

Leading Extemporaneous Prayer

Extemporaneous Prayer is Evangelical

By leading the group in extemporaneous prayer, you set the tone and model the heart of a “spirit-filled evangelizer” (cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 259).

While you may wish to use a few prayers of the Church here and there, the default method should be extemporaneous prayer. You are forming people to seek and respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. That requires talking and listening to God.

How to Pray Extemporaneously

Above all, pray from the heart, in your own words.

- ◆ Address the Lord directly; speak **to** God rather than **about** God.
 - Do not say “I’d like to pray that God blesses...” but rather, “God, bless our time together...”
- ◆ Speak to the persons of our triune God rather than simply God.
 - Address prayer to the Father, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit.
 - We all need to grow in our relationship with all three persons of the Trinity. Directing prayer to each one helps.
- ◆ Offer mental prayer aloud as a model.
 - St. Teresa of Avila said, “Mental prayer is nothing more than frequent friendly conversation with the One we know loves us” (a colloquial translation from her *Autobiography*).
 - Christians need to learn how to have friendly conversation with God.
- ◆ Model your personal relationship with Jesus.
 - Show your trust in him. Let your prayer demonstrate how you turn to Jesus with your own challenges.

- Exhibit the burning love of the Savior for the people with you and those who never come to Mass.
- ◆ Praise God in your own words. This is essential to discipleship.
 - Personal praise needs to be spoken from the heart, not recited.
 - Practice: If this feels awkward for you; it will be awkward for others.
 - Grow in ease by first using praises from the Psalms.
 - Make the words of the Psalm your own. Alter the language, and use your own vocabulary and style as much as possible.
 - Speak in your own natural voice, not a “churchy” voice.
- ◆ Intercede with confidence: for the group, the parish/campus ministry, and the people your ministry is called to reach.
 - Pray intercessions about your hopes for the ministry **as though it really matters**, because it does!
 - Intercessory prayers provide space for God to build our spirits for the mission, plant words in our hearts, and strengthen our resolve.

Inviting Others into Extemporaneous Prayer

The first few meetings you will most likely need to model this type of prayer. After several meetings, once the group members have grown comfortable with one another, invite them to offer their intentions, praises, joys, and sufferings up to the Lord.

- ◆ Explain the types of prayer.
 - Praise is prayer to God for who God is - not for what he does for us.
 - Gratitude and thanksgiving are beautiful prayers, but they are not praise.
 - Intercession is scripted at Mass, but heartfelt, even urgent when we pray individually.
 - People should pray for their own personal concerns. This will bond the group as the kind of small faith community you want to create.
- ◆ To help them participate, tell the group before you start the closing prayer that you will provide this time to pray together. This allows them time to mentally prepare.

- Provide structure by stating your format as precisely and clearly as you can. Structure gives people the assurance they need to pray.
 - For example, “I’ll open us up in prayer, and then be silent. Add your own prayers as the Spirit leads. After everyone has prayed who wants to, I will begin the ‘Our Father’ to close. Please pray the ‘Our Father’ aloud with me.”
- ◆ Allow silence. God works in silence!
 - People need this time to pull their thoughts together.
 - During silence, pray for individuals, or for the Holy Spirit to strengthen each person present, or for other concerns of the group.
- ◆ Allow ample time for prayer.
 - The opening prayer time can be shorter.
 - Devote more time for the closing prayer.
 - Closing prayer can be a natural time for the group to respond to God together after being touched by the Spirit through the videos and discussions.
 - Don’t leave so little time that it ends up being a quick or perfunctory nod to Heaven before leaving. Aim for at least 10 minutes.
 - As the group progresses, you may see these closing prayer times become more rich and natural. You can then allocate more time in the later sessions if the Spirit is drawing people deeper into the experience.

Examples of Extemporaneous Prayer

Below are some examples of the instructions above, but your own words are always the truest prayer.

- ◆ “Father, we ask you to bless our time and efforts. Make them fruitful for your parish/campus ministry and your Church....”
- ◆ “Holy Spirit, awaken our hearts! Make us sensitive to the Father’s desires for the Church and for our ministry.”
- ◆ “Holy Spirit, guide our conversation tonight. We long to experience life to the fullest. You said you came to give us that, and we are hungry for it. Help our conversation tonight move us to the joy that only intimacy with Jesus can give.

Help our own deepening experience of Jesus' love overflow to everyone we meet."

- ◆ "Jesus, people sought you fervently when you walked in Galilee, Samaria, and Judea. We want to stir that kind of enthusiasm in our ministry. Help us!"
- ◆ "Jesus, you said, 'With God all things are possible.' Remove any impediments that would prevent us from seeking and living the Father's will."
- ◆ "Jesus, we know you love and long for the people who no longer come to Mass, who are indifferent to your love. We want them to experience the light of the world, to be free from darkness. We want this, Jesus, because we know you want it. Everything you did healed and transformed, brought light into the darkness. Defeat anything that could prevent us from going forward in this mission, Lord. We need you. We cannot do this without you."
- ◆ "Jesus, tonight my spirits are high from viewing this video and discussing our hopes. But I know that tomorrow the demands of administering a parish (pastoring a program, etc.) will sweep me up and even depress my spirits. Help me and all of us to cherish and protect the hope we have in you here tonight."