

# Vienna Baptist Church

Changing Lives. Transforming Our Community.

## **Praying for Spiritual Growth and Renewal**

*Lenten Prayer Journey*

*2018*

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## MY PRAYER GROUP COVENANT

My Prayer Group (names, phones, email addresses)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

### **OUR COVENANT**

Our Prayer Group Goals are:

- To meet for discussion and prayer 6 times over the next six weeks;
- To faithfully attend each group prayer gathering, having read each session's prayer study guide before each meeting;
- To study and discuss Scripture passages listed in this guide;
- To pray daily for one another, for the other prayer groups, for our church, for our community, and for growth and renewal;
- To have an open mind, listening for God's voice and watching for God's leading;
- To keep a journal of significant discussions, insights, and experiences that take place in private prayer or when we are together.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## INTRODUCTION TO *PRAYING FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH & RENEWAL*

Mark opens his gospel with the story of Jesus' call to ministry. In Mark 1:9-13, we read the story of Jesus' baptism and his time in the wilderness:

*In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.*

The forty days between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday have been a meaningful time for Christians throughout the centuries. Lent is a season in the Church calendar when we focus on reflection and spiritual renewal, commemorating Jesus' time of fasting and prayer in the wilderness before he began his public ministry. The time period of 40 days and 40 nights is significant not only in the life of Jesus, but throughout the Bible.

A careful reading reveals the ways prophets and great leaders have experienced deep communion with God and personal transformation over the course of six weeks. So each week in Lent, we are committing to gather together in small prayer groups to reflect on how God invites us each one of us to spiritual growth and renewal.

*Praying for Spiritual Growth and Renewal* is a time for listening, as God works to inspire our hearts and engage our minds. In our Prayer Groups we will seek to connect with God, connect with each other, and discern how God is calling us to new life. Over the course of about two months, we'll focus on the following themes:

1. Church renewal
2. Spiritual growth
3. Missions
4. Youth and children's ministries
5. Generosity and Gratitude
6. Church Vision

We believe that discover new life by engaging in both the *inward journey* of spiritual growth and the *outward journey* of helping others. Our weekly reflections and prayer activities will help you to reflect on both sides of your spiritual journey. We also hope that this will be a time for you to pray for our church, think about our shared mission and ministry, and reflect on the ways God may be calling you to engage on a deeper level.

**Each *Prayer* experience follows this outline:**

### **GATHERING**

We will begin with a time of reflection and prayer related to the ways in which God has been at work in our lives since our last gathering and preparing for the conversation ahead.

### **REFLECTING ON THE MESSAGE OF SCRIPTURE**

Our spiritual journey is guided by the witness to God's work in the world found in Scripture. Each session will explore the meaning of a certain passage and how it informs the day's focus.

### **DEVOTIONAL REFLECTIONS**

Reflections from pastors, theologians, artists, church leaders and poets will stimulate thought and conversation. Questions will be asked to probe deeper and guide conversation.

### **GUIDE FOR PRAYER AND REFLECTION**

You will have the opportunity to personally apply the day's focus during this part of the gathering. Our learning grows as we build connections with what we are hearing and learning to our lives and to our congregation.

### **PRAYING OUT LOUD FOR EACH OTHER AND OUR CONGREGATION**

*Praying for Spiritual Growth & Renewal* is about nurturing our relationships with God and each other. It is about communicating with God through the study of Scripture, through our conversations and explorations with each other, and through structured times of prayer. Each prayer and sharing experience will end with a time of intentional and focused prayer. Prompts for prayer will be offered, but you are encouraged to pray for other things as God leads.

### **WEEKLY PRAYER ACTIVITY**

We want this prayer experience to not only be an inward journey of spiritual growth, but also an outward journey of transformation. This final section is your opportunity to apply the lessons from the prayer experience to your life in tangible ways. This commitment is between you and God and does not necessarily have to be shared with your group. Until your prayer group meets again, we hope you spend time in prayer and applying what you've learned.

