

# Centring Spaces:

## Creating a Spirituality Centre for Your Church

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Each year, our congregation hosts a spirituality centre as a part of “The Week of Guided Prayer.” This program teaches Lectio Divina, a meditative kind of prayer that is centred on scripture. Participants pray at home and with a trained prayer partner each day for a week. Our spirituality centre is created during this time as an enhancement for the program and has become a significant ministry all on its own.

We create a series of prayer stations that use images, words, sounds and even taste and touch to draw us into prayer. Using a unified theme such as light, water, bread or “following Jesus,” there are opportunities at each station to pray in different and often tactile ways. Some are repeated every year, such as the small table and chair we set up with a tabletop labyrinth that allows participants to pray in silence as they trace the path with their finger. New stations are also created every year. When light was the theme, for example, we included:

### Spirituality Centres:

- A spirituality centre is a quiet spot where people can go to reflect, meditate, pray, think, write, paint or just be.
- Often there are props at each reflection station to aid meditation or direct thinking.
- Participants are invited to go from station to station and spend whatever time is needed in that station.

- 1 a table with a tall, glass vase that invited people to write down their prayers for others on red and orange slips of paper, in the tradition of the Quakers who “hold one another in the light”
- 2 a sand-filled bowl with birthday candles that encouraged people to stop and light one - even if they were so rushed they only had a moment - so they could breathe quietly and bask in God’s presence
- 3 “Lite Brite” toys that suggested people might “play a prayer” with light and colour

Our spirituality centre is always hosted in the sanctuary. Our building is less than 25 years old, so this room is filled with light (there is no stained glass) and the chancel furniture is movable. Stationary pews, however, do create some space restrictions. We remove any unnecessary items such as music stands and extra chairs in order to create more space and find we have room for four stations on the floor and two or even three on the chancel riser. We also place written prayers on small stands mid-way back, so that people can sit in the pews nearby. Since we hope to provide private, quiet spaces at each station, we place soft barriers using silk trees or a decorative screen in between them. On Friday evening, when we are able to use an additional large room, we set up a temporary floor labyrinth. The spirituality centre is open every day and evening.

We have discovered that many people long for a deeper prayer life and are eager to explore new ways of praying. The spirituality centre invites people to grow beyond Sunday morning prayers offered by the minister or grace before meals. Often we include copies of written prayers that people can take home, and we display books that people might borrow or buy. Many people - even those not participating in our Week of Guided Prayer - visit during the week according to their own schedule. We often hear how busy and tired people are, and how this offers an opportunity for rest and reflection.

Perhaps our biggest surprise has been the response from our families with young children, and from our youth. Parents love to bring their children into the sanctuary and quietly visit each station, and we are careful to include tactile ways of praying that include even the non-readers. In the evening, when candles are lit, the children are awed by the sacred atmosphere and

have no trouble being quiet. Our young people enter into the spirituality centre easily and seem amazed that there are ways to pray that involve moving, writing, tasting and touching. This year our junior youth visited the centre as part of their preparation for confirmation, and they spent close to two hours engrossed in prayer!

You don’t have to host a Week of Guided Prayer program to host a spirituality centre. You may have an existing program, such as VBS or a mission focus, that would benefit from this added dimension. Or perhaps it might allow your congregation to deepen their prayers during Advent, Holy Week or Pentecost. If you have the space, you could even create a permanent prayer room in which the centre changes each month or each season. It takes only a few people, and almost no budget. Here is what we have learned:

1. **Work with what you have.** Every church has unique challenges and blessings, and there are no hard and fast rules for what you can create. Do you have stained glass windows? You could create a prayer walk from window to window, using prayers at each that are inspired by the window’s design. Is your space very dark? Try projecting a cycle of prayerful images on a wall. Is your space very limited? Only provide two or three stations.
2. **Simple is better.** There is no need to buy expensive craft materials or hi-tech equipment. Each station just needs to be tidy and clean. A few white tablecloths and pillar candles can go a long way.
3. **Give participants clear instructions.** Although many people long for deep spiritual encounters, they are often intimidated by the opportunity. Advertise the event in advance with as much detail as possible. Post notices on the door as people enter, directing them where to go. At each station, write down very specifically what people are to do.
4. **Be safe.** Candles are beautiful but must not be left unattended. Extension cords should not be left underfoot for people to trip on. If your building is to be left open all day, be sure that someone is there keeping an eye for visitors.
5. **Do solid research and provide significant content.** Learn about different kinds of prayer such as Lectio Divina, labyrinths, breath prayers, and so on. Using your theme or occasion to guide



you, look for ancient prayers and relevant scripture passages that you can print out and display (search the Internet or look on your church bookshelf). This is not only a spiritual opportunity but an educational one.

6. **Provide comfortable space.** Be clear that this is a quiet space, and communicate that through signs on the doors as people enter and even in the bulletin as you advertise. Conversations belong outside of this restful and reflective space. Soft, meditative music played quietly in the background eases the intrusion of coughs, sniffles and the occasional whisper. Comfortable places to sit are essential, as is a comfortable room temperature.
7. **Include the whole church.** Make sure that those with impaired mobility can access your centre. Include ways for non-readers to engage, such as a painting station or the opportunity to sculpt a prayer with modelling clay. Direct participants to pray not only for themselves and those they love but also for the world around them.

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## Sample Spirituality Station 1: Carrying the Light

### Materials:

Small table, chair, tablecloth, candle, printout of instructions, bowl of small glass beads or marbles with colour swirls (available from craft stores)

### Printed Introduction:

Some days are dark. We had a fight with our spouse, we made a mistake at work, or we are simply exhausted. At those times, we need a reminder that no matter how dark the world feels, a tiny sliver of God's light is always shining.

Take a few moments now to consider where God's light is shining in your own life. Is there beauty outside your window? Have you laughed today? Do you have a friend who loves you? God's light is all around us if we simply notice.

The Light of God before me.  
The Light of God behind me.  
The Light of God above me.  
The Light of God beside me.  
The Light of God within me.

– From the Prayer of St. Patrick

Choose a small, clear stone. Notice the swirl of light in it, almost like a flame. Feel how smooth it is in your fingers. Become aware of its weight and its cool, glassy surface as you hold it. Here is a tiny symbol of God's light.

Take that stone with you. Put it in your pocket or purse, on your dresser or in the car. When your mood is gloomy or a situation feels dark and hopeless, reach for your light-filled stone. Let it help you remember the places where God's light is shining in your life.

### Resources:

*Setting Up a Spirituality Centre: A Guide for Congregations*, by Laura Alary  
[www.presbyterian.ca/files/webfm/ourresources/worship/spirituality\\_centre\\_guide.pdf](http://www.presbyterian.ca/files/webfm/ourresources/worship/spirituality_centre_guide.pdf)

The Week of Guided Prayer  
[www.weekofguidedprayernetwork.org](http://www.weekofguidedprayernetwork.org)