

CHAIN OF PRAYER
PRAYER VIGIL
HANDBOOK

PROVIDED BY



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CHAIN
OF
PRAYER

Prayer Vigil Handbook

Your prayer vigil links your congregation to a
continuous Chain of Prayer with Disciples
congregations from New Year's to Easter



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...Lord teach us how to pray



The Lord's Prayer

*Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
The power and the glory,
For ever and ever.
Amen*

SECTION FOUR

SUGGESTIONS OF BOOKS

Unless otherwise noted, the following resources are available from www.cokesbury.com 1-800-914-9934

A Spiritual Formation Workbook. By James Bryan Smith with Richard Foster

A small group resource based on a balanced strategy for spiritual growth, leading group members to explore spirituality in the contemplative, holiness, charismatic, social justice, and evangelical traditions. The workbook provides materials for eight 60-90 minute sessions, with suggestions for disciplines individuals can practice during the week.

Beginning Prayer. By John Killinger

Provides an excellent introduction for those wanting to begin a life of prayer and for those seeking renewal in their prayer life. Helps us learn “the act of being in God’s presence.”

Chalice Hymnal

A guide for daily worship is included in the back of the hymnal, with a Scripture passage and a hymn for each day.

Deep is the Hunger. By Howard Thurman

Written from the African-American perspective, these meditations are helpful for personal devotions.

Available from Friendship Press, Richmond, Indiana.

Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home. By Richard Foster

Deals honestly with questions concerning prayer, yet leads us beyond the questions to a deeper understanding of the practice of prayer, bringing us closer to God, to ourselves, to our community.

Too Busy Not to Pray. By Bill Hybels

A practical guide for developing a life of prayer, which deals with issues that often trouble us, such as how to deal with “unanswered prayers” and to “listen” to God.



Section one

Planning and Organizing the Prayer Vigil

Read the material on the following pages for descriptions and suggestions.

CHECK LIST

- Decide to have a Prayer Vigil and recommend date and the task group to work on arrangements.
- Get authentication by the Church Board.
- Enroll your congregation in the Chain of Prayer by contacting Disciples Hands on Missions.
- Announce and publicize the Chain of Prayer.
- Secure participants.
- Mail or hand the material to participants.
- Arrange the setting and resources.
- Participate in the vigil.
- Evaluate.

WHAT IS A PRAYER VIGIL?

A Prayer Vigil is continuous prayer by many persons during a certain period of time. It is a powerful force in spiritual preparation for expressing the evangelistic mission of the Church. These unusual days require more than the ordinary. Our strength reinforced by God’s power, through personal encounter, is required to meet the demands of our times.

The twenty-four hour Prayer Vigil offers to persons who share in it the opportunity for a time of uninterrupted dialogue with God.

When your congregation keeps its Prayer Vigil, it becomes an essential link in

a vast Chain of Prayer. Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregations are thus joined together in *unbroken prayer* from the early hours of January 1 until the beginning of Easter morning.

The number of persons taking part in the Prayer Vigil will be determined largely by the size of the congregation. If the time is broken into one-hour periods, at least twenty-four persons will be needed. When there are half-hour periods, forty-eight volunteers are required. Advance instructions to all participants should make it clear that each person is expected to arrive a bit ahead of time and remain until the arrival of the next participant.

A Prayer Vigil may begin at any hour and proceed for twenty-four uninterrupted hours. The enrollment form suggests a schedule from 6:00 a.m. to 5:59 a.m. the following day. Each congregation, of course, is free to set its own time span of twenty-four hours, but the prayer should be continuous.

Many congregations use an elder and a deacon, or a couple, to serve as captains for three-hour periods throughout the twenty-four hours of the Prayer Vigil. They wait patiently and quietly near the prayer room, always alert to the needs of all persons sharing in the Chain of Prayer. It is reassuring to all prayer participants—whatever the time of their vigil—to know that they are not alone in the church building.

WHAT DO WE DO?

What do you do? Well, you know, routine things like make phone calls, arrange rides, get posters put up, etc.

But, there is another answer in the midst of the activities. You serve as a priest, being faithful to the holy function of leading the people of faith into the presence of God through prayer.

It's true, you will wear no vestments and hold no elevated standing. But, as you prepare the Prayer Vigil you will be living out one part of the priesthood of all believers, the arranging for your brothers and sisters to have an opportunity for encounter with God in prayer.