**Please note:** that the times allocated to the above conversations may vary from week to week. These allocations are just suggestions to help keep you on track. Please use your time together in the most meaningful way possible.

## **PRAYER EXPERIENCE 1: CHURCH RENEWAL**

**Our Focus:** Congregational renewal is not about initiating a new program or following a new formula. It is about opening ourselves up to being transformed--being formed anew--by the living God. Renewal occurs when we get rid of the things that clutter our lives and prevent us from following God wholeheartedly.

### **GATHERING (5 MINUTES; times are abbreviated for this introductory experience)**

- Begin with a time of prayer and by sharing your expectations and hopes for your *Praying for Spiritual Growth & Renewal* experience.

### **REFLECTING ON THE MESSAGE OF SCRIPTURE (10 MINUTES)**

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

*<sup>3</sup> For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. <sup>4</sup> For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. <sup>6</sup> We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; <sup>7</sup> ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; <sup>8</sup> the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. (Romans 12:1-8)*

#### Discussion Questions

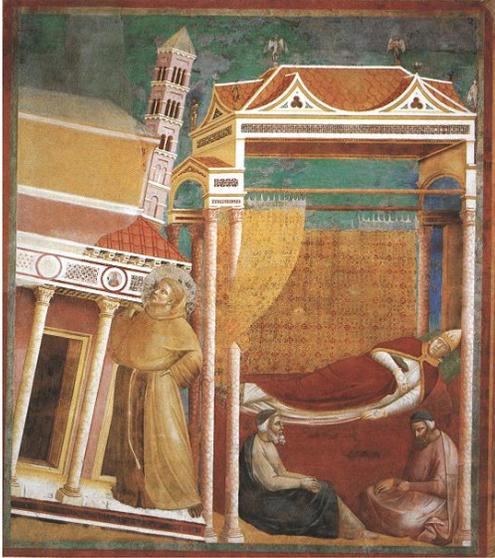
1. What spiritual gifts do you see active in our congregation?
2. What are the gifts that you believe God has given you or others have affirmed in you?
3. How are you using those gifts to support our mission and ministry?

### **DEVOTIONAL REFLECTIONS (10 MINUTES)**

Discontentment is a gift to the church. If you are one of those people who has the ability to see the things that are wrong in the church and in the world, you should thank God for that perception. Not everyone has the eyes to see, or to notice or to care. But we must also see that our discontentment is not a reason to disengage from the church but a reason to engage with it. As Gandhi said, “Be the change you want to see in the world.” Our invitation is to “be the change” we want to see in the church. There are things worth protesting, but we also have to be the people who “pro-testify,” proclaiming the kingdom that we’re for, not just the evils we’re against.

Jesus offered an alternative to Caesar’s empire not by mounting a rebellion but by teaching people that another way is possible. That way is summed up well in Jesus’ triumphal entry, the inaugural parade of a new kind of king for a new kind of kingdom. Church history is filled with holy dissenters, rabble-rousers, and prophets – disturbers of the peace who’ve helped to show us a better way. As some church historians have pointed out, every few hundred years the church gets cluttered by and infected with the materialism and militarism of the world around it. We begin to forget who we are. One bishop said, “And so every five

hundred years or so the church needs a rummage sale,” to get rid of the clutter and to remember the true treasures of our faith.



*The Dream of Pope Innocent III* by Giotto di Bondone

Church history is filled with reformations and renewals. It was in the middle of Italy’s wealth and crusades that St. Francis heard God whisper, “Repair my church which is in ruins,” and he began to repair the ruins. At one point the pope had a vision that the church was beginning to crumble, but the corner was being held up by Francis and the little youth movement in Assisi. The call to repair the church is a call we continue to hear from God and a movement we are invited to participate in.

