

- General conversation about prayer style that has been practiced.
- Introduce new prayer style.
- Practice new prayer style.

The final gathering

At the final session, give time to celebrate what you have shared and consider what each person is drawn toward in the future. Some participants might like to continue practicing a specific style. Some groups might like to continue meeting and look for some other material, or work through *Uphold* again. Conclude with a time of worship in celebration of your time together.

You could invite each person to write a prayer for others in the group on the back of the *Uphold* bookmark or on a card. When you are finished writing, invite people to read out their prayer and give it to another person in the group. Make sure everyone is given a card.

This resource is produced by the Uniting Church Centre for Theology & Ministry, Spiritual Formation Advisor

Written by Joan Wright Howie and Anneke Oppewal-Korbjin

Special thanks to Clare Boyd Macrae for editing

Photography by Paul Wright

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For more information please contact:

Uniting Church Centre for Theology & Ministry

1 Morrison Close, Parkville, VIC 3052

Ph: 03 9340 8800 fax: 03 9340 8805

Email: info@ctm.uca.edu.au

Website: <http://ctm.uca.edu.au>

Uphold one another in prayer

LEADERS' NOTES

The Uniting Church is a diverse church and is open to a diversity of ways of praying. While honouring our Protestant reformed origins and ethos, we also seek to take seriously the contemporary search for spirituality and the gathered wisdom of other traditions. Different people will be drawn to different types of prayer. Some prefer reflective, quiet meditation, while others prefer to engage the imagination and movement. There are as many ways to practice prayer as there are many different personality styles. Remind people that there is no right way to pray.

This resource is a supplement to the 2003 Lacuna kit and can be added to the Lacuna folder. In this resource, you will be introduced to ten different ways into prayer. These have been selected from a vast array of prayer traditions. The styles of prayer in this resource have been ordered in such a way as to nurture spiritual movements in relationship with God. In Jesus' followers, there is a movement from believers who become disciples; to disciples who become friends; and friends who grow in intimacy with the beloved. Prayer weaves together faith, relationship and service, and over the course of this material, participants are invited to observe movement in their relationship with God.

Prayer styles

Prayer of the Heart

Simple Prayer

Journaling

Centering

Intercessions

Awareness Examen

Lectio Divina

Mindfulness

Jesus Prayer

Adoration



Pray for the people in your group, that they may experience movement in their relationship with God as they journey through *Uphold One Another in Prayer*.

Prayer is not an easy topic to discuss. Some people may be full of confidence in describing their prayer life, yet lack a sense of depth. Others may feel quite uncertain and need affirmation. Still others may be at a very dry and painful place in their lives and their prayer may feel too vulnerable to name and share. Lead the group with sensitivity and curiosity, inviting honest responses and respecting people's level of participation.

Group process

Gather a group of people interested in exploring and growing in their experience of prayer. Your group may gather only for this purpose and agree to meet once a month for up to 10 months. Yours may be an existing group who choose to use this material for a period of time in conjunction with other activities. The material can be the focus of retreat days. The material can also be used by groups meeting as committees and councils of the church where a shorter period of time may be given to working through material as the devotional focus of the meeting. Feel free to adapt and use the material to suit your circumstances. You could even copy the resource and distribute it monthly to the whole congregation with the pew sheet.

Preparation

Establish a venue, pattern for gathering and send out the invitations. Additional invitations are available through the Centre for Theology and Ministry. You may also like to create a journal for each group member. You could use an A5 ringbinder with blank pages for journalling. Each prayer style hand out could be added as you work through them. Do not give people all the prayer style sheets at the first session, hand out a new style each time you meet.

The first gathering

The first session is an important time for establishing a sense of trust in the group. Photocopy handouts for your group of the introductory session and the first prayer style. You may like to give each participant an Uphold bookmark, more are available from the CTM. There is an introductory handout to work through when you first gather. Make sure everyone has an opportunity to share responses to the questions on the sheet marked *Engage*. Divide into smaller groups if need be. Be conscious that prayer is a personal and sensitive topic and one that people may not be well practiced at discussing. Be affirming and remember that there are no right or wrong answers. It may take time for people to become comfortable to share more deeply with the group. Practice using each

prayer style yourself before introducing it to the group.

The first time you meet,

- Work through the introductory worksheet.
- Provide people with paper and pencils or *Uphold* journals to use during the prayer of the heart.
- Introduce the first prayer style. Give time for brief conversation about the prayer style and clarify any questions.
- Lead people in practicing the prayer including at least 10 minutes silence.
- At the conclusion of the prayer, invite people to share any initial reflections.
- Encourage people to practice the style of prayer during the period till you meet again. Encourage them to set a realistic expectation about how often they will pray and to uphold each other in prayer until you meet again.
- Decide how to use the covenant liturgy. When will your group be ready to make this commitment to one another? You could use it to conclude the first session.
- Give people bookmarks. You could write the names of all group members on the back of the bookmark and encourage people to pray for each other.

When you meet again

Structure the following sessions to include:

- A gathering prayer.
- A time for sharing reflections on experience of the prayer style you have been using. Initially suggest that you do not get into discussion about people's comments, but prayerfully listen to each person's reflections. Make sure everyone has an opportunity to share. Ask inviting questions that depth the experience.
- After every person has spoken, invite general comments on themes observed, concerns and emerging ideas.
- Half way through your time, hand out and introduce the new prayer style.
- Remember to provide materials needed for some prayer styles e.g. Bibles for lectio, material to make prayer beads for the Jesus Prayer.
- Give significant time to practicing the prayer style in silence together.
- Conclude with an opportunity for people to make brief initial observations.

Continue to meet in this way for the period you will be using *Uphold*.

- Gather, housekeeping and brief prayer.
- Each person shares reflections on prayer style.