

# Prayer Meeting Formats

*By Fr. Peter Smith, Archdiocesan Liaison*

One of the issues that prayer groups have to deal with is that of the format of prayer meetings. Often, once the newness of charismatic prayer meetings becomes normal, it can become the same old thing from week to week, i.e., it becomes “boring.” One solution for this is to have variations in what we do in prayer meetings. Something that I know worked reasonably well from my past involvement in campus prayer meetings was in changing the format and focus of the meetings from week to week. We utilized several different formats in sequence so people did not settle into a prayer meeting rut. Here are some options to consider.

## **1. Regular meeting.**

These meetings followed the traditional format and had a progression something like this.

- a. Begin with a time of praise and exuberant songs.
- b. Move into a time of deeper worship, and praying or singing in the Spirit.
- c. A period for spiritual gifts, usually prophecy, inspired texts from scripture, and sharing of a personal sense from the Lord.
- d. A period of personal sharing.
- e. A brief period of praying for intercessions and particular needs of people.
- f. Announcements.
- g. A final song.

## **2. Teaching meeting.**

In these meetings someone is assigned to give a teaching or presentation on a particular topic of interest to the people at the meeting.

- a. Begin with a time of praise and exuberant songs.
- b. Move into a time of deeper worship, and praying or singing in the Spirit.
- c. A period for spiritual gifts, usually prophecy, inspired texts from scripture, and sharing of a personal sense from the Lord.
- d. The teaching or presentation.
- e. A brief period of praying for intercessions and particular needs of people.
- f. Announcements.
- g. A final song.

There are numerous topics that could be covered in a teaching. And there are a lot of sources one can draw them from. Some examples of teaching topics could be:

- Prayer, learning to pray, structuring a prayer time, methods of prayer, what to do when prayer seems dry.
- Scripture, reading scripture, studying scripture, praying with scripture, meditating with scripture.
- Guidance, discerning God's will, methods of discernment, accounting for what we already know.
- Overcoming sin, the world, the flesh, the devil, spiritual warfare.
- Repairing relationships, repentance, forgiveness, restitution.
- Spiritual growth, being faithful, spiritual direction.
- Evangelism, testimonies, reaching out to others, strategies, being open to God's direction.
- Service, a heart of a servant, obstacles to serving, Jesus example.

Charisms, the purpose of charisms, different charismatic gifts, using the charisms. These are only some example of what we could look at. We could also look at aspects of Jesus life and ministry, aspects of the Church, the many aspects of the apostolate, etc.

Another variation on this theme is to have a "canned" presentation of some sort. It may be a tape or CD of a talk or presentation at some other event. It could be a video clip that everyone could see and listen to. In this way we are able to bring very accomplished and competent speakers into the prayer meeting and have everyone benefit from that.

### **3. Scripture Study meeting.**

These meetings began like normal meetings and then went in a very different direction

- a. Begin with a time of praise and exuberant songs.
- b. Move into a time of deeper worship, and praying or singing in the Spirit.
- c. A period for spiritual gifts, usually prophecy, inspired texts from scripture, and sharing of a personal sense from the Lord.
- d. People are split up into groups of about five or six people each, and a group facilitator is named.
- e. Everyone gets a copy of the scripture study and then is asked to take five minutes or more to prayerfully read the scripture and reflect on the questions.
- f. For the rest of the meeting until just before the close, the groups discuss the questions and the scriptures.
- g. Gather for any announcements.

- h. Final song.

For these meetings we prepared a handout for people that was a single page, one or both sides being used. It began with one or more scriptures printed on it. Thereafter we had a series of five to eight questions that were based on the scriptures. The questions were design to lead people in a particular progression and to certain answers. The discussion was not meant to rigidly adhere to the questions but to serve as a guide or focus to the discussion. The overall purpose was to help people become more familiar with scripture, more familiar with how to do simple scripture studies and how to participate in group discussions.

Another variation of this is to use an appropriate article or story for people to read and reflect on.

#### **4. Personal Sharing meeting.**

These meetings also began in the normal fashion but the focus was on sharing how God had worked in our lives, or how we had seen God at work around us over the previous few weeks. What is different about this is that we did this in small groups, similar to the scripture study meetings.

- a. Begin with a time of praise and exuberant songs.
- b. Move into a time of deeper worship, and praying or singing in the Spirit.
- c. A period for spiritual gifts, usually prophecy, inspired texts from scripture, and sharing of a personal sense from the Lord.
- d. People are split up into groups of about five or six people each, and a group facilitator is named.
- e. Then the groups take the bulk of the remaining time and share with one another how God was working in their lives, how they had seen God at work around them over the previous few weeks.
- f. When group leaders hear a sharing that is really inspiring or would be very helpful for everyone to hear, they should encourage that person to share that at the next regular meeting so everyone can hear it. This allows the core team to distill some really good sharing from all those given so that when they all come during one regular meeting, people are really moved and inspired. And only those in the small group where it was first shared would be hearing it for the second time. It also allows the small group leader to help the person sharing, to hone their sharing and make especially effective in the larger group.
- g. Gather for any announcements.
- h. Final song.