We shouldn’t be too surprised the church is a mess. After all, it’s made up of people... We are not to leave her, but we are to work for her healing, as we would with a dysfunctional parent. Our work is not “para-church” but “pro-church.” The church needs our discontent, and we need the rest of the body of Christ. One pastor said it like this: “The church is sort of like Noah’s ark. It’s a stinky mess inside, but if you get out, you’ll drown.”

(Excerpt from *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*, Shane Claiborne, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, and Enuma Okoro)

### **PROMPTS FOR PRAYER AND REFLECTION (10 MINUTES)**

1. What is the “clutter” in our own life that gets in the way of spiritual growth? Are you bringing your clutter to the church and dropping it off, or are you allowing the church to repair your heart and help you hear from God?
2. What messes or clutters in our community do you think Vienna Baptist is called to address? Why?
3. God desires all churches to be mission-focused and we can choose to live into this calling. What are ways you have seen us in the past or see us today engaging in mission? What are 2-3 things our congregation could do over the next year to be more mission-focused?

### **PRAYING OUT LOUD FOR EACH OTHER AND FOR OUR CONGREGATION (5 MINUTES)**

Pray for each other by name. Pray that as you journey together and with God over the next few weeks, you will experience the joy of discovering and pursuing God’s direction for your life. Pray that our congregation will experience the blessing of God’s presence and be willing to be God’s living presence in the community and the world.

### **WEEKLY PRAYER ACTIVITY (5 MINUTES)**

Take a piece of paper and pen. Write a list of the things that you have been carrying around with you that you would consider “clutter.” Write down things you think our church is carrying around as “clutter.” Make a commitment to rid yourself of one piece of clutter from your list this week. Then, as you leave, take the list, tear it into little pieces, and place the pieces in the trash can. Remind yourself that God has come to wash away the mess and clutter in our lives, that we may experience new joy and hope.

## **PRAYER EXPERIENCE 2: SPIRITUAL GROWTH**

**Our Focus:** In this hour, please pray for the spiritual growth of our church. Pray for opportunities of spiritual formation for each person in our church and for the group as a whole. Pray for our Bible study and discipleship opportunities. Pray that we will discern movements of the Spirit within our community and respond accordingly. Pray that we would invite others to journey with us.

### **GATHERING (7 MINUTES)**

- Open with prayer centered on our focus theme.
- What part of last week's gathering resonated with you most strongly?
- How was the experience of trying to "de-clutter" your life?

### **REFLECTING ON THE MESSAGE OF SCRIPTURE (10 MINUTES)**

*<sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*

*<sup>43</sup> Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All who believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup> they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup> Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)*

### Discussion Questions

1. Luke lists five key areas to healthy congregational life: teaching, fellowship, worship, service, and generosity. Where do you see these areas lived out at VBC?
2. Which of these areas nourishes your soul the most? What area do you struggle with the most?
3. How do you see our church developing "the goodwill of all the people" in our community?

### **DEVOTIONAL REFLECTIONS (10 MINUTES)**

Spiritual formation requires taking not only the *inward journey* to the heart, but also the *outward journey* from the heart to community and ministry. Christian spirituality is essentially communal. Spiritual formation is formation in community. One's personal prayer life can never be understood if it is separated from community life. Prayer in the spiritual life leads to community, and community to prayer. In community we learn what it means to confess our weakness and to forgive each other. In community we discover our own woundedness, but also a place of healing. In community we learn true humility. Without community, we become individualistic and egocentric. Therefore, spiritual formation always includes formation to life in community...

Christian spirituality not only flows from community but creates community. It nurtures the life of the Spirit in us, within us, and among us. The Spirit of God dwells in the center of our heart and is the center of our life together. Indeed, what is most personal proves to be the most public; what is most nourishing for our individual lives proves to be the best food for our lives as the people of God living in and acting on behalf of the suffering world. It is therefore not surprising that prayer and community are always found

together, because the same Spirit who prays in us is the Spirit who binds us together into one body as we are called to love each other and work for a renewed world.