Now, on to that checklist—but with the understanding that it is a guide to assist you in faithful fulfillment of your priestly role.

Your congregation may already have completed the first three items of the check list: decide and organize, authenticate, enroll. The steps are described here so that you can catch up on any item you may have missed.

Almighty God, out of chaos you called into being the stars and gave them orbits, out of darkness you called the light, out of the wilderness you brought the wandering into a land of promise.

Call forth now from our timid and confused hearts the light and purpose that will make us servants of peace, lovers of justice, and workers for a community that fulfills the promise that all may lie down unafraid of neighbor, war or hunger.

O God, before you all nations are accountable.

Do not let us pray for peace without asking us to risk the path of trust.

Do not let us pray for justice without teaching us that justice is more than dividing up what we already have.

Do not let us pray for the oppressed without calling us to share in the responsibility of their oppression.

Almighty God, we desire your rules in our lives and in our nation. Keep that desire alive in us and grant us the courage to let that love of your kingdom lead us, even as it led Jesus to his death and resurrection. In his name we pray.
AMEN

Thomas O Russell



Section Three

PROVIDING RESOURCES FOR USE DURING THE PRAYER VIGIL

Many persons who enter a prayer vigil may need to have some resources to help them get started in prayer and meditation. Place the items on the following list where they can be easily found by participants.

- Various translations of the Bible
- A variety of hymnals and service books
- “A Pattern for Christian Prayer”
- The following list of Psalms:

NIGHT: 1, 3, 4, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 23, 25, 26, 33, 40, 41, 42, 52, 56, 57, 58, 60, 70, 75, 76, 78, 82, 83, 85, 87, 101, 104, 135, 137, 142, 143

MORNING: 5, 6, 36, 41, 48, 49, 62, 65, 71, 74, 99, 100, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 141, 149

MID-DAY: 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131

EVENING: 2, 4, 9, 17, 20, 22, 43, 44, 45, 46, 66, 89, 91, 94, 95, 96, 97, 108, 134, 136

- A printed prayer by the pastor
- A printed prayer by an elder
- A tape or CD player and worship music
- A prayer for peacemakers:

DECIDE AND ORGANIZE

The introduction of the Prayer Vigil may have come from most any segment of the congregation: concerned individuals, a church school class, the church cabinet, a functional department. It frequently originates in either the Worship Department or the Evangelism Department.

After having one of the Departments request a Prayer Vigil, a structure is needed. A functional department such as evangelism may be the Prayer Vigil Task Group. However, the Prayer Vigil committee may consist of the pastor, chairperson of the Evangelism and Worship Departments or committees, with two additional persons from each of these departments or committees. The Prayer Vigil convener should be chosen from this group. He or she may be elected by the group or appointed by the pastor or the chairperson/moderator of the congregation’s administrative/general board.

AUTHENTICATE

The recommendations to have a Prayer Vigil was taken to the Board, which approves a date and task group.

ENROLL

An enrollment form or letter is mailed, emailed, or faxed to Chain or Prayer, DHM, P.O. Box 1986, Indianapolis, IN 46206-1986. Fax number 317-635-4426. Your congregation thereby becomes part of a church-wide prayer emphasis that will have some person from the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) at prayer at all times during the one hundred days from New Year's Day until Easter.

Now, you have a packet of Prayer Vigil material which includes this handbook, a sign-up sheet for securing participants, and a copy of the brochure entitled “A Pattern for Christian Prayer.” If your congregation requests it, at a time close to your Prayer Vigil date you will receive a listing of any congregations that are holding a vigil the same day. You are now ready to proceed down the check list!

ANNOUNCE

Well in advance of the date of your Prayer Vigil, all means possible should be used to inform members of the congregation’s participation in the unbroken Chain of Prayer. Make certain that all members, including shut-ins, learn exactly what is involved in the Prayer Vigil and *when and where* it will be observed.

Repeated reminders should be made every week in enthusiastic announcements from the pulpit and in every youth and adult church school class. Notices should be published in the church's printed material, such as the news bulletin and the worship bulletin. The auxiliary fellowship groups are not to be neglected for they are a source of real support for the Prayer Vigil. Usually there is in a congregation a person of creative artistry who will prepare some special display piece. Pictures of previous Prayer Vigil participants or of the worship center are useful in publicity. Children's departments can make advance publicity posters when given the information on the Prayer Vigil.

