



Gather & Pray

Title: Four Week Guide

Included:

- Description of Leadership Roles within your WCI team
- Outlines for four weekly Gather & Pray sessions.
- Overviews of several spiritual formation practices.

Introduction

Church teams begin the Whole Church Initiative (WCI) process with a “Gather & Pray” season, in which the team develops practices of prayer, teamwork, and spirit-centeredness. This is accomplished by the team establishing a rhythm of meeting together weekly for spiritual formation, discussion, and building covenant relationships. What follows is an outline of how a team could utilize a four-week time of preparation. This process is adapted from an eight-week version, and can be used for teams with limited time before the Learn phase of WCI or before engaging in other smaller projects.

The team meeting together consists of all persons who will undergo the WCI training or project, most likely including pastor(s), select staff, and lay leaders. The convener of this preparation season is a team member – preferably a lay person – who exhibits gifts in administration and leading groups, and who is chosen through the team’s prayerful discernment

Leadership Roles

Convener

The convener is responsible for managing the following items. Although the convener may be capable of handling every task, the process is more fruitful if they equip others and share the responsibilities.

- 1. Keeping the group’s rhythm**
Send meeting reminders at least two days before the meeting, and share follow-up notes within a couple of days after the meeting. This can be done over email.
- 2. Location set-up**
Make sure the gathering room is a comfortable atmosphere and free of distractions. Ideally, the group sits all together at one circular table.
- 3. Developing and timing the process for each meeting**
How the group spends time together is a flexible process, not an “agenda” or a list of to-do items. The convener of the meeting is the only one who needs to keep an eye on the process and timing. This allows the group to relax and move with the Holy Spirit, while the convener quietly adjusts as needed. This is a journey of discovery, not a race; an intentional process, not a forced assignment.
- 4. Spiritual Formation and Text Debriefing Leader assignments**
When Activities and Text Debriefings are well-prepared, everyone in the group can fully engage in the process. This task may include preparing materials or other support.

Keeper of the Covenant

Week 1 includes discussion on creating a basic peer-to-peer covenant for the group members to abide by during the Gather & Pray time. A covenant is different from a contract in that members commit unconditionally: each member chooses to abide by agreed-upon behaviors, whether others do so or not. The process of creating a covenant helps group members express their needs in building high-trust relationships, and will provide a strong foundation for the group as they enter the next phase of project development.

The convener or another selected group member types up the covenant and keeps track of how the group plans to hold one another accountable. Any group member may approach the covenant keeper if they feel something needs to be adjusted or addressed. The covenant keeper decides how covenant issues need to be handled, and serves as a mediator of any discussions around concerns. This covenant can be reviewed and adapted at any point of the WCI or other project journey and beyond.

Schedule

Each week the group meets for a two-hour period in a location free from distractions and heavy hospitality responsibilities.

The group may wish to share a meal or snack/dessert before or after their time together, but only as long as it does not become a stress point or distraction for any person(s) within the group. The two-hour time period does not include a meal, so this would need to be scheduled outside of the meeting time. Keep breaks brief (five minutes).

Where not otherwise indicated, instructions for group process below are intended for the convener.

Week 1

Introductions

Invite each person to share the following (consider writing up on a whiteboard or printing out questions so participants can remember what to answer). The following questions are intended to provide an introduction to the WCI process. For future projects, team members may wish to begin with sharing names and discussing other questions pertinent to the project at hand.

- Name
- What church(es) did you attend as a child? If you did not attend a church as a child, when and where did you start attending?
- What do you miss from your early church days? What do you NOT miss?
- From what you understand so far about this team, what are you most excited about? Most concerned/apprehensive about?

Establish a Basic Covenant

Discuss the expectations team members have or desire for themselves around attendance, technology, confidentiality, and other topics important to the group members. See Appendix A.

Discuss what it means for pastors/staff/laity to be in covenant together

All are encouraged to set positions aside within the space of this group and treat one another as brothers/sisters in Christ, first and foremost.

Break

Blue & Yellow Activity

Engage in the “Blue + Yellow = Green” art activity and discussion. See Appendix B.

Preparations for Week 2:

- Introduce concept of God Sightings. See Appendix C.
- Invite members to consider and prepare answers to the “Color Check-In” Questions. See Appendix B.
- Invite members to keep a notebook or journal to record their reflections from the meetings and readings.

Closing

John Wesley Covenant Prayer and Holy Communion. See Appendix D.

