An Exercise On Gospel Contemplation**¹⁸
Incorporate a few ideas on the Review to be made after the Gospel Contemplation is over.
- 20 min **6. Time Of Private Prayer**
If appropriate, directees could be invited to move to different parts of the hall or church.
- 20 min **7. Break For Refreshment, Pacing, And Interchange**
Remind the directees to find their prayer guides and vice versa. If the assembly is large, perhaps name tags could be color-coded in order to help prayer guides and directees connect with each other.
- 30 min (+) **8. Small-Group Work**
Directees go to an assigned small group with their own prayer guide. Complete whatever introductions may still be necessary to settle into this group sharing.

Facilitate a discussion/sharing about their experience of the exercise (#5 and #6 above). Prayer guide may have to suggest reflective questions, such as:

How was Gospel Contemplation for you?

What went on as you entered the gospel event? What did you feel or see or hear?

How did you respond?

How was God present or not present while you were making this period of prayer?

Depending on whether or not directees are familiar with the Week of Directed Prayer, give a few ideas about what goes on during the interview.

Some remarks about: confidentiality; how the prayer guide listens to the experience of prayer and builds on it; even when nothing is happening, something is happening; every experience is a good experience.

Last minute organization:

If the above was done in the large assembly room, the prayer guide brings his/her group to the interview room. Check on whether each directee is certain of interview time each day. Perhaps some last minute re-arranging may be necessary. Then give everyone the same scriptural material along with suggested focus for prayer and a word of encouragement. If helpful, a prayer guide could hand out *Some Tips For Prayer*, page 26.

Closing Prayer with and for each other.

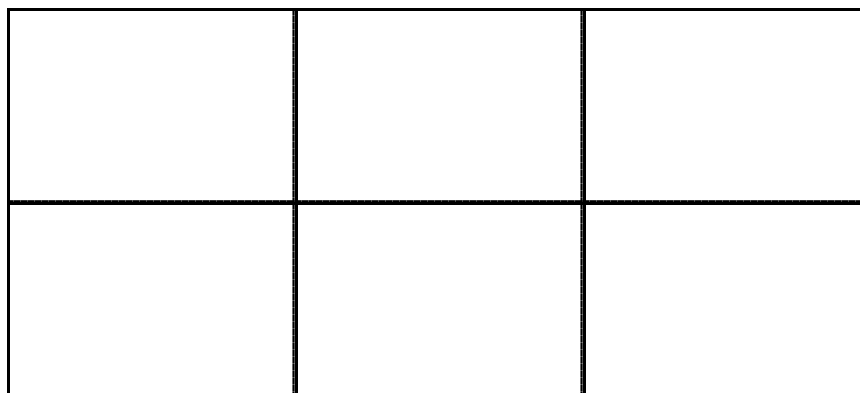
Here is an idea for a 'D Cycle' Opening Session
which you could use with participants
who have made the Week of Directed Prayer before.

The Blessed-History Approach¹⁹

Note that this 'D Cycle' approach could take a bit over three hours. It could work very well if participants have first made at least two of the earlier cycles. Some ideas from this approach might be useful for Cycle B.

- 20 min 1. *Welcome*
Introduction about why we have come, an overview of the Week, and some idea of the format of the afternoon.
Short ice-breaker to meet each other.
Introduction and assignment of prayer guides.
- 15 min 2. *Opening Prayer*
Spend some time in prayer for this event and for one another.
- 60 min 3. *PRESENTATION to the large assembly.*²⁰
Give a short presentation on the theme of how God is present in the events of one's life and introduce the exercise. Give the following instructions to the whole group:
"Take a piece of paper 8.5" X 11" and fold it in three panels 8.5" long in equal widths. Then open the page and fold it in half lengthwise."

(Open the sheet and you have six squares as in the diagram below.)



Then, after this is completed, continue with the following instructions:

"Take a few moments and reflect upon your life and quickly draw in each of five squares²¹ a diagram (stick men or women – no artistic talent required) that represents a significant event in your life. Do not draw anything in the last square at the bottom. Try to include at least one positive or happy event."