(Excerpt from Henri Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit*, xxvi-xxvii)

### **PROMPTS FOR PRAYER AND REFLECTION (10 MINUTES)**

1. What has being a part of this faith community taught you about yourself and/or your relationship with God? Tell a story about when you learned this lesson.
2. Who is a person that has helped you grow in your faith? Is there a story that comes to mind that illustrates the impact they have made on your life?
3. Who are people you take time to pray with and for in our congregation? Take some time to pray for those people and their spiritual growth. If you do not have people you regularly share prayer concerns with, ask God to help you discover a small group so you can grow in community with others.

### **PRAYING OUT LOUD FOR EACH OTHER AND FOR OUR CONGREGATION (5 MINUTES)**

Thank God for the people and relationships that have shaped your faith journey. Spend time giving thanks for the mentors, teachers, and friends along the way. Ask God to help show you people in our congregation and in your life that you can encourage, support, and care for as others have done for you. Pray for our congregation, that we may develop meaningful relationships and grow in faith together as a community.

### **WEEKLY PRAYER ACTIVITY (5 MINUTES)**

Take some time to remember and share the story of an experience in the church or in your journey of faith that changed you personally in a meaningful way. For those mentors, teachers, and friends you've thought about during today's session, if possible send them a note or give them a call to let them know the ways they've impacted your life. Also, spend time thinking about who you will encourage and support this week.

## **PRAYER EXPERIENCE 3: MISSIONS**

**Our Focus:** In this hour, please pray for the needs of our local community. Pray for students and teachers, young families and retirees, homeless neighbors and affluent ones. Pray for our church, that we would be a community of faith that serves our community and meets people's needs.

### **GATHERING (7 MINUTES)**

- Open with prayer centered on our focus theme.
- What part of last week's gathering resonated with you most strongly?
- What was your experience with writing cards or reaching out to mentors/teachers?
- What was your experience with encouraging others?

### **REFLECTING ON THE MESSAGE OF SCRIPTURE (10 MINUTES)**

*<sup>31</sup> "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, <sup>33</sup> and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. <sup>34</sup> Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; <sup>35</sup> for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup> I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' <sup>37</sup> Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? <sup>38</sup> And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? <sup>39</sup> And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' <sup>40</sup> And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' (Matthew 25: 31-40)*

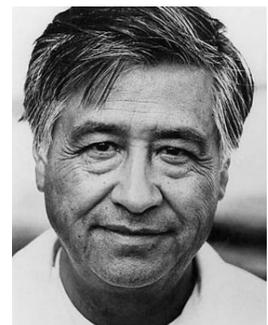
### Discussion Questions

1. What surprises you, challenges you, or inspires you about this passage?
2. Where do you see some of these needs in our community today?
3. How might God be calling you to meet one of these needs?

### **DEVOTIONAL REFLECTIONS (10 MINUTES)**

*The following section contains a series of quotes about making a difference in our community. Read each quote slowly, taking time to pause and reflect. Maybe you want to write down connections you make or inspiration you've discovered. Share with one another how these quotes are speaking to you today.*

Perhaps we can bring the day when children will learn from their earliest days that being fully man and fully woman means to give one's life to the liberation of the brother who suffers. It is up to each one of us. It won't happen unless we decide to use our lives to show the way. –Cesar Chavez





What we would like to do is change the world--make it a little simpler for people to feed, clothe, and shelter themselves as God intended them to do. And, by fighting for better conditions, by crying out unceasingly for the rights of the workers, the poor, of the destitute--the rights of the worthy and the unworthy poor, in other words--we can, to a certain extent, change the world; we can work for the oasis, the little cell of joy and peace in a harried world. We can throw our pebble in the pond and be confident that its ever-widening circle will reach around the world. We repeat, there is nothing we can do but love, and, dear God, please enlarge our hearts to love each other, to love our neighbor, to love our enemy as our friend. –Dorothy Day

Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love. – Martin Luther King, Jr.



