

## **Praying with a religious symbol, visual art or a physical object**

The object could be a picture (abstract or realistic, a print, photo, or painting) or an art object, such as a carving, pottery, weaving, etc. It could be a natural physical object, such as a stone, piece of wood, shell, or flower. It should be something that can fit on the table in the center of your circle. The person who will lead this exercise should provide the object. Pick something that has been meaningful to you spiritually, currently or in the past. It doesn't need to be fancy or expensive. It may be something you have made yourself.

### **I. Purpose of this session:**

- A. To experience using a visual, physical symbol devotionally.
- B. To reflect on God's presence with you in a past creative, symbolic, sacramental experience.
- C. To practice leading these experiences.

### **II. Suggested Procedure**

#### **A. Opening**

1. **Light the candle** to symbolize God's creativity and presence. Welcome everyone. Begin with a prayer you lead and/or invite others to offer brief prayers to begin your time together. Hold hands around the circle to symbolize your unity in faith.
2. **Explain the process:** There will be meditation and a sharing time.

#### **B. Prayer Exercise** Approx. 30 minutes.

##### **Meditation with a symbolic visual art piece or physical object**

1. Place the art piece or physical object on the table so that all can see it. Rearrange chairs if you need to. Invite them to look at the object. Share what you know about the object (it's age, who the artist was if known, where it came from and how you obtained it, why it's important to you, how it has been important to you in your spiritual journey.) If it is related to a Biblical story, verse, or place, or an historical event or place, tell about that and perhaps read or tell the Scripture reference.

2. As everyone continues to look at the object, suggest possible questions they might use to focus their meditation: What attracts them? What disturbs them? What do they see in the object? What do they think of, or what do they feel as they gaze at it? What does it connect to in their lives? What does it say to them? How does it move them? How does it touch their spirit? How does it draw them to God? (*If you think these are helpful, you may give them a copy of the questions to use during their meditation*)

3. Ask them to sit in their chair in a way that will be comfortable for the next ten minutes or so. Give them time to shift around and get comfortable, and then invite them to close their eyes for a few minutes and feel their body relax.

4. Ask them to engage with the object in a relaxed way (not "study" it critically) - just notice the shape(s), the arrangement of things, the color(s), the size, the texture, etc. - just slowly, in a relaxed way observe the object. If the object is related to a Biblical text, let that pass through their mind as they look at it.

- If they feel drawn to just one part of the object, to dwell on that.
- Let their senses and their hearts lead them as they gaze at the object....

5. Begin the meditation with. "Let us pray..."

6. After 10 minutes, say "Amen." Wait until all have shifted their attention back to the group. Ask them to share what happened for them during the meditation. For example:

- what the object brought to their mind,
- how they felt as they looked at the object,
- how the object touched them spiritually - or not,
- whether the meditation was pleasant or uncomfortable, relaxing or refreshing, or did their mind race onto other things.

Whatever happened is what they should say. Thank each person for sharing. There isn't time for give and take among them about what they say.

7. When all have shared, close the meditation with a prayer related to how they have responded to the image.