Then, after this is completed, continue ...

"You have now illustrated five significant events in your life; some perhaps are positive, some traumatic, some negative. Choose one of them, the one that you would be able to talk about in a small group made up of some of the participants here. Put a title under your picture."

Then, after this is completed, continue ...

"Now place a few words indicating your feelings during this one significant event."

Then, after this is completed, continue ...

"Where was God for you in this event? ... In this square, draw a picture, image or symbol that illustrates where God was as far as your awareness was *at that time*."

Then, after this is completed, continue

"Now move into a small group with your prayer guide. Complete whatever introductions may still be necessary before the exercise continues. Your prayer guide will continue this exercise with you until you come back to this large assembly."

15 min 4. *Small-Group Sharing*

Complete the introductions and then prayer guide continues with the exercise which, at this point, is a reflection -- first in private, and then shared. Prayer guide asks each directee to reflect on the drawing that he/she has made and then to jot down a few words or phrases in response to the following questions:

- a) As far as you can recall, how was God present (or absent) in this event for you?
- b) As you think back to this event today, how do you understand how God was present (or absent) for you?

After this reflection is over, the prayer guide invites the directees to share with each other the significant event and tell why it was significant. If time permits, the prayer guide encourages them to share on a deeper level: "How has the way you see or feel about God shifted over the years?"

20 min (-) 5. *Refreshment Break*

10 min 6. **PRESENTATION: How To Meditate Prayerfully Over Your Own History**
Bring the group back and give a brief teaching on how to pray over one's own history as explained in Endnote 15 and in the handout on page 42.

- 12 min 7. *Time Of Private Prayer*
Then send directees to meditate prayerfully over the event they have shared.
- 15 min 8. *Small Groups*
Then after a period of twelve minutes of silence,²² invite them back into the small group to share what happened in them as they prayed over this event.
- 20 min 9. *Ritual Closure (in large assembly or in each small group)*
Use a ritual-type closure to symbolize how participants will be bringing their lives to God and how everyone will be praying for each other during this Week.
- 20 min 10. *Last Minute Organizational Items*
Then the prayer guide brings his/her group to the interview room. Check on whether each directee is certain of interview time each day. Perhaps some last minute re-arranging may be necessary. Also, if needed, the prayer guide could give a few ideas about what goes on during the daily interviews and could make some remarks about confidentiality, etc. Then give everyone the material for prayer and a word of encouragement. If helpful, a prayer guide could hand out *Some Tips For Prayer*, page 26, or something more relevant.

Please note that during the Week of Directed Prayer, the prayer guide could encourage some directees to use this approach throughout the whole Week of Directed Prayer. Each day the directee could complete one of the squares and prayerfully meditate over it according to the above method. Page 42 may be a helpful handout.

FINDING GOD IN THE EVENTS OF YOUR OWN LIFE

In this method, we allow Jesus to enter into some remembered past event of our own life. Our experience unites with the experience of Jesus and in this process we are led to greater self-acceptance, healing, and gratitude.

Here is a way you can approach this method of prayer:

- A. Decide on the one event on which you would like to focus.
- B. Settle into a prayerful mode.
- C. Remember the details of the experience you had at the time.

... WATCH ... LISTEN ... FEEL ...

- D. Now relive it through your imagination.
 - How was Jesus present (or absent) to you during this event?
 - What were your feelings then about this?
 - 1) **If this event was a happy experience for you, simply express these feelings to God or to Jesus:**
 - Tell Jesus how this event made you feel.
 - Dialogue with Jesus.
 - End with an appropriate response.
 - 2) **If this event was an unhappy one where you need healing, after STEP C above, imagine Jesus entering the event:**
 - Walk back with Jesus into this recollection.
 - Imaginatively reconstruct what would happen if Jesus were perceived as present then.
 - Dialogue with Jesus about your reactions; thank him for his healing love as you walk out of the recollection with him.
- E. After you have completed this exercise, reflect upon what happened in your heart.