### **PROMPTS FOR PRAYER AND REFLECTION (15 MINUTES)**

1. If it's a nice day outside, take some time to walk around the neighborhood together. Consider taking a different route than you are familiar with or try to notice something new on an old sidewalk. As you walk, pray for the people who live in the homes and how our church can better serve them. Take a notepad with you and write down things you observe or something God brings to your attention.
2. If the weather isn't nice outside, grab a notepad and spend time reflecting on what your neighborhood looked like when you first moved to the area. Who lived in the area? What is your first memory of living in the community? Then, take some time to consider how the community has changed. What changes do you see as you drive through the streets? What changes have surprised you about the community? What remains the same? What do you think Vienna will be like in 10 years? Spend time praying for our community's past, present, and future. Ask God to help us discern how to best serve our neighbors.

### **PRAYING OUT LOUD FOR EACH OTHER AND FOR OUR CONGREGATION (5 MINUTES)**

- Think of one of our mission partners. You can visit the "serve" section of our website if you need help thinking of our partners. Pray for one of them specifically. You can look up their website to give you more specific ideas for how to pray for them. Look for ways you can be involved in how God is already at work in our world through our mission projects and service opportunities.

### **WEEKLY PRAYER ACTIVITY (5 MINUTES)**

Remember and share the story of the most meaningful experience you've had helping others. What did you do? Why did it make such an impact on your life?

If you aren't connected to a mission project or service opportunity, ask God to guide you to a place of service that would connect your deepest passions with our community's deepest needs.

## **PRAYER EXPERIENCE 4: YOUTH AND CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES**

**Our Focus:** In this hour, pray for the youth and children in our church and for their families. Pray for our ministry and ways we can equip families to help in the faith formation of their children. Pray for those who serve our children in ministry. Pray that we take the time and effort to learn about God through them and find ways to incorporate them as equal partners in faith. Pray for our kids as they continue to discover their identity in Christ and how to live out that identity in all aspects of life.

### **GATHERING (7 MINUTES)**

- Open with prayer centered on our focus theme.
- What part of last week's gathering resonated with you most strongly?
- Did you feel a new or renewed calling to a particular mission project or service opportunity? If so, what was it and why?

### **REFLECTING ON THE MESSAGE OF SCRIPTURE (10 MINUTES)**

<sup>4</sup> For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving; <sup>5</sup> for it is sanctified by God's word and by prayer.

<sup>6</sup> If you put these instructions before the brothers and sisters, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound teaching that you have followed. <sup>7</sup> Have nothing to do with profane myths and old wives' tales. Train yourself in godliness, <sup>8</sup> for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. <sup>9</sup> The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance. <sup>10</sup> For to this end we toil and struggle, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

<sup>11</sup> These are the things you must insist on and teach. <sup>12</sup> Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. <sup>13</sup> Until I arrive, give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting, to teaching. <sup>14</sup> Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders. <sup>15</sup> Put these things into practice, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. <sup>16</sup> Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.

(1 Timothy 4:4-16. see also: Acts 16:1-5, Luke 1:26-56)

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What is the most meaningful faith experience you had as a youth or child? Why does it continue to resonate with you?
2. How do you see the callings and contributions of our youth and children celebrated at our church? What are other creative ways we could nurture them?

### **DEVOTIONAL REFLECTIONS (10 MINUTES)**

Children's ministry that emphasizes forming disciples of Jesus is about walking alongside children on the path of discipleship, apprenticing them into the way that Jesus laid out for all of us...We are formed as disciples even as we form others. Children and adults walk the path together as equals on a common journey of discipleship...Children's ministry can become a tale of friends on a spiritual journey, a journey

of following Jesus one step at a time. As common pilgrims along this path, adults and children have much to teach one another...[Children remind] us of the creativity, exuberance, authenticity and fear that come along with the journey. They show us what close connections to God look like. They remind us to thank God for the little things in life and that it's okay to cry out to God in gut-wrenching lament when we are overwhelmed, afraid or saddened. As we have followed Jesus side-by-side with young disciples, our spirits have been lifted and challenged, and we have been given the freedom to enjoy the journey. After all, children don't just walk along the path - they run, skip, slide, hop, play and dance as they follow in Jesus' footsteps.

