Lord, Have Mercy

Praying for Justice with Conviction and Humility

A Guide for Conversation, Learning and Growth

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Part 1

HOSTING THE CONVERSATION

Lord, Have Mercy can provide a focus for reflection in a wide variety of contexts. Many church groups—including Bible study groups, sacramental preparation classes, youth groups, retreats, prayer groups, and study groups—will find it germane to their concerns. It can also be used in classrooms, within families, at the workplace, and in nonprofit organizations. Less formally, a group of friends could agree to read and discuss this book together.

Whatever the setting, it is important that the person or persons hosting the conversation honor the hopes and longings participants will bring to the disciplined consideration of how we might pray for justice with conviction and humility within our communities. This person is charged with shaping a community of learning—one that may last only a few weeks, to be sure, but one whose structure will be an important factor as participants seek to help one another learn and grow. After all, they will not merely study Christian practices during their time together, they will also engage in some of them in a preliminary way—saying yes to clearing time for reading and talking, discerning together what action will result from their learning, offering testimony about their convictions, forgiving one another for the misunderstandings that will surely arise at some point along the way, honoring one another's bodies through an embrace, by sharing a meal, and praying together. These are small acts, but how the leader helps them take faithful form is a crucial matter.

LEADING AS TEACHING

When you take responsibility for leading a series of conversations or even a single session, you become, in effect, a teacher. Whether you are a solo teacher or part of a leadership team, it becomes your special charge to foster a situation in which those present can help each other grow in the practices of faith. This does not require that you be an "expert," for your role is not primarily to impart information to the participants. *Lord, Have Mercy* will provide much of the information your group needs—the biblical, historical, theological, and ethical material that will fuel your process of reflection. (You may want to find other resources as you and your group advance, but these are not essential as you begin.) Becoming a teacher-leader does require, however, that you give deliberate attention to the specific nature of your group and how it can best explore Christian practices.

As a teacher-leader, you will be guiding a specific group of people on a specific day for a specific period of time. This is the "live event" of teaching. In that live event, energy will surge and recede, momentum will develop and ebb, the flow of conversation will twist and turn, and any number of planned and unplanned things will happen.

A voyage at sea provides a good analogy. When a group of people embark on a journey together, someone comes with a map and an itinerary to navigate the way. This does not ensure that the travelers will reach the planned destination, but it might help them stay afloat and find a worthy port. In the course of the voyage, when all are out on the sea together, the group may find that the water is calm and the map is easy to apply; sailing is smooth, just as the navigator had hoped. At other times, however, the sea may be unexpectedly turbulent, and the original map may seem irrelevant.

Educational designs chart a teacher's hopes for what might happen in an educational event, enabling the leader to guide reflection when that is helpful and to adapt when it is not. They crystallize important issues for reflection, attend to the specific needs of the individuals who will participate, and draw together the resources and ideas that are most likely to fit the circumstances. They lend focus and intentionality to an exploration that could conceivably go in hundreds of directions, making it more likely that learners will be engaged and challenged.

Creating a good educational design is an artistic process. It is a process that is unique to each situation—indeed, just as the teacher, the participants, and the local culture are unique. A fruitful educational design will connect all of these elements—teacher, participants, and local culture—with the larger contexts discussed in *Lord, Have Mercy*, including the Bible, history, and what is happening in the world beyond this place.

PREPARING TO LEAD EDUCATIONAL EVENTS

The following pages offer suggestions for charting a single group session. In most cases, such a session will be one in a series, so a few words about creating a series are important as well. Many different formats are possible—such as a weekly study group, an intensive process of reflection during a weekend retreat, a daylong workshop, or a yearlong series with meetings once a month. Any of these, or others, may suit your situation. Whatever format you choose, help the group be clear about what it promises to do over the term of the series as a whole—to read, for example, or to undertake certain activities, such as journaling, exploring prayer traditions, or engaging in activities related to specific seasons.

These suggestions are offered to help you, the teacher-leader, as you prepare an educational design for any given session. Use it in conjunction with other sections of this guide. More important, rely on your own common sense and educational experiences as you chart the educational course of your group.

Develop a Clear Sense of What the Session Is About. Carefully read each relevant chapter in *Lord, Have Mercy*. How does the author define the problems people face when praying for justice, and what practices does she commend? What stories, quotations, and biblical material in this chapter caught your interest or sparked your imagination? How is prayer something that people do together, and not just something a person does alone?

Wrestle with the Material in the Chapter. Allow your reflection to go beyond the discussion in the book. What other examples of this practice occur to you? What other biblical stories are relevant? What questions do you have? Where do you resist entering this practice as the author has portrayed it? Do you need to do further reading?

Reflect on Your Personal and Institutional Involvement in This Practice. Try to identify the ways in which you are already involved in activities described in the chapter, both positive and negative. Some may be hard to recognize because you take them for granted. What assumptions, prejudices, and passions do you bring? What yearning, pain, or experiences of new life do you bring? What responsibilities do you have regarding this practice within your own community, and what are your hopes and fears about exploring the practice in light of these? Do you have a special perspective that arises from your denominational or cultural identity?

Think About the People with Whom You Will Be in Conversation. Teaching works only when it is designed for the specific participants and all that they bring to the event. As you chart an educational event, reflect on who is likely to be present. How do the communities and traditions they represent already engage in this practice? What life circumstances are you familiar with that may resonate with the chapter? Do you suspect that they have experienced pain in relation to issues of justice? Joy? Confusion? What prejudices and passions do you anticipate they will bring? What gifts and wisdom? Where do you think they need to be challenged? What styles of learning and group structures will be comfortable for them?

