

Love

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Dear Prayer Leader,

Thank you for leading this prayer on the charism of *Love*.

A charism is like a living gift. It is a way of living or doing, inspired by Jesus, which links us to God. As you pray with your staff, we hope that you will develop a clearer appreciation of how each charism can impact on your life and the lives of those around you.

In this prayer module, your charism is linked to the spirituality of the Benedictine Orders and to the prayer style of Lectio Divina.

Gathering

Each prayer starts with a brief ritual that serves to engage and focus everyone to the spirit of the prayer. As well as being a means of focusing your staff, it is also a way to add another level of meaning and understanding to the charism.

The ritual for your prayer involves inviting each staff member to take a crayon and to write their name into the front of the prayer intentions book. The symbolism of the crayons reminds us of the way in which God loves us, his 'children'.

Alternatives for larger staff groups where time is an issue may be to invite them to:

- write on an A3 sheet/s, allowing more people to write at once.
- write in the book as they leave.
- write in the book before the end of the day.

Reading and Reflection

The reading is Matthew 22:36-40. The reflection material invites us to consider what it means to love in the way Jesus did.

Prayer

The prayer style is Lectio Divina. It is a method of interacting with scripture that invites you to focus on a phrase or word ultimately leading to a deeper coming together with God.

If you are not familiar with it, it may be a good idea to practice the prayer exercise with someone first.

Surprises

Add to the experience of the prayer by continuing to bring your prayer's charism to people's attention during the week. Here are a few ideas to get you started.

- *Sprinkle love hearts onto the staff table.*
- *Find/ compile a CD of love songs – have it playing during lunch*
- *Create a sign: "To love is to receive a glimpse of heaven."*

The structure and ideas we have included are just suggestions. Please feel free to modify or add to the wording to make the experience more personal and relevant for your staff.

Adding your own touches will not only make the experience more enriching for you personally, but also for the rest of your staff.

Best of luck.

Love

We Gather

God of love,
You lead us on life's journey.
As we gather here in Your name,
Open our minds to know Your voice.
Open our hands to do Your work.
And open our hearts to hold Your Spirit.
Amen



"crayons" flickr photo by niznoz
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We Listen

One of the experts in the law asked Jesus...

*Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?
He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
and with all your soul, and with all your mind."
This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it:
"You shall love your neighbour as yourself."
On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'*
Matthew 22:36-40

We Respond

Love finds expression in so many different ways. Rethink the things you have said and done today... how are they 'love'?

This kind of love we are talking about is not the cupids and chocolate kind of love
(though that can be good!)

It can be tough love and it can mean we have to dig deep for the bigger picture.
Recall your own experience of this challenge of love, honouring what you have given.

We Pray

As we go about our day O God,
As we strive to walk with Jesus as people of love,
Remind us that we are the face of Christ,
Who is with us always.

May your grace, mercy and peace,
Bless us, keep us and transform us all,
This day, now and forever.

Amen

Words of Wisdom

Love is what we are born with. Fear is what we learn.
The spiritual journey is the unlearning of fear and prejudices
and the acceptance of love back in our hearts.
Love is the essential reality and our purpose on earth.
Marianne Williamson from "A Return to Love"

Love

Using the notes:

Sections to be read by the leader are marked with Leader: at the beginning.

Texts in bold type are notes and guiding information for leaders and provide a guide for what to do or say.

Resources:

*Crayons
Head, Heart, Hands candles
Staff candle
Matches
Prayer intentions book*

Setting up for Prayer:

- *Prepare a prayerful space suitable for your staff to gather around. Have ready...*
 - *The 'Head', 'Hands' & 'Heart' candles to light in the opening prayer.*
 - *Your staff candles.*
 - *The prayer intentions book.*
- *Have the 'Quickfire Prayer Cards' ready to distribute at the end of the prayer time.*
- *Have your handouts ready.*
- *Make sure your staff prayer book and crayons/ coloured pens are available.*
- *Organise someone to read the scripture passage*

We Gather

As we begin our series of staff prayers for this term our focus is on the charisms of Jesus. Charisms are like living gifts.

They are a way of living or being which is life giving.

Particular people in our church story have been identified with particular charisms and these in time have become associated with the founding stories of religious orders inspired by these very people.

Our staff prayers in the coming weeks will focus on the charism gifts visible in the life of Jesus. In a very real sense Jesus depended on these charisms of the Spirit. He lived these out every day and so are we called to as well.

These charisms belong to the church – the community of followers of Jesus...across the globe, across time.

Our prayer journey this week invites us to walk with Jesus through his charism of love.

Love is one of the focusing charisms of the Benedictine religious orders. In his Rule for monastic life St Benedict wrote for his monks;

"Your way of acting should be different from the world's way: the love of Christ must come before all else."

It is this focus on understanding, accepting and placing above all else this gift of love that directs those who follow today in the way of Jesus through St Benedict's Rule.

Throughout Jesus ministry he taught about the love of God for us. He knew God to be as close as a parent can be to their child.

The writer of John's gospel understood this relationship with God clearly and deeply enough to be able to say "God is love".

To begin our prayer journey this term, we invite you to sign your name in our staff prayer intentions book with a crayon.

(For larger groups where time to do this will be a problem consider altering this action.