Week 2

Spiritual Formation

- God Sightings. See Appendix C
- Lectio Divina. See Appendix E.

Break

Review Basic Covenant

Invite group members to share how they feel about the basic covenant discussed the week prior. Make any desired changes so that all feel a healthy mix of comfort and challenge within the commitment.

Color Check-in

Encourage each group member to share their responses to the Color Check-In Questions. See Appendix B.

Closing

John Wesley Covenant Prayer and Holy Communion. See Appendix D.

Week 3

Spiritual Formation

- God Sightings. See Appendix C.
- Lectio Divina. See Appendix E.

Break

Color Check-in

Encourage each group member to share their responses to the Color Check-In Questions. See Appendix B.

Preparations for Week 4

Prayer Partner selection process. See Appendix F.

Select a way to celebrate together at your next gathering – share a meal or dessert, exchange small gifts, do something fun (movie, bowling, hiking, play games)... simply enjoy one another!

Closing

John Wesley Covenant Prayer and Holy Communion. See Appendix D.

Week 4

Spiritual Formation

- God Sightings. See Appendix C

Prayer Partners

- Invite Prayer Partners to meet privately, ideally in separate rooms.
- Prayer Partners form their own specific covenant. Topics to discuss include how often they will pray for one another, and when and how they can contact each other for prayer or updates each the week.
- Each person shares a request for prayer with their Prayer Partner.

Celebrate!

Closing

Holy Communion. Serve one another by passing the elements in a circle.
John Wesley Covenant Prayer and Holy Communion. See Appendix D.

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Michele Cox
Don Houtkooper
Sara Peaslee
Ginger Villalva

Laura Craven
Rhonda Lewis
Karen Plymell
Dave York

Cathy Houtkooper
Terry McGeeney
Mark Rudnik

You can download the full Spiritual Formation booklet form SonRise on the WCI website: <http://wholechurchinitiative.org/training-outline/gather-pray/>

Appendix A: Example of a Basic Covenant

Adapt to fit the desires of your group:

- We will each attend our weekly gatherings, beginning and ending on time. If someone has not arrived by the break time and has not notified someone in the group of their absence, they will receive a text or phone call during break time to make sure they are okay.
- Cell phones will be silenced during meetings, and we will not text or email except on break. If phone calls must be taken, the person will step outside of the meeting space.
- Confidentiality - A person may talk outside the group about what they themselves shared within the group, but will not talk about what others have shared, even to spouses.
- If a covenant issue arises with an individual or of the group as a whole, the keeper of the covenant will approach the topic in an appropriate and respectful manner. For example, a violation may warrant a mediated discussion between individuals or with the group as a whole.

Appendix B: Blue + Yellow = Green!

A group called ReImagine in San Francisco refers to the concepts of personal and social holiness as colored spaces. “Yellow space” refers to personal holiness aspects of faith – quiet times of prayer, meditation, Bible study, and self-examination. “Blue space” represents social holiness – activities that share love for our neighbor. Although most individuals will discover a personal preference toward one color, the goal is to become more “Green” – to live out faith through the overlapping of personal and social holiness.

(Reference: The Shaping of Things to Come by Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, pages 27-28)

Begin discussing this concept by providing a hands-on way for individuals to discuss their “color.” Invite the group to individually consider their personal preference and habits in practicing their faith. Ideally, provide paper, brushes, and blue and yellow paints, encouraging group members to paint pictures or a Venn diagram that represents how they live out their faith. If possible, display your paintings where they can be seen by others in the congregation. Encourage everyone to share about their pictures, and how they can grow toward becoming more “Green.”

Beginning in Week 2, individuals can share about their growth and faith experiences through what can be referred to as a “Color Check-In.” Below are questions that can help group members reflectively share:

Color Check-In Questions

- What Yellow activities have I been practicing?
- What Blue activities have I been practicing?
- How have I grown closer to God and others through these practices?
- How might my current practices be adapted or changed so as to become more Green?
- How can this group help me grow in becoming more Green?

Appendix C: God Sightings

Glory is God's Incarnated Awesomeness! Where have we seen God at work in the world? When was the last time you told someone a story about some incredible work you witnessed God do? Paul witnessed to the work of the Holy Spirit in the world. Despite all the challenges and problems and life threatening situations he faced-this was agenda item #1. We glorify God when we notice all the intricate and amazing things God does in our lives and in the world, from things that are so small we sometimes overlook them or so huge that we are overwhelmed. Followers of Jesus share tales of God's work in the world, we share our stories of how God has shown up and shown off. When we tell the stories, the Holy Spirit grows the Church deeper and stronger in the midst of the listening. When we share God Sightings; we praise and glorify God, encourage others on their walk with God, and increase our confidence in the present day activity of the Holy Spirit.