Identify Your Hopes for the Session. Try to articulate in your own mind what you hope for the people who will gather. The authors of Practicing Our Faith had certain hopes when writing that book about the kinds of reflection the book might generate. These hopes now inform the Practices of Faith Series. As you identify your own hopes for the group you are leading, you might find the hopes of those authors helpful.

They hoped that readers of Practicing Our Faith would

- Come to a greater recognition of God's action in the world, in our communities, and in our lives
- Become more aware of their yearning for a way of life that is whole and holy
- Understand more deeply the rich resources biblical faith and Christian tradition hold for shaping a way of life that can be lived with integrity today
- Learn about the various forms of practices developed by faithful people in history and around the world today
- Reflect critically on the deformations of practices that exist in church and society
- Grow in the skills and language that would help them engage in Christian practices with greater fluidity
- Discover fresh forms of the practices that are responsive to God's activity in the changing circumstances of our world, communities, and lives
- Be challenged and motivated to engage in practices with greater intentionality, energy, reflectiveness, and commitment

Consider a Variety of Ways of Exploring the Practices in Each Session.
Reflecting on Christian practices takes more than general conversation. It happens best as part of a process in which participants engage with this material in a variety of ways. Fruitful sessions will usually include activities, exercises, and questions that nurture various forms of personal and communal engagement. Following are some forms of engagement that can help your group explore the practice of praying for justice with conviction and humility more fully:

- Explore participants' experiences by helping them identify formative memories, present realities, and hopes for the future
- Consider the emotions stirred by the practice—the group's yearning for it, joy in it, or worries about it, and the stories, dreams, and promises it evokes
- Think through the analysis set forth in *Lord, Have Mercy*, making sure that its main points are understood but giving participants an opportunity to affirm, question, or challenge issues raised by the reading
- Explore the theological character of prayer in scripture and as the author presents it, and relate this to God's activity and our faithful living

• Reflect critically on how our attitudes toward prayer can become deformed and harmful in our lives and in our society

• Take on a challenge to live more fully and faithfully, beginning perhaps with some change the group will decide to undertake together

Create a Design.

Arranging elements like these into a design appropriate for a particular group is one of the chief challenges of the teacher-leader. Often, posing discussion questions seems to be the easiest way to proceed. But in most educational events—particularly those concerned with Christian practices--other approaches must also be incorporated. Creative exercises, field trips, forms of artistic self-expression, rituals, songs, writing in a journal, interpreting a piece of art, reflecting in silence, sharing in groups of two or three—all these are activities that can enhance learning when used with good judgment.

Part 2 of this study guide offers a number of suggestions for nurturing reflection. Look through these as you prepare a session, but don't rely solely on them. Develop your own ideas, drawing on your hopes, the suggestions in this guide, and, especially, what you know about the specific character of the people you are leading and the places in which they live their lives.

There are no firm rules about how to design an educational event. Different groups are led by their own traditions or deep convictions to prefer one starting point over another. For example, in some churches it will be important to start with the Bible, whereas in other places starting with a contemporary ethical issue or an invitation to share a personal story would work better. Use your common sense, experience, and powers of observation as you determine what will be most fruitful in your situation.

A few more words of advice arise from our sense of the kind of education that nourishes growth in faithful practice. First, be alert to the concrete nature of practices, and actually do something together. It seems especially appropriate to *Lord, Have Mercy* that the sessions begin with prayer. One possibility is to start each meeting with Lectio Divina, a traditional Christian practice of praying with Scripture. Instructions for a simplified form of Lection Divina are included in the resources for this Guide, as are Scripture passages for each chapter. Feel free to use other passages or prayers, as appropriate to the group, or perhaps a different member of the group could take responsibility for choosing the passage for Lectio Divina each week.

Second, be aware that praying together about controversial topics may raise issues of faith that group members are struggling with, or may lead to the sharing of deep feelings and/or insights. Prepare for disclosures and disagreements and think in advance about how to honor the limits (or lack of limits) of your participants. Establish guidelines for discussion that will foster trust, such as asking the group to agree to listen with respect to opposing views and agree that no one will repeat stories shared within the group without the permission of the one who told the story.

Set Up the Physical Environment. Though it is easy to overlook, this step is a crucial one. A conversation in an elementary grade classroom feels different from a conversation in the warmth of someone's home. Reflect with care about how the physical space available to your group can be arranged to enhance the educational climate. Here are some suggestions:

• Sit in a circle on comfortable chairs (as opposed to sitting in rows with a leader in front) to open up dialogue and mutuality.

• Stimulate the imagination of the participants through the presence of sacred symbols. A candle, a chalice, or a small altar might serve your group in this way.
• Do what you can to arrange for good lighting and comfortable room temperature and seating. People can converse more deeply when they are physically comfortable. Sometimes, having food and drink available helps, and sometimes it does not. Use your judgment.
• Prepare in advance all materials that will be needed, such as markers, drawing supplies, writing utensils, paper, or directions to a site.

Create an Appropriate Emotional Environment. The emotional climate of any educational setting is crucial to its success. But this is especially so when the topic at hand is the life of Christian faith. How can the interactions among the people who will gather reflect the quality of Christian practices themselves? How will hospitality, forgiveness, testimony, healing, and other practices be embodied in this small community of learning?

An atmosphere of *mutuality* is important. When people are treated with dignity and respect, they participate more fully in transforming and challenging reflection. Remember, as teacher-leader, you need not have all the answers. Try to show respect for each member and instill in each a sense of mutual regard and gratitude for the variety of gifts and experiences he or she brings to the group.

