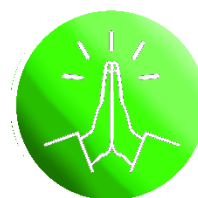




## Getting Started with Strategy 1: Deepening and Growing our Prayerfulness as Individual, in Groups and as a Church



Prayer is at the centre of the faith experience and as essential to our relationship with God and each other within the Body of Christ as conversation is in a family. As Anglicans we spend much of our time together in worship in prayer. And yet we can find ourselves praying familiar words with little engagement or we can become so busy that prayer becomes a hasty conversation on our way to do something that seems more urgent.

It may be important to begin by identifying where and when we pray together, in small groups, and as individuals. This will be partly to do with the offices of the church during the day and over the course of the week.

It will also be important to identify who are the prayer warriors and passionate ones in the congregation or organisation.

### Mapping our Existing Prayer Life

#### Corporate Prayer:

- **Sunday and mid week services:** Are those leading Intercessions well trained and gifted? Sometimes Intercessions can become almost instructional to God (which usually means someone is trying to instruct the congregation how to think, pray and act).
- **Morning and Evening Prayer:** is an opportunity to pray with others for ourselves, others and the mission of the church.
- **Home church and discussion groups:** can be a time of less formal freely moving prayer.
- **Prayer Chain:** is there a prayer chain or tree that allows the right balance of privacy and loving faithful concern and support?
- **Opening Prayer:** even our business meetings such as Parish Council can be a time of deep prayer and opening ourselves to the presence of the Spirit. More attention to the prayers we say at the beginning and ending of business and other meetings can have a profound effect as we remember that everything we do and decide is done in the name of our God and for the sake of our neighbours near and far.
- **Discernment for church direction/decisions:** during special times of needed discernment such as when choosing an incumbent, making a parish plan, the leadership needing to make difficult decisions, it is important that the people charged with such decision making have the opportunity to come together and pray together. Several models of Discernment by groups are available including Ignation models.

**Private Devotions:**

Is there a tradition in the parish of encouraging private devotions and does this extend to shared resources such as prayer books or devotional studies? As a minimum it may be useful to encourage Advent and Lent studies that have a daily devotional as part of the study.

**Shared Fellowship outside the Anglican Church:**

is there a network of other Christians who come together to pray for community matters?

**Prayer Styles and Traditions:**

As well as identifying who is particularly devoted to prayer it may be useful to identify the **prayer style or tradition/s** in the church. Are there those who are comfortable and gifted in contemplation and meditation? Are there those who are gifted for prayer in the Spirit?

There are many **traditions and resources** including such as The Fellowship of Contemplative Prayer, or Companions in Christ. There are also books such as A Purpose Driven Life that can encourage the parish as a whole to pray together for the future.

**Identifying how and where our Prayer life can grow**

It may be helpful having identified the strengths to then seek to grow in those areas where there is not so much experience and familiarity.

There are also existing resources and traditions within the diocese that may help the particular churches and agencies. Such as the Clergy and Lay Retreats, Cursillo.

With a small amount of training more of the people may be able to access **worship on-line** and thus participate in prayer and devotions that the local parish cannot provide or the individual get to. This may also assist the housebound although they will still need real in person care and support as available.

**Process for Moving Forward**

It may be useful to dedicate several hours or a half day for a group of clergy and lay leadership (maybe including but not limited to clergy, Parish Councillors, LLM's) to gather together with no other purpose than to reflect, pray and plan together. It is important that only those with a degree of enthusiasm for the topic of prayer attend otherwise it may become a task orientated development of "shoulds" rather than a spirit led invitation to growth and depth. Someone with a gift for prayer might be appointed as Chair or Facilitator so that others can "relax" and focus of reflecting and thinking creatively.

The mapping exercise as above can be a beginning place but not too much time to be spent here. Then having identified what might be missing or underdeveloped it is important not to overwhelm each other with too many goals and good intentions. Having brainstormed various forms of prayer and prayerful occasions that the parish or agency might take it would be important to prayerfully discern which one or two "next steps" be committed to. (The rest of the good ideas should be gathered and kept as they may prove to be further steps.)

There are several models of discernment of which I find the Ignation tradition very helpful. Some helpful links are: [www.ignatianspirituality.com/making-good-decisions/an-approach-to-good-choices/a-method-of-group-decision-making](http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/making-good-decisions/an-approach-to-good-choices/a-method-of-group-decision-making)

And: [www.marquette.edu/faith/ignatian-principles-for-making-decisions.php](http://www.marquette.edu/faith/ignatian-principles-for-making-decisions.php)

Where parishes don't have many of their own resources it may be helpful to invite neighbouring clergy and lay people to facilitate and lead the process while leaving the locals free to participate.

### **Enlivening the Prayer Life that we Already Have:**

Having identified where the parish or organisational strengths and learning curves are it will be important to identify what steps are being taken to strengthen and deepen the prayer life of the church. For example it might be that the Intercessors need a refresher course to enliven Sunday prayers. Or it might be that a group within the parish would like to learn Christian meditation and are open to gathering once a week for three months. Or it might be a reminder of having a more prayerful time at the beginning and ending of business meetings such as Parish Council. A group may decide to pray for specific matters within the parish as well as for the sick.

Whatever is discerned and decided needs to become built into the way the parish or organisation goes about its normal life. A reoccurring question at the end of each meeting might remind people to pray about all things together as part of the leadership task. There also needs to be a few review dates built into the process. Ongoing review makes it more likely that the culture of the parish will change and grow.

### **Resources**

#### **The following attached resources may be helpful in this process:**

- Steps for Moving Forward in the Growing in Prayer Strategy (provides a time frame)
- Growing in Prayer: Initial Review Documents (for discussion)
- Growing in Prayer: Mission Action Plan (for how to proceed with chosen way forward)

#### **Ignatian models of discernment may be helpful. Online Resources for this include:**

- [www.ignatianspirituality.com/making-good-decisions/an-approach-to-good-choices/a-method-of-group-decision-making](http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/making-good-decisions/an-approach-to-good-choices/a-method-of-group-decision-making)
- [www.marquette.edu/faith/ignatian-principles-for-making-decisions](http://www.marquette.edu/faith/ignatian-principles-for-making-decisions).

#### **A Prayer that could be used at the start of meetings:**

Gracious God, our Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier  
We gather in your presence so that we might  
Better know you and more closely follow you.  
Open our hearts and minds that we might  
Listen deeply to the movement of Your Spirit,  
And discern your will for us;  
Help us to listen lovingly to our neighbours  
That we might live in loving-kindness  
And proclaim with our words and actions your saving grace.  
Amen.