

## Praying with an Icon

(You will need to provide an icon for this prayer practice. If possible, bring an icon of Christ, or one of Mary and Jesus, in which the eyes of the person look directly at you. Try to bring a larger icon since your group will use it together.)

### I. Purposes of this session:

- A. To experience a contemplative prayer form from the Eastern Tradition.
- B. To share what we experience with each other.
- C. To practice leading one of those prayer practices.

### II. Suggested Procedure

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

- 1. **Light the candle** to symbolize God's continual and constant creative and loving presence.
- 2. **Open with a prayer** of thanks, awe, petition - whatever is on your heart for your group.

**B. One way to lead a group in prayer with an icon** Information from Tilden Edwards, *Living in the Presence*, Harper and Row, 1987, pp. 50 - 53. (Paraphrased and shortened, just to give you some idea of how this might flow).

- 1. Light a candle (which you've already done) before the icon as a symbol of the living divine presence.
- 2. Sit as close to the icon as possible, while keeping as clear a view as possible for every person.
- 3. With eyes closed, have each person pray silently, or as leader you pray aloud, a prayer expressing the desire to touch God's presence through the icon, and to relinquish whatever might hinder you from being present to God.
- 4. Invite people to open their eyes and look at the eyes of the icon, reaching out to God through the eyes and *letting yourself be known by God through the icon's eyes*.
- 5. Sit silently gazing at the icon for (he suggests 20-30 minutes - for us probably 8-10 minutes).
- 6. Ask them to close their eyes and try to retain a sense of the icon in their minds.
- 7. Let the image fade to a formless presence.
- 8. Try to sense the eyes of the icon re-appearing as your eyes, God seeing the world through you - helping you realize yourself to be an image of God, through whom God loves the world into fullness of being.
- 9. Close the prayer time with "Amen." Allow a few moments for people to end their prayer.
- 10. Share about the prayer experience, using these reflection questions:
  - a. What was it like to try and let yourself be "known" by God through the icon?
  - b. Was there any seemingly graced moment that revealed something crucial for your way of seeing and being?