Foster an atmosphere of *trust*. Sharing thoughts and experiences, people expose vulnerabilities and become sensitive to how they will be received by others. Attentive listening, a supportive word, and a nonjudgmental spirit help create an atmosphere of deeper conversation and greater growth. In many groups, it may be helpful to make these expectations explicit and to agree not to repeat personal information shared in this setting.

Directive but non-controlling leadership can enhance your educational event. Conversation that meanders without any direction can be frustrating for everyone involved. One of the roles of the teacher-leader is to gauge the interests of the entire group and assist it in moving toward its goals. However, do not be overly directional or feel that you have failed if the group does not address all the issues you had charted. Stifling honest and lively engagement frustrates participants, too. What you are seeking is a delicate balance sustained by close attention to the needs and interests of your particular group.

Honest questioning is another aim. The questions you pose—including the ones you discover in this guide—should have the purpose of opening up dimensions of human experience and reflection. They should not be used to trick participants into saying something you want them to say, and they are not meant as quizzes to which people might give answers that are "correct" or "incorrect." Ask questions to open, not close, discussion.

Encourage *shared participation*. Everyone has been in groups in which one or two members dominate the conversation. We may also have been surprised on occasion by an unexpected insight from a person who usually remains silent. Try to find comfortable ways of making it possible for everyone to participate, even if this means asking a dominant person to give someone else a chance to speak. Let the group be silent for a spell when that is helpful, too. Show that you think it is all right if there are some minutes when no one speaks at all.

ENCOURAGEMENT: BEYOND THE GUIDELINES

Reflecting on the practices of faith as they take shape in our lives and communities can be a generative experience. When you lead others in doing this, you are initiating a process far richer and lengthier than the group meetings themselves. As we have noted, your sessions are occasions when people practice together. They are also times of planting, times when ideas are encountered that may lie dormant at first but later grow in unanticipated ways.

You cannot control the outcome of a single session or of the group's experience as a whole, nor should you hope to do so. But you are nonetheless offering a wonderful gift when you agree to serve as a host at the table of mutual learning. May you find that at this table you are a guest as well.

Part 2

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Foreword

"What I hope to do in this book is allow stories of actual practice to open up a much-needed conversation about how to pray in ways that are attentive to social justice, yet reflective and humble." (xvi)

Write the word PRACTICE on a board or newsprint pad. How do we normally use this word? Does its meaning change when we use it in a religious context? Hand out copies of the "One-page Definition of Christian Practice."

If studying *Lord, Have Mercy* as a group, take the initial meeting to explore participants understanding of *prayer* and *social justice*. Reflect on perceived connections and disconnections between these terms, both personally and in the life of your faith community.

In a group setting, set ground-rules for discussing difficult issues, such as confidentiality, "I" language versus "you" language, and a commitment to not demonize the opposition. One suggestion is practicing a "charitable assumption" towards each member as they speak. Deeply held beliefs involve emotion and that emotion can be expressed by passion, anger, sadness, or fear. Behind this expression is most often a desire to be understood. A charitable assumption involves looking for this underlying desire, attributing the most positive interpretation possible to a person's words, asking questions for clarification, and listening to them as you would wish to be listened to.

Resources

Lectio Divina handout

A One-page Definition of Christian Practice handout

Dorothy C. Bass, ed. *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997. www.practicingourfaith.org

Michael Casey. *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*. Ligouri, Missouri: Ligouri/Triumph, 1996.

Thelma Hall, RC. *Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1998.

M. Basil Pennington. *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures*. New York: Crossroad, 1998.

Martin L. Smith. *The Word Is Very Near You: A Guide to Praying with Scripture*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cowley Publications, 1989.

Lectio Divina

We often read scripture like the newspaper—scan for the important points, skim the parts that may not make immediate sense, and then move on. Rather than reading for quick facts and information, *lectio divina*, or "divine reading," is a spacious, prayerful process inviting us to savor the text. The reader enters into a prayerful dialogue with text, chews on it, ponders it in her or his heart, and looks beyond the obvious to make connections with life and prayer.

Lectio divina is not a method with steps that must be done in order. Rather it is a way of living the text. There are four movements to this practice:

Reading (Lectio)
Meditating (Meditatio)
Praying (Oratio)
Contemplating (Contemplatio)

- **Reading.** Choose a scripture passage, 5 to 10 verses, and read it slowly many times. Read it silently; read it aloud. Without focusing too much on perfection, try memorizing the passage.
- **Meditating.** As words or phrases stand out, focus on them. Why do they "stand out" or "shimmer" to you. What do they remind you of? Other verses? Memories? Do they inspire you to prayer?
- **Praying.** As you read and meditate, do you find yourself asking God questions? Do people come to mind or life situations that could be brought to God? Allow the connections you make to become a natural conversation with God.
- **Contemplating.** This is a gift from God. It may not happen and it is not the "reward" for a well-done *lectio divina*! It is the delightful "aha-moment," a sense of timelessness, an inner awe at the beauty or love or wisdom or (fill in the blank) of God, revealed through the text.

At any point, praying may lead back into reading, contemplating back into meditating. Reading could lead directly into contemplation. These steps need not be done in order, but as a gentle dialogue with ebb and flow. *Lectio divina* can be adapted to a group setting by allowing quiet time for participants to ponder the passage individually and then facilitating group time for sharing experiences, insights, and prayers.

