

## Centering Prayer

### I. Purposes of this session:

- A. To experience Centering Prayer
- B. To share what we experience with each other.
- C. To practice leading one of the prayer practices

### II. Suggested Procedure

#### A. Opening - (5-10-minutes)

**1. Light the candle** to symbolize God's presence, God's desire for us to come to him in prayer, and the Spirit's work in our hearts as we seek God.

**2. Explain the process** - You will use Centering Prayer, a prayer of quieting the mind and inner silence and simple presence before God, and then share about that experience.

**3. Introduce Centering Prayer.** This form of prayer can create discomfort for people who have had little or no experience cultivating interior silence, so it is important to set a tone of comfort and safety and gentleness in the space. You may consider bringing soft, meditative instrumental music to play very softly in the room if you happen to that available. Or you may wish to bring some object to enhance your center table - a larger, softer cloth to drape over the table, a cross, icon, picture, etc.

#### B. Begin with a short conversation about "silence"

Where/when have they experienced silence and what was that experience like for them? Encourage them to think also about their *level of comfort* with silence in general (do they always have music on, etc.), and *experience of 'interior silence'* - when their mind is "quiet"- and *how they respond* to that kind of silence. Have them share together about their experiences.

**C. Explain Centering Prayer** as an opportunity to enter into an open, gentle, quiet space where God is present - a quiet, open space and time. They relax their bodies with slow, steady, deep breaths; they calm their minds by slowly repeating a simple word that they choose. The prayer is simply to "be present" to God, not to talk to God - just be present with - and allow God to be present to us. The prayer word is to help keep our minds quiet. They may stop repeating the word at some time - but if they become aware of thoughts interrupting the silence, gently let those thoughts float away like a leaf on a river and by saying their chosen word again to calm their minds and return to silent openness to God.

**C. Ask them to each choose a prayer word** - a simple word or phrase that they can use silently to bring them back to the presence of God; a gentle word that doesn't take much effort to say, that is soothing, that brings them into God's presence: God, Jesus, Abba, Father, Holy, Spirit, Love, etc. Give them a minute or so to settle on a word.

**D. Explain the process you will use for the prayer time:** You will begin the prayer with "Let us pray" and then they will pray silently for 15-20 minutes (you judge based on the group's time constraints). Tell them you will be the timekeeper and you will end the prayer time by saying "Amen." During the time of prayer, as they become aware of their thoughts, they can release the thoughts by speaking the prayer word and returning to silence. Unlike praying with a mantra, which is repeated continuously during the prayer time, Centering Prayer makes use of a prayer word only as a way of drawing ones attention back to the presence of God when other thoughts are present.

**E. Invite them to sit** with their back straight, head up (like there is a silver thread hanging straight down from the tip of their head through the center of their body); feet flat on the floor; hands relaxed on their thighs, with their eyes closed and begin to breath slowly and deeply.

**F. Begin the prayer time with “Let us pray.”**

**F. End the prayer time by saying, “Amen.”**

**G. Allow a short time of silence**

**H. Gently invite observations, reflections, questions or comments** about the prayer or the prayer experience.