[Excerpt from *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus* by David M. Csinos and Ivy Beckwith]

### **PROMPTS FOR REFLECTION AND PRAYER (10 MINUTES)**

1. In our Scripture passages, you read about youth who answer the call to ministry. How do we make space for and help our youth understand and answer their calls to follow God? What are steps you can take to be part of that process?
2. Think of some of our youth by name. Name a talent God has given them. How can you and our church acknowledge their giftedness? How can we encourage them to use those gifts to pastor others? The next time you see those youth, acknowledge their giftedness with them.
3. As older disciples of Christ, we are called to guide children in the ongoing process of faith formation. How can you help our church walk alongside children in their faith formation?

### **PRAYING OUT LOUD FOR EACH OTHER AND FOR OUR CONGREGATION (5 MINUTES)**

Thank God for the ways your faith journey was impacted as a youth or child by caring adults. Spend time in prayer for our Pastor for Youth and Children Ginny Richardson, our Volunteer Children's Ministry Associate Lynn Collins, and all of our amazing youth and children's ministry volunteers. Pray for the faith formation of our youth and children as they grow into the people God has uniquely created them to be.

### **WEEKLY PRAYER ACTIVITY (5 MINUTES)**

Jesus calls us to come to God's kingdom with the heart of a child. A treasured practice of children is coloring. "Praying in Color" is an active, meditative, playful prayer practice.

Gather a collection of colored pencils, crayons, and paper. Take a piece of paper, a pencil, and a few crayons. On your piece of paper, draw a shape (it could be a triangle, imperfect circle, etc.). Write the name of a child in your family, the families of our church or something specific you feel called to pray for our ministry in the shape.

Add detail to the drawing. This might be dots, lines, circles, zigzags, or whatever you would like to do. Think of each stroke and each moment as time that you spend with the person or issue in prayer. Add color to your shape. You can make other shapes and pray for other children and their families or pray for other parts of our children's ministry.

(Instructions found in Sybil MacBeth's *Praying in Color*).

## **PRAYER EXPERIENCE 5: CULTURE OF GENEROSITY**

**Our Focus:** In this hour, we ask that you pray for God to grow a culture of generosity in our congregation. Pray that our hearts would overflow with thanksgiving for what God has done and our spirits would be filled with hope in what God is about to do. Pray that we would show our gratitude and hope by giving generously of our time, talents and treasure to support God's work in the church and in the world.

### **GATHERING (7 MINUTES)**

- Open with prayer centered on our focus theme.
- What part of last week's gathering resonated with you most strongly?

### **REFLECTING ON THE MESSAGE OF SCRIPTURE (10 MINUTES)**

*<sup>6</sup> The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. <sup>7</sup> Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. <sup>8</sup> And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. <sup>9</sup> As it is written,*

*"He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor;  
his righteousness endures forever."*

*<sup>10</sup> He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. <sup>11</sup> You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; <sup>12</sup> for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. <sup>13</sup> Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, <sup>14</sup> while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. <sup>15</sup> Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! (2 Corinthians 9:6-15).*

### Discussion Questions

1. What are you grateful for right now in your life? What are you celebrating?
2. What is the most joyful experience you've had giving to others? Why?

### **DEVOTIONAL REFLECTIONS (10 MINUTES)**

On our own, we conclude:  
there is not enough to go around

we are going to run short of money, of love, of  
grades, of publications, of members, of years, of  
life

we should seize the day, seize our goods, seize  
our neighbours goods because there is not  
enough to go around

and in the midst of our perceived deficit  
you come

you come giving bread in the wilderness  
you come giving children at the 11th hour  
you come giving homes to exiles  
you come giving futures to the shut down  
you come giving Easter joy to the dead  
you come – fleshed in Jesus.

and we watch while  
the blind receive their sight, the lame walk  
the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear  
the dead are raised, the poor dance and sing

we watch and we take food we did not grow and  
life we did not invent  
and families and neighbors who sustain us  
when we did not deserve it.