Over time, this way of reading scripture can become second nature and spill over into other areas of life. Imagine "reading" a situation, a world event, a personal crisis, or a relationship in this manner. *Lectio divina is a way of living.*

Christian Practice: A One-page Definition

A Christian practice is a cluster of activities, ideas, and images, lived by Christian people over time, which addresses a fundamental human need in the light of and in response to God's active presence for the life of the world in Jesus Christ.

A practice

- addresses fundamental human needs and conditions through practical human acts.
- involves us in God's activities in the world and reflects, in the way we participate in the practice, God's grace and love.
- is social in character
    - we learn practices with and from other people
    - though we sometimes do some of the activities that comprise a given practice alone.
- endures over time
    - each practice arises out of living traditions, having taken numerous forms in the past and in various cultures around the world, and
    - will carry those traditions into the future, in specific forms not yet imagined.
- involves a deep awareness, a profound knowing; a practice
    - is imbued with thought; it is embodied wisdom
    - carries particular convictions about what is good and true;
    - embodies these convictions in physical, down-to-earth ways;
    - becomes articulated in concepts, ideas, and images, expressed through rich vocabularies and carefully developed bodies of thought;
    - incorporates both words and gestures, some of them grand but others apparently small and mundane.
- is done within the church, in the public realm, in daily work, and at home.
- shapes the people who participate in it
    - as individuals and as communities,
    - in ways that conform to the particular content and patterns of the specific practice, thus
    - nurturing specific habits, virtues, and capacities of mind and spirit.
- possesses standards of excellence
    - having that which is good as its purpose and goal
    - relying on certain competencies and embodying certain norms
    - though practices often become distorted and corrupt
    - and so are open to criticism and reform, particularly with reference to the shape of God's practice.
- comes to a focus in worship
    - which makes manifest in words, gestures, images, and material things the normative meaning of the practice and its place in the mysterious life of God, and
    - discloses the practice as gift, not task.
- adds up to a way of life when interwoven with other practices
    - through their mutual interdependence, as each practice strengthens the others, and
    - in their reliance on the God of Life.

Chapter 1: Prayer in an Election Year
Lord, Have Mercy

Lectio Divina
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18
Luke 18:1-8
Romans 8:26-27

Discussion

> *Although we may not have been publicized as much as the more vocal and more certain voters, I imagine many people of faith found themselves in a somewhat similar position: wanting to relate their beliefs to this practical decision, yet unclear about precisely how faith would direct this choice. Just a little less sure that God saw politics through the same lens that we did. Just a little suspicious of how others—conservatives and liberals—so easily heard God's voice. (p. 2)*

Responding to the above quote, have you ever found yourself caught between the desire to act or speak out in accordance with your faith and a concern about how the rhetoric of piety affects our political and social life in the United States? What situation were you facing? How did you resolve your dilemma?

What is the purpose of prayer? What role does prayer play in the life of a Christian? Why do you pray? How do you pray? How does your prayer reflect or not reflect your image of God?

The author's understanding of prayer is informed by many things, among them the tradition of her Roman Catholic heritage and her work as a scholar in the field of Christian spirituality. What is your own prayer heritage? How has your faith journey influenced your understanding of prayer? From what traditions and experiences do you draw?

This book makes use of stories of real communities in prayer, and the author encourages us to "step into these stories, to imagine [ourselves] there in these contexts, and to wrestle with the dilemmas the people faced" (p. 13). Read the overview of the stories on pages 12-13. What questions are raised by this preview? Have you ever found yourself in a situation similar to any of these stories?

"Too often, prayer has been taught as a practice that requires disengagement from and devaluing of the world" (p. 14). Do you agree or disagree? What examples can you think of to support or refute this statement?

What is your rhythm of prayer? How is this rhythm nurtured by your community prayer life? How is the daily round of ordinary life remembered in this prayer?

Read "Prayer as a Pause Button" on pages 6-8. The Benedictine tradition instructs monks to lead a life balanced in prayer, work, rest, and study. In some monasteries, monks pause for prayer

seven times a day; in others, they gather for morning, noon, and evening prayers. These times of prayer are often quite short. Is this pattern of prayer practicable outside a monastery? How might it be adapted to work or family life?

What prayer resources does your faith community offer to mark the "hours"? Liturgy of the Hours? Morning and evening prayer? Compline services? Daily devotionals? Morning "quiet times"? In what ways do these resources nurture your prayer life and the life of your faith community?

As you watch TV or read the newspaper, how might you "pray the news"?

For an upcoming election, gather together and bring clippings from local newspapers around issues of concern. While some may take opposing sides on certain issues, welcome all to share the clippings and then spend time praying together.

What is the "glue" of your faith community? How might corporate prayer (both as private expression and when gathered together) deepen the experience of community?
How might your prayer as a person and as a member of a faith community become "public"?

Take a prayer walk through your neighborhood. As you walk past stores, houses, offices, schools, and people, silently acknowledge God's presence in these places and with these people. What issues come to mind as you walk? How might a regular neighborhood prayer walk quietly express both the public and prophetic aspects of prayer?

Gather a small group together for 6 weeks to discuss prayer and to explore different prayer practices, such as lectio divina, prayer walks, or the Daily Office. Invite members to create a "rule of prayer" that includes personal and corporate times of prayer.

Resources

Joan Chittister OSB. *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990.

Margaret Guenther. *The Practice of Prayer*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cowley Publications, 1998.

David Hanson. *Long Wandering Prayer: An Invitation to Walk with God.* Intervarsity, 2001.

