

THE GUIDELINES

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
3. When engaged with your thoughts,* return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

*thoughts include body sensations, feelings, images, and reflections



CENTERING PRAYER

I. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.

- The sacred word expresses our intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
- The sacred word is chosen during a brief period of prayer to the Holy Spirit. Use a word of one or two syllables, such as: God, Jesus, Abba, Father, Mother, Mary, Amen. Other possibilities include: Love, Listen, Peace, Mercy, Let Go, Silence, Stillness, Faith, Trust.
- Instead of a sacred word, a simple inward glance toward the Divine Presence, or noticing one's breath may be more suitable for some persons.

The same guidelines apply to these symbols as to the sacred word.

- The sacred word is sacred not because of its inherent meaning, but because of the meaning we give it as the expression of our intention to consent.
- Having chosen a sacred word, we do not change it during the prayer period because that would be engaging thoughts.

II. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.

- "Sitting comfortably" means relatively comfortably so as not to encourage sleep during the time of prayer.
- Whatever sitting position we choose, we keep the back straight.
- We close our eyes as a symbol of letting go of what is going on around and within us.
- We introduce the sacred word inwardly as gently as laying a feather on a piece of absorbent cotton.
- If we fall sleep, we simply continue the prayer upon awakening.

III. When engaged with your thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.

• "Thoughts" is an umbrella term for every perception, including body sensations, sense perceptions, feelings, images, memories, plans, reflections, concepts, commentaries, and spiritual experiences.

- Thoughts are an inevitable, integral and normal part of Centering Prayer.
- By "returning ever-so-gently to the sacred word" a minimum of effort is indicated. This is the only activity we initiate during the time of Centering Prayer.
- During the course of Centering Prayer, the sacred word may become vague or disappear.

IV. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

- The additional two minutes enables us to bring the atmosphere of silence into everyday life.
- If this prayer is done in a group, the leader may slowly recite a prayer, such as the Lord's Prayer, while the others listen.

Some Practical Points

1. The minimum time for this prayer is 20 minutes. Two periods are recommended each day, one first thing in the morning and the other in the afternoon or early evening. With practice the time may be extended to 30 minutes or longer.
2. The end of the prayer period can be indicated by a timer which does not have an audible tick or loud sound when it goes off.
3. Possible physical symptoms during the prayer:
 - We may notice slight pains, itches, or twitches in various parts of the body or a generalized sense of restlessness. These are usually due to the untying of emotional knots in the body.
 - We may notice heaviness or lightness in our extremities. This is usually due to a deep level of spiritual attentiveness.
 - In all cases we pay no attention and ever-so-gently return to the sacred word.
4. The principal fruits of Centering Prayer are experienced in daily life and not during the prayer period.

5. Centering Prayer familiarizes us with God's first language which is SILENCE.

Points for Further Development

1. During the prayer period, various kinds of thoughts may arise:

- Ordinary wanderings of the imagination or memory.
- Thoughts and feelings that give rise to attractions or aversions.
- Insights and psychological breakthroughs.
- Self-reflections such as, "How am I doing?" or, "This peace is just great!"
- Thoughts and feelings that arise from the unloading of the unconscious.
- When engaged with any of these thoughts return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.

2. During this prayer we avoid analyzing our experience, harboring expectations, or aiming at some specific goal such as:

- Repeating the sacred word continuously.
- Having no thoughts.
- Making the mind a blank.
- Feeling peaceful or consoled.
- Achieving a spiritual experience.

Theological Background

The source of Centering Prayer, as in all methods leading to contemplative prayer, is the indwelling Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The focus of Centering Prayer is the deepening of our relationship with the living Christ. It tends to build communities of faith and bond the members together in mutual friendship and love.

Wisdom Saying of Jesus

Centering Prayer is based on the wisdom saying of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: "When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you" (MT 6:6). It is also inspired by writings of major contributors to the Christian contemplative heritage including John Cassian, the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Francis de Sales, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Thérèse of Lisieux, and Thomas Merton.