

Meeting Christ in Prayer

Meeting Christ in Prayer An 8-Week Life-Enriching Experience

Meeting Christ in Prayer is an engaging eight-week guided prayer experience designed for small groups. It is modeled on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, which is a tried-and-true method of spiritual renewal. By means of prayer, reflection, and faith sharing, *Meeting Christ in Prayer* introduces participants to various ways of praying, helps them form regular habits of prayer, and provides them with an opportunity to meet Christ anew and to experience support in the Christian life in a new way. It can also inspire a profound sense of mission that urges participants to a new level of discipleship.

Who can participate in *Meeting Christ in Prayer*?

Meeting Christ in Prayer is designed to serve many groups of people, such as the following:

- people with little or no experience in praying with others
- people who are hungry for a deeper spiritual life

- people who are actively seeking to learn about their faith
- people seeking renewal and focus during Lent or Advent
- parish staff members and parish pastoral councils
- catechists and Catholic school religion teachers
- faculty of Catholic or Christian schools or universities
- campus ministry groups
- parish liturgical ministers
- members of a religious community
- members or staff of Catholic organizations
- participants of Ignatian mission and identity programs
- staff or volunteers at Jesuit apostolates
- prayer groups
- mature high school religious education students

In other words, adults who want to renew their Christian faith or enrich their prayer life can participate.

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Meeting Christ in Prayer is an engaging guided prayer experience that combines eight weekly small-group meetings with daily prayer and reflection exercises completed individually between each gathering.

The Structure

Eight weekly meetings, each an hour and fifteen minutes in length, include group prayer, guided meditation, faith sharing and reflection, an orientation to Scripture readings, simple prayer technique exercises, and an overview of the individual prayer exercises to be practiced in the week ahead.

The individual daily prayer exercises have three segments: (1) a brief prayer in the morning, (2) a brief review of the day in the evening, and (3) a period of extended personal prayer at some time during the day. It is recommended that the extended period of prayer last between twenty and thirty minutes daily.

All materials and directions needed for the weekly meetings and the daily prayer exercises are included in the *Meeting Christ in Prayer* kit. Each member of a group will receive a *Participant Guide*. The *Leader Guide* includes preparation aids, complete scripts for each meeting, tips and suggestions, a music CD, and other helpful materials.

Who can lead a *Meeting Christ in Prayer* small group?

Meeting Christ in Prayer is designed to be led by any practicing Catholic who works well with others, regardless of his or her degree of experience in leading prayer or faith groups. All the materials and support needed to successfully lead a group are provided in the *Leader Guide*. A leader does not need to be an expert in theology or psychology but needs only to be a person of faith who is welcoming, confident, reliable, and interested in growing in his or her faith along with others.

A potential group leader for *Meeting Christ in Prayer* should be

- faith-filled and prayerful,
- comfortable with a small group of people (ten or fewer),
- a good listener,
- trustworthy and confidential,
- organized,
- welcoming and hospitable,
- able to be assertive in a group,
- focused but not controlling, and
- an engaging oral reader.

In other words, any practicing Catholic with leadership ability can lead a *Meeting Christ in Prayer* small group.

Themes for Each Week

Week One: The God of My Experience

In the first session, participants will be invited to reflect on their own experience in order to discover the presence of God in their lives. The “Daily Prayer Exercises” for the first week will include reflective scriptural prayer and writing exercises to help the participants articulate their faith journey up to now.

Week Two: The Plan of God in My Life

God’s plan, in Christ, is for the well-being of all things. However, humanity has chosen its own plan, and this choice separates us from God and leads us away from God’s life-giving grace. Nevertheless, God’s plan is not deterred, and new hope comes in Christ. This second week’s session introduces faith sharing along with the ancient practice of the sacred reading of Scripture known as *lectio divina*. The week’s “Daily Prayer Exercises” consist of reflective scriptural prayer, a personal reflection on sin, and an invitation to celebrate the sacrament of penance.

Week Three: The Early Life of Jesus

In Christ, the saving work of God is offered to men and women in a thoroughly new and unsurpassable way. In the third week, the “Daily Prayer Exercises” introduce an imaginative prayer exercise focused on the life of Christ, from his birth up to the beginning of his public ministry.

Week Four: Jesus’ Public Ministry

Throughout his public ministry, Jesus manifested the saving power of God. As participants grow in their admiration of Christ, they may sense a call to renewed discipleship and desire to respond generously. The “Daily

Prayer Exercises” of the fourth week include a scriptural imaginative prayer exercise focused on events in Jesus’ public ministry, with an emphasis on the call to make a choice for Christ.

Week Five: The Passion and Death of Christ

Christ’s whole life was oriented toward the cross—that singular act of the love of God and neighbor. Participants will reflect on the generosity of Christ’s love in the events of the Passion. In the fifth week, the “Daily Prayer Exercises” focus on the passion and death of Christ through imaginative prayer, meditation, and writing exercises.

Week Six: The Risen Christ Is the Firstborn of Many Brothers and Sisters

As St. Paul teaches, Christ’s resurrection is both the foundation of the Catholic faith and the source of eternal life. Through the mystery of Christ’s resurrection, believers participate in his risen body, giving birth to the church. This sixth week’s session invites participants to prayerfully review their day, using a technique called the *daily examen*, developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola. This week’s “Daily Prayer Exercises” alternate between imaginative prayer on the resurrection of Christ and reflective scriptural prayer on the nature of the church.

Week Seven: Doing the Work of Christ

Since the church is the sacrament of Christ’s presence in the world, the members of the church sacramentally share in his mission of announcing the good news of salvation to all people. Having answered the call to follow Christ, the disciple receives the power of the Holy Spirit to bring the gospel of Christ to every aspect of life. This week, the “Daily Prayer Exercises” include reflective scriptural prayer on Christian life and mission and on the Eucharist.

Week Eight: Celebrating Our Journey in Christ Together

By the eighth week, participants should have a deeper knowledge and love of Christ, a concrete experience of the church as a community of disciples, and a new enthusiasm to share Christ’s message and love in daily life through word and deed. During this last session, the program leader may invite participants to celebrate the Eucharist together in order to conclude the program with Christ-like gratitude and in communion with the whole church. A follow-up or reunion meeting at a later date is provided as an option in the *Meeting Christ in Prayer* materials.

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