Chapter 2: A Cloud of Witnesses
Prayer and the Christian Way of Life

Lectio Divina
Psalm 63:1-8

Discussion
In the book, *Primary Speech*, Ann and Barry Ulanov write: "Everyone prays. People pray whether or not they call it prayer. We pray every time we ask for help, understanding, or strength, in or out of religion." Assuming this is true, how do you pray? On newsprint or board write: *How do you pray?* List all the ways and mark those named more than once. Are there patterns? Is there a noticeable preference in the group for a particular way of prayer? Do the same for: *When do you pray?* When does prayer fall naturally from your lips or well up from your heart? How might you cultivate this unique gift of prayer God has given you? How does your faith community pray? What is your unique gift of collective prayer?

Have you ever gone away on retreat for a weekend (or even longer)? Where did you go? Was it a quiet retreat? Did the program follow any particular spiritual tradition? Share your experience.

Gather information about places in your community that provide resources for and/or instruction in practices of prayer, including retreat centers. Share the information with the group. Has anyone in the group ever used one of these resources? Perhaps the group might like to make plans to go on a retreat together.

Rather than retreating to a monastery or church—practice a time of open-eyed prayer in a local café. Journal your prayers for people and listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit: what issues and needs come to your attention for prayer?

Place Cassian's psalm prayer—O God, come to my assistance. O Lord, make haste to help me.—on or near critical places in your life routine: the bathroom mirror, the car dashboard, the alarm clock.

"For Ignatius, prayer guided one to perceive one's purpose in life, make right choices, and act generously in the world. …Ignatius believed that as we make decisions and choices, careful attention to abiding feelings of 'consolation' and 'desolation' point us to what is of God and what is not of God" (p. 22-23). How do you know when you are making the right choice? What role, if any, does prayer have in your daily decision-making?

Do Ignatius's terms of consolation and desolation capture your experience personally or as a community? What pointers help you discern between consolation and desolation when making choices?

Have you ever been skeptical of someone who always seems to know exactly what God wants in a given situation?

Consider making a retreat using the Exercises of Ignatius. Many options are available: weekend, week-long, and 30-day retreats, as well as the program "Spiritual Exercises in Everyday Life," which spends 33 weeks reflecting on the Exercises via monthly group meetings and individual spiritual direction.

Respond to Ignatius' words: *"The eye of our intention ought to be single. I ought to focus only on the purpose for which I was created, to praise God and to save my soul."* How might this quote be read as a support for individualistic prayer and spirituality? In what ways could the meaning of these words be expanded to include the community and the whole of creation?

Spend 15 minutes this evening reflecting on these examen questions: "When today was I open to Love? When did I flee from Love?" If you are part of a prayer group, invite the group to practice an examen together. The examen also works well in corporate worship during the prayer of confession.

"Solitude" does not necessarily mean silence or escape from the ordinary noises of daily life, but an inward recollection of God's presence. This can occur in a sanctuary or in the grocery line. How often do you *practice* solitude?

Humility is often practiced as self-scolding in order to become "less prideful." In the monastic tradition, *humility* is related to the Latin word "humus," meaning *earthy* (also closely related to *human* and *humorous*). *Humility* is the knowledge that we are human and that God is God. How might you cultivate a "gentle quiet, light-filled" humility?

Resources

Roberta Bondi. *To Love as God Loves: Conversations with the Early Church.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987.

Roberta Bondi. *To Pray and to Love: Conversations on Prayer with the Early Church.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.

Thomas Merton. *The Wisdom of the Desert*. New Directions, 1960.

Ann and Barry Ulanov. *Primary Speech: A Psychology of Prayer*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982.

Chapter 3: Spirituality and Politics
Tensions Within a Congregation

Lectio Divina
Isaiah 10:1-2
Micah 6:8
Matthew 25:31-46
James 2:14-17

Discussion
Some congregations are now considering whether to provide sanctuary to undocumented workers in defiance of U. S. immigration laws. How would you approach this issue in your own congregation?

What is your understanding of the relationship between faith, prayer, and politics?

Write on the board or newsprint: "The synod saw the boycott as a Christian practice" (p. 41). What is your understanding of Christian practice? Does your definition include or preclude political action? Why? Now add the following continuation of the sentence: "The synod saw the boycott as a Christian practice, a way to integrate faith with economic actions and speak for those who are powerless" (p. 41). Does the inclusion of the explanation change your mind about the boycott as Christian practice? Why or why not?

Bring in newspaper clippings or headlines about local or national political issues. In what ways might congregations involve themselves in these issues? With which kinds of involvement are you most comfortable? With which kinds are you least comfortable? Have there been times in your faith community when you have felt reluctant to express your own views on an issue? What were the circumstances?

Theologian Jon Sobrino urges us to find the "correct relationship between action and prayer" (p. 47). How would you define that relationship?

The author asks how we can "prayerfully engage social and political issues without simplifying those issues, or causing greater alienation or division" in our faith communities (p.51). What do we do with our differences? How do we define unity as Christians?

Do you find the prayer about defining marriage (p. 51) to be humble or vague? Why?

How has your faith community experienced potentially divisive issues? How has corporate prayer played or not played a part in your community experience?

Some Christian communities pray very specifically to God about issues, often with stated expectations of outcome. What role does specificity and outcome-focused prayer play in your community and in your personal prayer life?

Who speaks for your faith community publicly? Who defines its identity and mission to the greater community? Is prayer an aspect of its public identity?

Respond to the specific situation described at Coral Gables Congregational Church. What are your reactions to Pastor Schaper's actions and to the response of her church? What role should prayer play in the discernment and decision-making process of a church? If you were in Pastor Schaper's position, how would you encourage the social justice engagement of your congregation?