## **5. Personal Testimony meeting.**

These meetings also began in the normal fashion but the focus was on sharing how God has called us to follow him. We share our “conversion” story, or how our faith came alive.

- a. Begin with a time of praise and exuberant songs.
- b. Move into a time of deeper worship, and praying or singing in the Spirit.
- c. A period for spiritual gifts, usually prophecy, inspired texts from scripture, and sharing of a personal sense from the Lord.
- d. People are split up into groups of about five or six people each, and a group facilitator is named.
- e. Then the groups take the bulk of the remaining time and share their testimonies with one another.
- f. Gather for any announcements.
- g. Final song.

The effect of this kind of meeting is that we are more easily connected to one another through knowing each other’s stories. Some testimonies can be very inspiring and give great hope to others in the group. Also, some people have struggled through things successfully and that can be a help for others. Again, the group leader may hear testimonies that may be particularly helpful for the whole group and can refer the person to the leader or care team later on.

Another variation of this meeting is to have people work together on developing a three minute version of their testimony. A short well prepared testimony that someone has worked on can be very effective in normal conversational situations. During the sharing time, the facilitator can give an example and then have one person share their testimony and then have the group work with them in fine tuning it into something very effective.

## **6. Praying with people meeting.**

These meetings begin the normal way but have a large part them focused on praying with one another.

- a. Begin with a time of praise and exuberant songs.
- b. Move into a time of deeper worship, and praying or singing in the Spirit.
- c. A period for spiritual gifts, usually prophecy, inspired texts from scripture, and sharing of a personal sense from the Lord.
- d. People are split up into groups of about five or six people each, and a group facilitator is named.
- e. Then the groups take the bulk of the remaining time and pray with each member

for whatever particular needs they may have. Remind people that the goal is for everyone in each group to receive prayer, if they desire it so they can't monopolize the group for their own needs.

- f. About ten minutes from the end let people know so they can make sure everyone has an opportunity for prayer.

The advantage of this kind of meeting is that you demonstrate to those unfamiliar or hesitant about praying with people how to do it. You don't need to overdo it and spend twenty minutes with each person. Be matter of fact and trust the Lord. Also, you can have different members of the small group take the lead in praying with people. That way we draw them into what we are doing.

In addition it is also a practical example for folks about praying in tongues and using spiritual gifts in these settings. People are usually more willing to be venturesome in a group setting when they have some "cover."

## **7. Inspired Sharing motivated Praise and worship.**

This is a variation on the regular meeting and the personal sharing meeting.

- a. Begin with an opening song, then have everyone sit.
- b. Then have three to five people give good sharing, ones that really move people.
- c. Then continue with the praise and worship, but key the songs off the sharing, and let it go on for some time.
- d. Move into a time of deeper worship, and praying or singing in the Spirit.
- e. A period for spiritual gifts, usually prophecy, inspired texts from scripture, and sharing of a personal sense from the Lord.
- f. The leader then draws the meeting to a close with a short commentary on what was heard, what may have come through spiritual gifts, and what to remember in the week ahead.
- g. Announcement.
- h. Closing song.

In this format we use the selected sharing, and any others that may be given, to inspire and move those present to praise and worship the Lord more deeply. That in turn will usually lead to a greater depth of spiritual gifts and a greater openness to the Lord. If these kind of meetings go well, people can really be touched by the Lord in them and experience his presence deeply. It is important to remind people what they heard at the end, and to give them something to focus on in the week ahead.

## **8. Meditation and Reflection meeting.**

This is a variation of the teaching or presentation meeting.

- a. Begin with a time of praise and exuberant songs.
- b. Move into a time of deeper worship, and praying or singing in the Spirit.
- c. A period for spiritual gifts, usually prophecy, inspired texts from scripture, and sharing of a personal sense from the Lord.
- d. The meditation or guided reflection.
- e. Peoples' responses.
- f. A brief period of praying for intercessions and particular needs of people.
- g. Announcements.
- h. A final song.

The meditation or reflection is usually, but not always, based on scripture. One way to do it is to have people get into a comfortable, prayer posture. Then take a piece of scripture, e.g., one of the scenes in the Gospels involving Jesus and read it to people. Then do the meditation or reflection. This may involve asking people to place themselves in the scene and personalizing it. Then at some point Jesus speaks to them. What does he say? Another way is to do a reflection and to ask questions.

Having people share what touched them or what they heard can be very helpful for the others present. You could do this in the large group or in smaller groups.

## **9. Fellowship meeting.**

This type of meeting is focused on developing relationships and friendships among prayer group members.

- a. Begin with a time of praise and exuberant songs.
- b. Move into a time of deeper worship, and praying or singing in the Spirit.
- c. A period for spiritual gifts, usually prophecy, inspired texts from scripture, and sharing of a personal sense from the Lord.
- d. Announcements.
- e. Break into the party for the rest of the evening. Encourage people to talk to at least one person they don't know, or don't know well. In this way people become more attached to the meeting and to some of the people attending. It also provides another opportunity for informal sharing of life among the participants. In addition, it allows people to relax and enjoy each others company in a setting that's familiar to them.

You may want to experiment with some of these general formats to see what works best for your prayer group.