

Leading Groups in Prayer

Offering workshops in different methods of prayer is a way of helping people to encounter God in new ways, to deepen their relationship with Christ and to offer them further tools for an ongoing prayer life. Developing the skills of presenting, talking about prayer and leading groups in prayer is not an end in itself but a response to a call to let God be known.

Finding a balance, trusting God and using our human and God given skills and experience.

There's an old saying that we should "pray as if everything depends on God, work as if everything depends on you." It's been attributed to Ignatius (though there's no evidence that he said it), and many think it captures the Ignatian spirit: turning it all over to God in prayer and then working tirelessly and urgently to do God's work. I prefer to reverse it: "pray as if everything depends on you, work as if everything depends on God." This means that prayer has to be urgent: God has to do something dramatic if everything depends on me. It also puts our work in the right perspective: if it depends on God, we can let it go. We can work hard but leave the outcome up to him. If God is in charge we can tolerate mixed results and endure failure.

Ignatius writes about work and human effort in a letter to an aristocrat named Jerome Vines, whom I imagine was a busy, hard-charging, Type A character who was getting upset about the fate of his many projects. A busy man, Ignatius writes, "must make up his mind to do what he can, without afflicting himself if he cannot do all that he wishes. You must have patience and not think that God our Lord requires what man cannot accomplish." He concludes with this: "There is no need to wear yourself out, but make a competent and sufficient effort, and leave the rest to him who can do all he pleases.

Jim Manney <http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/13274/work-as-if-everything-depends-on-god>

THE ROOM

- Arrangement of chairs – circle / horseshoe : Where does the presenter stand or sit?
- Do you need more than one space available – moving chairs can be disruptive
- Flip chart / projector / lectern / music stand ...
- Lighting – dim might be atmospheric but not good for presenting, ?? change for each
- Where is the sun ... if anywhere, and where will it move
- Warmth ...but not too warm : And tea and coffee facilities
- Ventilation – are there windows you can open, especially in the afternoon
- Where are the loos : Where are the fire exits
- We aware of accessibility needs

FACILITATORS STYLE

Rapport with group.

Present with a degree of confidence that creates safety for the group. They may not know one another, may not be comfortable. Important that people know that you know what is going on and all will be well. Not arrogant but confidence – be yourself. Establishing any rules and boundaries : Learn people's names – note them down and/or acknowledge if you are bad at

remembering: Make eye contact with as many as possible – be aware you are likely to have a preference to talk to your right or your left: Invite and acknowledge contributions : Encourage some interaction within the group, talk to neighbour.

- **Smiling helps – relaxes you and shows confident.** What will help you enjoy this experience?
- Loudness of voice – particularly when leading prayer : Modulation of voice – not monotone
- Speaking clearly or mumbling ... Pace of speaking – it will be different for talking or when leading prayer
- Your own stillness – be comfortable but still
- **Attitudes:** confident, genuine, friendly, approachable
- **Willing to share something of yourself, but it's not about you!**
- Avoid speaking too much, be comfortable with silences. You will become aware of the difference between a thoughtful silence and a prayerful silence
- How to get the attention of the group – clap, bell, singing bowl etc.
- **Don't be apologetic**, or lower expectations of the group to make yourself feel better
- Be genuine, not trying to be someone you are not! If you are struggling with something be honest, humour can be helpful

CONTENT OF PRESENTATION & HOLDING THE SPACE

- Simple and clear objectives for the session. **What message do you want to get across?**
- Know exactly how you are going to start ... confidence ... Welcome
- Engage with group – don't just lecture
- Check out with the whole group – but not 100 times! – not just a few noddors, Whole group important
- Start on time and keep to time at end : Break up a long session, change activities
- Have questions they can chat to each other about – not deep sharing. Take feedback from the chat – does the group share much in pairs or as a whole
- Don't just read from a script, know well enough to talk from notes or bullet points
- Know how you are going to finish ... and what happens next
- People learn in different ways – hearing, seeing, reading, writing, kinaesthetic ...
- Online resources and ideas, as well as inventories to find out your own!

LEADING A GROUP THROUGH A WAY OF PRAYING

- **Don't forget to pray yourself before the workshop, and remember why you are doing this.** It is unlikely you will be as consciously attentive to God when you lead others in prayer, your focus will be on the group
- Remember it's about the individuals meeting God / Jesus, leave space for that encounter
- You can ask them to close eyes or focus on floor. You may want to create a focal point in the centre

- A gentle voice is OK – but you need to be heard. Be aware of people with hearing difficulties
- Pace. Keep an eye on the group, are they still or shifting
- Let people know how long you will pray for, if there will be silence and how you will end it – not knowing can be very stressful for some people

BRIEF TIPS

- **Prepare but keep it simple**
- **Start with confidence** – make sure you know how you are going to start
- **Remember** You are in charge and the group generally accepts this, and are friendly! Remember Eleanor Roosevelt's wisdom - 'no-one can intimidate me without my permission'
- **Attention span 5 – 10 mins** for any single unbroken subject. An audience often wiggle and are less comfortable after about 40 mins – need to stand, move break.
- Break up content so no single item more than a few minutes.
- Spice – bringing presentations and audiences to life! Buzz : Brainstorm : Video clip / images : Props : Quotes : Straw polls / taking the temperature
- Take the pressure off yourself by not speaking all the time! Get the group doing things

PLAYING TO YOUR STRENGTHS - As you look at this long list and in the light of your own experience in various contexts being in or working with groups:- What are some of your existing strengths? What do you know you know? What do you know you can do?

GROWING EDGES - What do you think is most challenging for you at this point? And why?