What structures for dialogue between pastor/priest, congregation, and the greater community exist in your context?

How does Pastor Schaper define "spiritual nurture"? What is the congregation's understanding of this term? Reflecting on your own community's experience, how do you define "spiritual nurture?" How might action for social justice be incorporated into "spiritual nurture"?

What does it mean to be "spiritual"? What is spirituality? One definition of spirituality is "embodied theology." How do your spiritual practices embody your theology of justice and prayer?

How does your community handle the common split between social justice and spirituality?

Is the tension between prayer and action felt more strongly in US and other Western cultures than elsewhere? Why or why not?

How does the current US frenetic pace perpetuate "broken, tired, stressed" congregations? How might a prayer practice both heal and energize a congregation? How might corporate prayer integrate spiritual nurture and "public capacity building"?

What is your community's understanding of the Holy Spirit? Is the Spirit separate from the concrete, daily world? How might prayer "in the Spirit" for the needs of your context heal the spiritual/earthly, sacred/secular, church/world split?

Respond to Jon Sobrino's words in the context of your faith community: *"The historical reality of the poor is something that not only ought to be analyzed and responded to in accordance with its materiality, but ought be the object of a spiritual experience, a reality that can 'implode' into our lives and so become a mediation of the experience of God."*

Some congregations allow parishioners to vocalize very specific praises and petitions during a time of corporate prayer, after which the presider closes with a general "pastoral prayer." Adapted to your specific context, this practice could offer the opportunity for specific personal prayer in a communal context as well as a general corporate prayer in which all can respond "Amen."

Make a list of issues which are especially relevant to your community, but also cause polarization. Brainstorm ways of praying corporately for these issues. How would you word these prayers?

Prayer does not need to be spoken—visual images, music, dance, and ritual all can be mediums for prayer. When words fail, how might other creative ways be used to express prayer in corporate settings?

Resources

These collections of intercessory prayers are arranged for the common lectionary used by many denominations and can serve as examples for writing intercessions for use in your own faith community:

David Adam. *Clouds of Glory* (Year A), *Traces of Glory* (Year B), *Glimpses of Glory* (Year C). Prayers for the Church Year Series. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Morehouse, 2001.

Gail Ramshaw, ed. *Intercessions for the Christian People*. Collegeville, Minnesota: Pueblo/Liturgical Press, 1990.

Chapter 4: Praying in the Spirit of the Prophets
South Africa Under Apartheid

Lectio Divina
Isaiah 61:1-2
Amos 5:24
Matthew 6:9-13
1 John 4:1

Discussion
Do you ever wonder whether God actually does intervene in the world? In the face of overwhelming injustice, in situations that do not seem to change despite many and fervent prayers, where is God? How do you understand the purpose of petitionary prayer in such instances?

The author's final questions are central to this chapter: "Where do we draw the line between prophecy and presumption? With what specificity should we petition God?" (p. 76)

Does prayer for a specific outcome "limit God?" Some faith communities believe that prayer should be detailed and state a hoped for outcome. Do you personally pray specific, detailed petitions or more general requests? What is the practice of your community?

"When Christians falsely believe that they are keeping their spirituality untouched by politics—keeping it 'private'—they end up supporting the status quo" (p. 64). Do you agree or disagree? Why?

How is prayer an "eschatological symbol"? (p. 65) What are we asking for when we pray, "Thy will be done" alongside "Thy kingdom come" in the Lord's Prayer? (p. 72)

How might our social and geographical location impact our agreement or disagreement with the prayer to "end unjust rule?" Do you think the South Africans were right to ask God to remove their government? If you support this form of prayer in South Africa, would you also support it in your own country, toward your government? Why or why not?

Consider the practices of your government, how might you pray for justice personally and as a community? How does prayer operate "prophetically" in your community?

The opponents of the prayer to end unjust rule cite 1 Timothy 2:1-3 which urges prayer for rulers and those in authority. Spend time reflecting on this passage and its scriptural context. Does it contradict the South African prayer against injustice?

The Dutch Reformed Church supported the government and apartheid system. Prayers for the government were prayed within this faith community. What is the difference between this form of prayer and prayers *against* the government due to the injustices of apartheid?

How does prayer change the person or people praying? How might the prayer to end unjust rule have changed people and the communities of South Africa? What are your experiences of prayer changing situations?

Respond to Rev. Phillip Russell's contention that one cannot pray for the removal of a government and still negotiate with it.

Rev. Peter Story "urged the international community to take strong action against the apartheid government," however he opposed the prayer to end unjust rule. Respond to the implication that requesting other countries to take action was acceptable, but not asking God.

Do your communal prayer times flow from the "heart's fiercest desires"? Brainstorm the characteristics and the ways in which this form of prayer might manifest.

Resources

John de Gruchy, ed. *Cry Justice!: Prayers, Meditations, and Readings from South Africa.* Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1986.

Chapter 5: Lament and Reconciliation
Praying Through Injustice

Lectio Divina
Psalms 44:9-11
Psalm 137
Psalm 22

Let us behave gently,
That we may die peacefully;
That our children may stretch out their hands
upon us in burial.
(a prayer from the Yoruba in Nigeria, *An African Prayer Book*, p. 134)

Discussion
Read Psalm 137 aloud together. How does it feel to ask for vengeance in prayer?

"Can the psalms of lament be seen as one moment of prayer in a larger move toward reconciliation?" (p. 85) In Matthew's account of the Passion, Jesus quotes the opening lines of Psalm 22 as he is dying. Read all of Psalm 22. Where does the mood of the psalm turn?