- *writing on A3 sheet/s, allowing more people to write at once.*
- *writing in the book as they leave.*
- *writing in the book before the end of the day.)*

This is a sign of your willingness to walk this term in the footsteps of Jesus, and as a reminder that we come before God as his children in love.

Take a crayon and begin the process of writing on the staff prayer book

Opening Prayer

Leader:

As we gather, let us begin with the sign of the cross.

God of love,
You lead us on life's journey

As we gather here in Your name,
Open our minds to know Your voice.
Open our hands to do Your work.
And open our hearts to hold Your Spirit.

(Light 'head' candle)
(Light 'hands' candle)
(Light 'heart' candle)

Amen

We Listen

Scripture

Leader: *Invite someone to proclaim the Word*

A reading from Matthew 22:36-40 (NRSV)

One of the experts in the law asked Jesus...

Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?' He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'

Jesus calls us to walk in Love

'Good' children should be trying to live the values of their family. And for the family of God love is perhaps the number one value!

In John's Gospel, Jesus reminds us of exactly what it is God asks of us.

Love each other!

Just as I have loved you, you should love each other."

It is easy to love our children, our family and our friends, but what about the annoying people or the people we don't know?

The new commandment to "love one another" doesn't mention exceptions. It is a call to accept love, to know love and to be more central in love.

It means being nice to those who are not nice to you.

It means spending the extra time with the student who irritates you, but needs the help.

It means listening to the story that goes on and on and on, because it is important to be a good friend.

It is not just settling for a passing wave, it's stopping and asking how someone is.

Love is a sacrifice.

It costs. Every time we love someone it costs us something.

Maybe time, maybe money, maybe friends.

It's not easy, but like a thoughtful present the true value is hidden in the giving, not the receiving.

Love is also a gift.

The treasure in loving is that when we love, we always receive more than we give.

Love has the potential to change us, and those around us, at the very centre of our being.

We are transformed everyday in this giving and getting of love.

Leader:

There are a few minutes of quiet time now to think about what we have just listened to and to spend some time considering the questions for reflection on our handout sheets.

We Respond

Reflection –

Take a few moments of quiet reflection...

Love finds expression in so many different ways.

Rethink the things you have said and done today... how are they 'love'?

This kind of love we are talking about is not the cupids and chocolate kind of love (though that can be good!)

It can be tough love; and it can mean we have to dig deep for the bigger picture.

Recall your own experience of this challenge of love, honoring what you have given.

Individual Prayer

Leader:

Our opportunity to pray today is in the style of Lectio Divina.

Lectio Divina, which is Latin for "sacred reading", is an ancient approach to prayer.

To engage in it is very simple and involves sitting quietly – reading a scripture passage (*lectio*), reflecting silently on the reading, looking at your life and how this reading may be evident in your life (*meditation*), offering this in dialogue with the heart of God (*oratio*) and resting in the presence of God who is love (*contemplatio*).

There are many variations of Lectio Divina, all of them are quiet and contemplative, and all invite a "long, loving look" at some aspect of life – be it through scripture, a poem, music or nature. Each in its own way can lead to a deepening of our relationship with God.

With our prayer today, we will listen as the Benedictines instructed, "*with the ear of the heart*" for a word, a phrase, an emotion, or an image, that holds for us a message from God.

Lectio Divina has been likened to taking a single bite from a banquet and savouring the flavours of that one mouthful and appreciating all that can be taken from it, before moving on.

Prayer in this way is not about listening to each and every word, it is about taking one part and relishing it.

**If your prayer space has lots of noisy distractions,
you may wish to play some
instrumental music in the background to counteract this.**

Leader:

Lectio Divina

To begin, find a position which is comfortable.
Close your eyes.
Slow your breathing with deliberately slow breaths....
Take a moment to feel God in your presence.....

Read again slowly the passage from Matthew's gospel,
looking for a phrase or word that particularly speaks to you.
Highlight this phrase with your crayon.
Keep it in your mind.....

Close your eyes again and slowly repeat the phrase or word to yourself....
Repeat them over and over again with each breath.

You may have to shorten or paraphrase it to make it easy to repeat.

As you listen to the words, sit with them.....
Relish them....

After a short time say-

Think about how your life is mirrored in this text....

After a short time say-

Take the opportunity to talk to God about this part of your life....

After a short time say-

Listen and feel the presence of God about you.
Allow this prayer gift to deepen in you.....

To conclude - Leader:

We give thanks for what we have received in this time of prayer. May we continue to listen with the ear of our hearts throughout today. Amen.

Shared Prayers

Leader:

As we pause now before our prayer time ends,
we stop to light our staff/school candle.

(Light the staff/school candle)

Into our prayer space we place our intentions book

(place it into the prayer space).

In coming days and weeks you are invited make use of this book.

Into it you can write any intentions you would like to have prayed for by our staff.

Write a note, a prayer or just a name – when we come together we will place these prayers before God.

We pause in silence to pray the prayers that are in our hearts and are known only to God.

As our candle burns throughout today, may the One who hears the cries of the poor, listen to our prayers and may our hearts be opened to hear the response.

(Allow for silent prayer)

We Go Forth

Closing Prayer

Leader: Let us pray together...

As we go about our day O God,
As we strive to walk with Jesus as people of love,
Remind us that we are the face of Christ,
Who is with us always.

May your grace, mercy and peace,
Bless us, keep us and transform us all,
This day, now and forever.

All: Amen