SECURE PARTICIPANTS

The Prayer Vigil sign-up sheet which is sent when your congregation enrolls, should be placed in a conspicuous location in the church building so the most people will see it. Everyone who agrees to share in the Chain of Prayer is to sign this sheet opposite the time for his or her personal participation.

Members of the church should be urged to register their intentions to participate by signing the Prayer Vigil sign-up sheet. Shut-ins who participate, of course, may simply sign cards. Older persons, some disabled persons and shut-ins will pray in their homes and phone the next participant at the vigil location.

Some congregations find it helpful to print names of participants in the church paper. Special care should be given to the enlistment of persons for the difficult hours from 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. Some churches secure only men for these hours while others enroll married couples. Classes or small groups can add to the prayer experience by taking one of the periods as a group.

MAIL OR HAND MATERIAL TO PARTICIPANTS

Each participant should receive a list of the names of all sharing in the Prayer Vigil with the exact time when each is to be on hand for prayer. (The sample letter in Section Two may be used.)

Also, each participant should be provided with the guidance prepared by the Prayer Vigil committee. These instructions may be copied or adapted from Section Two of this handbook, or the committee may prepare its own suggestions. It will be helpful to write each participant's name on the front of the material and the exact time which he or she will pray. Cancellations should be avoided except for extreme emergencies.

Alexander Campbell (1786-1866) A Founder of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Scriptures are to be read to understand them, and then "to receive any benefit from them, we must earnestly pray for the Spirit to apply them and to explain them to our hearts."

Thomas Campbell (1763-1854) A Founder of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

I walk alone the solitary fields and groves, to indulge meditation, and commune in holy aspirations, in looks, sighs and tears, with my everywhere and ever-present Father—the great I Am—to whom I freely speak as it occurs, upon any subject of these vast and mighty concerns...Thus conversing with my heavenly Father...I feel refreshed, consoled and delighted...

Robert Richardson (1806-1876) Professor, Physician, A Campbell Biographer, editor of Millennial Harbinger

It is here that everything should promote that solemn stillness and that reverential awe, which prepare the heart for communion with God and a better appreciation of the deep mysteries of His grace. It is in the contemplation of these that the soul reaches forward into an unseen eternity, and anticipates the day when freed from trammels of morality, it shall be free to explore those wonders now so imperfectly perceived and understood.

Walter Scott (1796-1861) Frontier Evangelist

I enjoyed the feast of a hundred hills, all lying in the quietude of the infinite, who had formed them a feature of his own power. For a moment I retreated to the back of the mountain, that I might enjoy the sweets of solitude, that I might converse for a moment with the great sentiment of power that impressed itself on the surrounding scene...With the multitude of hills lying all around me. I could not but lift up my head as being in the presence of God.

Barton Stone (1772-1844) A Founder of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

May the Lord direct our minds into love of God, and patient waiting for the Lord Jesus. Prayer is the means by which we receive the grace of God, and enjoy sweet communion with the Father and the Son.

Peter Ainslie (1867-1934) Disciples Minister, Christian Temple, Baltimore, Ecumenist

Thoughts are the little streams in my soul area that are easily turned into whatever direction wished, and they gather strength from continual repetition, when they break forth into words or acts or both. Two wishes make a will, and the will molds my being. To live most carefully is to live with a consciousness of all my thought streams being beneath the eye of God, *for He is always in sight and hears what I think ere it throbs into being.* Let God speak to my heart and search me.

The principal of communion. The souls must have intimate association with God. The chief method of communion is prayer. On one occasion, after the disciples had listened to Jesus pray, one of them said, "Lord, teach us to pray, even as John also taught his disciples" (Lk. 11:1). It was the honest call of a soul ignorant of the principles of its approach to God. *It is still the greatest necessity in Christian experience.* No amount of learning can ever be a substitute for prayer. Its experiences transcend those of any other life. There can be no devotional development without it, and the Sunday-school teacher who has prayed has studied well, for while a prepared lesson is essential, a prepared heart is even more essential. Methods, organizations and programs are always secondary to prayer. The soul's communion with God is primary, whether it has to do with its own development or the development of others. *All along the way should be emphasized as tactfully and as reverently as possible the purpose of prayer and answers to prayer.* Because of the soul's universal hunger for communion with God, it should be trained in prayer.