How is forgiveness practiced in your community? What role does prayer play? How does it feel to pray for someone who has hurt or harmed you? How might the psalms allow for space to feel the full pain in the movement toward reconciliation? On the other hand, is reconciliation always possible? Are there unforgivable actions?

Bishop Tutu approached his work on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a spiritual practice. How might the work of reconciliation be a "spiritual practice" in your faith community?

Intercessory prayer is prayer for others. If intercessory prayer is a regular part of your own prayer, for whom do you pray?

Respond to the image of prayerful protest "with fists raised." Would your faith community find this an acceptable, disconcerting, or audacious form of prayer?

What issue of injustice calls forth protest from you and your community? How might you bring it to God with "fists raised"?

Lament is an intimate expression of suffering. What role do psalms or songs/prayers of lament play in your time of worship? Would your faith community find such expressions uncomfortable? How might these expressions be incorporated? What would be gained?

Resources

In 1999 Bill Moyers produced and hosted a PBS documentary, "Facing the Truth," about the Truth & Reconciliation proceedings in South Africa. The video is no longer available for sale from PBS, but you may be able to find it at your public library or through interlibrary loan. A transcript of part of Moyers' interview with Bishop Tutu is available at http://www.pbs.org/now/transcript/transcript_facingtruth.html. Information about the documentary is available at http://www.pbs.org/pov/tvraceinitiative/facingthetruth/.

Eugene H. Peterson. *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989.

Desmond Tutu. *An African Prayer Book*. New York: Doubleday, 1995.

Desmond Tutu. *No Future Without Forgiveness*. New York: Doubleday, 1999.

Chapter 6: Walking with Our Lady

Cesar Chavez and the Farm Workers

Lectio Divina
Isaiah 58:3-7
Matthew 6: 17-18

Discussion
The author wonders whether practices specific to a faith tradition can be used with integrity in a diverse social movement. Do you think Chavez's use of Roman Catholic spiritual practices—the procession of Our Lady of Guadalupe, fasting, pilgrimage—was appropriate? What about Martin Luther King, Jr.'s use of explicitly Christian language and the African-American preaching tradition in the civil rights movement? Was Gandhi's use of fasting in the struggle for Indian independence a political or spiritual act? Was it inappropriate for Bishop Tutu to wear his Anglican religious attire and offer prayer in his role as the head of a civil commission?

Have you ever used fasting as a spiritual practice? Share your experience.

Have you ever been on a spiritual pilgrimage? Share your experience.

The author makes a distinction between a fast (for a spiritual purpose) and a hunger strike (for a political purpose) (p. 118). Do you think Chavez was fasting or one a hunger strike? Why? Would Bishop Tutu draw a line between the spiritual and the political?

When priests wear vestments made from union flags (p.117), has a line been crossed? Reflect on the inclusion/exclusion of organizational symbolism in a worship setting.

What role do images play in your faith life? How do they focus prayer in your community? What is your response to the use of religious images and rites in the Farm Worker's movement?

Media-saturated culture can jade us to authentic expression of faith. How do the media affect the reception of religious images? If the Farm Worker's movement had occurred in another country, would it change your response to its public religious expression?

What role does pilgrimage play in your experience of God? How might a "journey" bring to light spiritual insights in everyday life?

If spirituality is "embodied theology," do your spiritual practices reflect your beliefs about God, humanity, and creation?

What is the role of fasting in your faith life? Does it have a public expression or is it known only to God? Does Chavez' use of fasting to focus the movement away from violence fit your understanding of religious fasting? Why or why not?

Fasting can be practiced as abstinence from things other than food. How might periods of fasting from TV, driving a car, or consumerism be a public prophetic practice?

Resources

Susan Ferris and Ricardo Sandoval. *The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers Movement*. New York: Harvest/HBJ Books, 1997.

Philip Sheldrake. *Living Between the Worlds: Place and Journey in Celtic Spirituality*. Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1995.

Chapter 7: Division in the Body
Prayer and Abortion

Lectio Divina
Psalm 139
Matthew 6:5-6

Discussion
Abortion is a polarizing topic in the United States. If you are studying this passage with a group, pray for the ability to discuss it in a way that is respectful of all viewpoints. It may also be helpful to agree to a set of group discussion norms that can be written on a board or newsprint.

On page 51, the author describes a prayer composed so that those of opposing positions on the definition of marriage could pray together with humility and compassion. Is it possible to compose a prayer that can be shared by those who oppose abortion as well as those who wish to safeguard a woman's right to choose whether or not to bear a child?

Language is an important part of the polarizing of issues like abortion. What are the effects of: one side claiming the word "life" and the other "choice"? Of calling clinics "abortion mills"? Of accusing those praying of "grandstanding" or "ranting and raving"?

How does your faith community pray about abortion?

How might pro-life and pro-choice advocates join in prayer together? Recently, there has been more discussion about the reasons women choose to have an abortion as a road to common ground. While not agreeing on the issue of abortion, pro-life and pro-choice advocates are concerned with the welfare of women. Brainstorm specific petitions, such as prayers for adequate healthcare, economic opportunities, and freedom from abusive relationships, which both sides could pray.

If your faith community is divided along pro-choice/pro-life lines, offer an opportunity to pray together and meditate on the Lord's Prayer. One approach to this would be to reflect on each line separately—reading it aloud together and then spending time reflecting on it and praying silently. A practice such as this could stand alone or be a prayerful opening for discussions around this issue.

