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.

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.

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.

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.

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 it especially effective in the larger group.

 g. Gather for any announcements.

 h. Final song.

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.

Praying with People Meeting

These meetings begin the normal way but have a large part of 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.”

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. Announcements.

 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.

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.

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.