Process

Take turns sharing how you have seen God working in your community and in the world. Share and celebrate life transformation and God stories.

References

- Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church by Reggie McNeal

Appendix D: Covenant Prayer

The Covenant Prayer was written by John Wesley, founder of the Wesleyan movement. This prayer is appropriate for any and all occasions, but especially when the individual or group needs or desires to yield to God's path for the moment and/or future.

I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
thou art mine, and I am thine.
So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven.
Amen.

Process: This prayer can be prayed individually or corporately, spoken or silently. It can be used at any time during a gathering – beginning, end, or to refocus the group during times of activity transitions.

Appendix E: Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina, translated as “Divine Reading,” is a traditional practice of reading and meditating on scripture. Individuals or groups engage in a process of reading, silence, listening, and sharing around a passage, approximately a paragraph in length. The process typically reveals the Word as living text - alive yesterday, today, and always.

Process

The process can vary, based on time allotted or group size. Ruth Haley Barton in *Sacred Rhythms* lists four “movements” to the Lectio Divina process: Read, Reflect, Respond, and Rest (56-58). Reading should be done both silently and out loud, using different “voices” (male/female, varying ages/volumes/tones/speeds, etc.) if done in a group setting. Typically the same version of the passage is read, but some groups find hearing different versions to be beneficial. Reflection should be invited by asking group members to “listen” for what words or phrases are “rising up” or speaking to them, and perhaps why they believe this is so. Responses should be freely given and brief – participants should be invited to share the words or phrases that are rising up during their reflection, and are not required to provide a reason. Application is not required. Resting should be done in silence, allowing the text to plant itself within the hearts of the participants.

Notes

- Lectio is excellent for when an individual or group, for any reason, needs to slow down and focus on quality in reading of Scripture, rather than quantity. Highly valuable for when scripture has become “too familiar” – provides a fresh look.
- Before engaging in the process as a group, the facilitator should explain the steps and select readers so that the time can flow freely without interruption. Context (where the text fits within the biblical narrative) may also be helpful to explain before reading.
- Look and listen for where the Spirit is moving during the process, especially during the response time. Sometimes a particular word or phrase stands out for multiple people, and other times something different stands out for each individual. Both are recognized patterns of the Spirit moving.
- Allow and affirm wrestling and unanswered questions, evidence of the living Word of God speaking to and refining us today.

Example texts

Exodus 33:12-17

Psalms 139

Matthew 25: 31-46

John 15: 1-17

Modifications

Lectio Divina can also be done with song lyrics or other holy texts. Select a hymn where perhaps the tune has become the primary focus over the meaning of the lyrics. Singing the song can replace or follow resting.

Recommended Resource

Chapter 3 of Sacred Rhythms by Ruth Haley Barton

Appendix F: Prayer Partners

It is normal and healthy for the team as a whole to consist of several smaller, overlapping “inner circles” – in other words, each person will develop a special and unique bond with each member of the group. Celebrate this through a special prayer partner selection process, rather than randomly assigning pairs.

During the Week 4 session, allow each team member to prayerfully consider who from the group they would like to be their prayer partner. Have each person privately write down three names in no particular order (two names are sufficient for smaller groups). Encourage each person to consider the spiritual connection they feel with each person, rather than focusing on other aspects such as age or gender differences. Invite each person to write down the names of three people with whom they feel comfortable sharing openly, and who would also challenge them in this season of their faith journey.

The convener collects each person’s list. If there is an odd number of team members, the convener will not have a prayer partner, but will serve as a substitute when other team members are absent. This is not a disadvantaged situation for the convener, simply different. Talk with your convener trainer to discuss prayer partner options for the convener.

The convener reads each person’s requests, and prayerfully begins to create pairs. Make every attempt to pair each person with someone they requested.

Sometimes pair requests don’t work out perfectly, and sometimes one or two people are not requested by anyone else to be their prayer partner. In this situation, the convener can prayerfully contact someone they feel would be a good fit, and ask them to consider being that person’s prayer partner. This can be done discreetly and without much explanation – neither person needs to know why the convener is making a special request.

Announce Prayer Partners by email before the next meeting.