GOSPEL CONTEMPLATION

In this method, we enter a gospel story about Jesus by using our powers of imagining. The concrete details of the gospel story serve as a guide to our imagination.

Enter the story just as if you were there:

Watch what happens; listen to what is being said; feel the actions with your body.

Become part of the mystery either by being yourself or by becoming one of the persons in the story.

Listen, taste, smell, feel, and watch what happens.

Allow yourself to interact with the other persons in the event: enter into conversation with them, listen to what they have to say to you and to each other, etc.

Allow the event to unfold through your imagination. Be as passive as possible to allow this to take place. At the same time, remain more or less within the framework of the gospel story.

Respond spontaneously as in a dialogue with God, with Jesus or with one of the persons within the gospel story.

ENDNOTES

1. Though this program is a good program for the development and training of prayer guides, too many prayer guides with too few directees will almost completely trivialize the experience for both prayer guides and directees. Prayer guides-in-training need to have a sufficient number of directees (I would say at least three) in order to have a positive and formative experience of giving prayer guidance. Therefore, with a small number of participants, it would be far better for one prayer guide to handle five directees than for three prayer guides to be involved!
2. Loyola House, Box 245, Guelph, Ontario, Canada, N1H 6J9.
3. In other denominational or cultural traditions, you might set up an inviting prayerful atmosphere with an artistic bible or some other symbol which communicates a sense of God's presence.
4. Or those recognized as leaders in your local congregation.
5. Further information can be obtained through the Lowville administrative office: Lowville Prayer Center, 5138 Idlewood Crescent, Burlington, Ontario, Canada L7L 3Y6, or through Rev. Bruce Seebach, 500A Redfox Road, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2K 2V8. Materials are not available for purchase until a manual has been produced. A general brochure is available describing the Week of Guided Prayer.
6. Hilary presently resides in Toronto and continues to give these retreats in Canada and in England.
7. If more appropriate to the situation, a closing ritual or worship service could be celebrated at the end of the day.
8. If this were the first experience of the Week of Directed Prayer for the participants, I would **not** suggest that they use Gospel Contemplation (the use of imagination on scripture) as the general way of praying the scriptures. It is too complicated for some; with respect to those who naturally ponder by using their imagination, the explanation is not needed. Praying the scriptures as one ponders a love letter is far more practical as a way of introducing people to scriptural prayer the first time round. (The Collatio is an attempt to do just this.) On page 27, the section, *Pondering The Scriptures With Your Heart*, is a description of this and therefore may be a good handout to give directees at the end of the day.
9. This is a practical application of the above presentation.
10. This part is a practical experience of the Review.
11. The Collatio comes from my cousin, Armand Nigro, SJ, whom I have never met!
12. This summary was made for me by Marilyn Von Zuben, CND, who, I believe, got it from Armand Nigro, SJ.
13. These have been adapted from David Fleming's paraphrase of the Spiritual Exercises.
14. The presentation might include some of the following ideas:
 - God is present all the time whether we are aware of it or not.

- As for the Jewish people as a whole, so for us individually, all of our history is a salvation history.
 - All our experiences -- positive, negative, traumatic, joyful, sad, etc. -- have significance.
 - In all these experiences, we can discover God.
15. Here is a description of a method for the Praying-Over-Your-Own-Experience Approach. You can base your instructions on the exercise on page 42 which also might make a good handout to give retreatants at the end of the day. For this exercise, have the participants choose a significant event from the past month and use this method to ponder over it. Advise them to choose an event that they can talk about or share in a small group towards the end of the afternoon.
16. Just a few observations on making the Review and the prayer journal... Write a few lines only about what went on during prayer time -- moods, feelings, thoughts.
17. Include in your presentation such ideas as:
- Everyone has an imagination and no one can function without it. We decorate our rooms, we listen to stories, we describe an event, we place things on a table in a certain way -- all this is the use of imagination.
 - Imagination is not primarily picture-making but is any way we are present to another in memory -- we feel, we touch, we see, and we hear.
 - In prayer, we can do this also -- it goes back to an early Christian tradition as shown in the story below:

It happened one morning in an Italian monastery. On waking, the monks all dressed in their cells and then filed down the corridors to a central meeting room. There they sat quietly until a monk, standing at a lectern, began to read a passage from the second chapter of the Gospel of John. He read clearly in a leisurely manner the eight or so verses describing the marriage feast at Cana. He paused for thirty or forty seconds. Then he reread the same passage in the same clear, leisurely manner. Again, he paused for half a minute, then read the same passage a third time. When he paused this time, some of the monks began to return to their cells in order to pray over the passage. Others waited for the fourth reading and even the fifth before they, too, left for their cells.

What was happening? These repetitive readings saturated their imaginations with the particular energy and colour of the gospel scene. This saturation would, of course, minimize distractions and encourage a frame of mind and heart conducive to prayer. Perhaps it would enable a monk to identify with some particular person in the gospel episode and to discover the inner feelings of Jesus. The mystery of the gospel event would so take hold of the person at prayer that the past would become present through the instrument of the imagination.

(The description in these last two paragraphs is adapted from David Hassel. It appeared in several places but latterly it was in his book, *Radical Prayer*, published by Paulist Press, 1983, p.38.)
 - The handout on page 43 may have further ideas for this presentation. It would be wise NOT to distribute it here because it would interfere with the process. It would be more helpful to let the individual prayer guides give it to their directees at the end of this afternoon session or later on during the week.
18. You could do this step #5 and the following step #6 with the large assembly as a whole in the following or some similar way:
1. Explain the method and give a short introduction of how we are going to do this

together.

2. Change the lighting, have the people separate themselves for silence, ask them to place their pencils and books down, then help them to relax into silence and to settle into the awareness of God's presence. Make suggestions followed by appropriate pauses.
3. Invite the participants of the assembly to close their eyes while you read aloud the gospel passage in a clear voice and with meaning. (Take, for example, the story of Jesus' Feeding of the Five Thousand as in Matt 14:13-21.)
4. Guide the participants through the Gospel Contemplation together. Tell the participants to tune you out if they are beginning to enter the gospel story with their imagination, and then, if they need the help of your suggestions, to tune you in again. Something like this:

Begin by creating the scene with some appropriate helps for the imagination.

Then continue with more helps and questions, with frequent pauses, marked in the example below with a series of dots (...) after each part or question:

Imagine yourself in the deserted place with a large group of people, the twelve, and Jesus. He has just finished speaking with them.... Where would you place yourself in the scene? ... Be there.... Who is near you? ... Speak with him or her.... Now pay more attention to Jesus.... How is he interacting with the people? ... What do you see or feel as he is talking with them? ... Notice how he tells the disciples to feed the people.... If you are close enough, listen to Jesus tell the apostles to feed the people themselves.... How would you react if you were one of the disciples? ... etc., etc.

Continue with the suggestions and questions, but as the period draws to a close, make them fewer with longer pauses, giving time for the participants to use Gospel Contemplation on their own. When you come to the end, say something like:

... Now we are going to take our leave and come back slowly to this room and to the assembly.... Make or say your goodbye ... five ... four ... three ... two ... one.... Now let us say slowly the prayer Jesus taught us: "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name...."

19. This particular method was given to me years ago by Lavinia Byrne, IBVM. It has proven to be quite useful for workshops on prayer.
20. In order to know how to pace this when you are leading the large assembly, you will have to practice and time each segment beforehand.
21. Or just four squares. The reason for leaving some squares empty is to allow space for the participants to draw other more significant events later on. Another approach might be to use only one square -- the last one -- and choose a significant event from the past week or month to illustrate. (This would take less time and be similar to Cycle B.) Then after this process, the participants would be instructed by their prayer guides to complete the other squares throughout the Week.
22. During this, some taped music could be played.