Marguerite Harmon Bro (1894-1977) Disciples Missionary, Author

Even as beginners we all know that the greatest thing that can happen in prayer is a sense of the presence of God. It is the possibility of this experience that makes praying such an exhilarating undertaking. The tiniest moment of feeling lifted into full harmony, of standing on the verge of grasping the meaning of life—even a fleeting experience of such wholeness is so transforming that we take up our daily tasks as if we were new persons. About as near as we can come to expressing these high moments is to say that occasionally instead of offering adoration and straining for understanding, we become adoration and understanding. For a fraction of a second or for a time whose duration we do not measure, we are made complete.

All prayer participants may be called together for briefing. This group involvement should be one or two days before the Prayer Vigil. Such orientation is especially helpful if this is the first time your congregation is sharing in the unbroken Chain of Prayer. Even if it is not the first time, new participants will welcome such a briefing.

Well in advance of your Prayer Vigil, your pastor may join with your prayer committee chairperson to write and send letters of Christian greetings to other congregations observing the Chain of Prayer on the same day.

ARRANGING THE SETTING AND RESOURCES

A worship setting for your Prayer Vigil may be arranged in the sanctuary, chapel, or classroom. A Sunday church school class may accept responsibilities for the arrangements.

Light may be focused on the chancel or chapel from a spotlight. Indirect lighting is possible from behind a large cross and candles on the Lord's Table.

The Lord's Table is often the focus of the worship center. It may be arranged with the communion emblems, cross and candles, the open Bible, or a painting of a Biblical event.

Devotional materials may be readily available for the use of all participants. These should include different translations of the Bible, *The Challice Hymnal*, "A Pattern for Christian Prayer," and other devotional materials, including the list of appropriate scriptures and prayer concerns. Pencils and blank paper should also be at hand so that participants may record thoughts, write prayers or poems.

Section Four of this handbook gives a list of books of prayer and devotions. You may wish to make some of these available for use by vigil participants, along with a list of other congregations sharing your same Prayer Vigil date.



PARTICIPATE IN THE VIGIL

You are giving priestly leadership. You are experiencing the nuts and bolts of the priesthood of all believers as you prepare the Prayer Vigil.

But what of your own life in the Spirit? What of your own retouching the source or your life? Be a participant! Share deeply in this event in your congregation's life.

Our mechanical suggestion remains. It is tempting to show the people of your congregation early that the Prayer Vigil is backed by your commitment. Your name is then the first to appear on the Prayer Vigil sign-up sheet. It may be wiser to hold back from signing until the end and then take those often difficult to fill times in the middle of the night.

EVALUATE

Soon after the twenty-four vigil, the Task Group should convene to evaluate. What worked well? What was ineffective? Was the experience beneficial to the participants?

These comments can either be recorded at a set evaluation time or informally as the committee returns books to owners and the vigil setting to its previous appearance.

Are there recommendations which the committee wishes to record for next year's committee? Are there suggestions for enhancing spiritual life throughout the year?

Section Two

PREPARING THE PARTICIPANTS FOR THE PRAYER VIGIL

To: The Prayer Vigil Task Group
From: The Authors of this Handbook
RE: Suggested Material for Preparing Prayer Vigil Participants

The items of Section Two in the handbook may be effective in preparing your people for the vigil, or they may be ineffective. The important thing is for your Task Group to make that judgment and not use the material blindly.

As you make the decision, be aware that the material in Section Two and Section Three is for two uses. The first use is for mailing or giving to participants a week ahead of the vigil. The second use is to have available for use during the vigil.

Study the material. Let the Task Group share opinions on effectiveness. Reproduce those portions of the material judged to be effective, and send them on to those who will come to pray.

MATERIAL FOR MAILING TO PARTICIPANTS

Item No.1 Sample letter

Dear _____:

Thank you for being one of the persons who will pray during the Prayer Vigil at _____ Christian Church.

I am enclosing the list of participants to make sure each one knows the agreed upon time. It would be a good idea for you to check the list now to see that you have the time you thought you had. Call me if you find a problem.

This Prayer Vigil will put us in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Chain of Prayer. That means that some person in the Christian Church, some place on this continent, is at prayer at all times between New Years Day and Easter.

It is important that the Chain of Prayer be kept unbroken. One way to help is to phone the next person on the Prayer Vigil list before you leave home. If you have time in the middle of the night, please check ahead with the person. Waking the rest of the family may not be appreciated.

Some materials are enclosed for you to read and consider before the Prayer Vigil. These items are meant to help you prepare for your experience of participating in the Prayer Vigil.

May the peace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, be with you.

(signature)
Convener of the Prayer Vigil Task Group