Reflect on the use of prayer by pro-life advocates and the prayer to end unjust rule in South Africa. Both are forms of prayer against a perceived injustice. Does contextualizing the prayers in this way change your response to their validity?

Reflect on the two issues involved in pro-life prayer: the specificity of prayer against abortion and the public aspect of this prayer.

Should prayer be public that is not unanimously supported? Why or why not?

Respond to Castuera's comment that pro-life prayer is "in direct opposition to the directives of Jesus." Castuera uses the Matthew 6:5-6 passage against public prayer. Spend time reflecting on and discussing this passage. Does it disallow pro-life prayer in front of abortion clinics? Would it condemn the prayer to end unjust rule in South Africa or the protest prayer "with fists raised"? Does it speak against the public prayer of the Farm Worker's movement? How does context and the issue affect the "acceptability" of prayer?

Respond to the frequent association of pro-life protest in front of clinics—often involving prayer—and anti-abortion violence. Why are acts of protest and acts of violence often conflated in this issue?

Respond to the corporate prayer of Rev. Hoeltzel on page 138-39. While pro-life prayer often prays against abortion and for the "unborn child"—how does this prayer articulate the distinctly pro-choice prayer stance?

Resources

Nancy Duff. "Pro-Life, Pro-Choice, Any Common Ground?" A one-session adult education discussion resource from The Thoughtful Christian. (#TC0017, $5.00) www.thethoughtfulchristian.com

Elizabeth Rankin Geitz, et.al., eds. *Women's Uncommon Prayers: Our Lives Revealed, Nurtured, Celebrated*. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Morehouse, 2000.

Chapter 8: Going to the Wellspring of Trust
The Taizé Vision

Lectio Divina
Taizé chant (see resources list)
Luke 10:38-42

Discussion
Lord, Have Mercy notes in several instances that the tradition of Christian spirituality has been accused of favoring withdrawal from the world over engagement in the world. Is the contemplative prayer at Taizé a continuation of this tradition?

How does your faith community balance "action" and "contemplation"? How might contemplation be redefined to include action and social justice?

The word contemplation connotes "gazing at" an object. Current Western understanding of "sight" implies passivity. However, in monastic terminology, contemplation implied both *perception* of a deeper reality and a *participation* in that reality. With this more nuanced definition, how might contemplation be used to perceive the deeper structures of injustice and stand in solidarity with those affected? How might cultivating perception and participation in the reign of God bridge the split between an individualistic practice of prayer and prayer grounded in justice?

Lectio divina can be a bridge practice for people and communities desiring both spiritual nurture and action for justice. If you or your community tends to be disconnected from issues of injustice, choose lectio passages which speak about the reign of God and God's justice, poverty, and call to serve those in need, such as Isaiah 58:6-12. If you or your community is exhausted by social justice activities, choose lectio passages which speak of God's presence, strength, and love, such as Romans 8:22-39.

A common misconception of prayer and contemplation is that they require silence. In reality, many witnesses to a prayerful way of living were and are in the midst of noisy, messy existence. The home of Julian of Norwich, a 14th century English anchoress, was adjacent to a church in Norwich, directly off from a busy street. She would have heard people, horses, and carts during her prayer. Monasteries throughout history were often schools with young children present. A child's voice at play would have been a counterpoint to the Gregorian chants. Augustine's conversion experience involved hearing children's voices in the garden next door. Instead of fretting if you have trouble finding a quiet place or time to pray, try letting the sounds around you shape your prayer. How might daily noises, interruptions, and human messiness be incorporated into your prayer—as guidance for prayer rather than as distractions?

After an experience of retreat—such as at a local monastery or center—how do you bring the insights back into everyday life?

While a trip to Taizé, France, may be an option for you and/or your community, it is often not necessary to travel far to experience this form of prayer. In many cities, churches offer Taizé services. These opportunities can be found easily via an internet search. A group could attend a Taizé service together and reflect afterward on the experience.

Resources

Jacques Berthier. *Taizé : Songs for Prayer*. GIA Publications, 1998. A number of recordings of Taizé chants are available. Some denominational hymnals, including *Gather* from the Roman Catholic tradition and the Episcopal Church's *Wonder, Love and Praise*, also include Taizé chant.

The Cloud of Unknowing. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004.

C. W. McPherson. *Keeping Silence: Christian Practices for Entering Stillness*. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Morehouse, 2002.

Northumbria Community. *Celtic Daily Prayer*. London: HarperCollins, 2000.

Chapter 9: Praying with Conviction and Humility

Lectio Divina
1 Corinthians 13:1-13
Matthew 20:29-34
Romans 8:26-27

Discussion
Imagine a roundtable discussion among those whose stories have formed the case studies in this book. The author asks, "What is authentic Christian spirituality?" (p.164). How do you think this question would be answered? Where might they agree and disagree? How does your group answer this question? What experiences and insights do you bring to the discussion?

Respond to the author's own conviction that abortion is not "holy work" and that prayer for it as such is not "right practice." How does one discern and then articulate conviction while maintaining "humility and empathy"? Is it possible to still listen, dialogue and pray with others while disagreeing about what is "right practice"?

What is the role of discernment in determining "right practice"? How does your faith community determine what is considered a "right practice" prayer? When and how has this determination been challenged?

As an individual and/or group, reflect on the insights gained from studying *Lord, Have Mercy* and your understanding of prayer for justice. What dreams for prayer for justice have been birthed during this study? How has your understanding about praying for justice changed? How have you or will you incorporate these insights into daily life?

Resources
Kenneth Leech. *True Prayer: An Invitation to Christian Spirituality*. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 1980, 1995.