It dawns on us – late rather than soon-  
that you “give food in due season  
you open your hand  
and satisfy the desire of every living thing.”

By your giving, break our cycles of imagined  
scarcity  
override our presumed deficits  
quiet our anxieties of lack  
transform our perceptual field to see  
the abundance.....mercy upon mercy

blessing upon blessing.  
Sink your generosity deep into our lives  
that your muchness may expose our false lack  
that endlessly receiving we may endlessly give  
so that the world may be made Easter new,  
without greedy lack, but only wonder,  
without coercive need but only love,  
without destructive greed but only praise  
without aggression and invasiveness....  
all things Easter new.....  
all around us, toward us and  
by us all things Easter new.

Finish your creation, in wonder, love and praise.  
Amen.

(Excerpt from “On Generosity” in *Inscribing the Text* by Walter Brueggemann)

### **PROMPTS FOR PRAYER AND REFLECTION (10 MINUTES)**

1. Write down all the ways God has blessed you this year. Where do you see God at work in your life?
2. What would generous giving of your time, talents and treasure to God look like this year?
3. Spend time in prayer thanking God for all the ways you have experienced increased faith, hope and love this year. Pray for this church, both in thanksgiving and in hope for the future as we seek to discern and to be faithful to God’s vision for us. Pray for yourself and your family that you may hear how God is uniquely calling you to serve and to answer that call with boldness.

### **PRAYING OUT LOUD FOR EACH OTHER AND FOR OUR CONGREGATION (5 MINUTES)**

Thanksgiving acknowledges that God is the source of all good gifts and blessings. Remember, name, and thank God for your blessings and for the blessings God has given to our church. Ask that God’s goodness might overflow so powerfully in your life that you can do nothing else but respond by being generous to others with your whole life. May God form us into people of such blessing that others lift praises to God in thanksgiving and in this way create a world of generous giving and fulfilled living.

### **WEEKLY PRAYER ACTIVITY (5 MINUTES)**

Time does not permit you to share all of God’s blessings, but think back over your life and share two or three of God’s gifts and blessings to you. Afterwards, do the same for some of the gifts and blessings our church has experienced that have personally affected you.

How did you feel as you remembered and shared your blessings and heard others do the same? A thankful heart is an inspiration for change in our lives and an inspiration to follow God more fully. In what ways are you inspired to trust in the faithfulness of God to provide? What actions can you take this week to express gratitude to God and others?

## **PRAYER EXPERIENCE 6: CHURCH VISION AND MISSION**

**Our Focus:** In this hour, please spend time in prayer for the vision of Vienna Baptist Church. As we begin a new season in the life of our congregation, we continue to pray for God to give us clarity on who we are called to be and how we are called to serve others. Pray for a spirit of courage and faithfulness as we pursue God's calling.

### **GATHERING (7 MINUTES)**

- Open with prayer centered on our focus theme.
- How has this prayer experience deepened your faith and your sense of call?
- What was your experience reflecting on generosity last week? Did you do anything to act on your gratitude and thanksgiving?

### **REFLECTING ON THE MESSAGE OF SCRIPTURE (10 MINUTES)**

<sup>2</sup>Then the Lord answered me and said:

Write the vision;

make it plain on tablets,

so that a runner may read it.

<sup>3</sup>For there is still a vision for the appointed time;

it speaks of the end, and does not lie.

If it seems to tarry, wait for it;

it will surely come, it will not delay.

(Habakkuk 2:2-3)

#### Discussion Questions

1. When was the last time you felt God calling you to try something new in your life of faith or in your service to others? What was it like? How did you feel? How were you changed?
2. Spiritual growth and renewal is about recognizing that God is not finished with us yet, that there is more new life to discover ahead. God has something important for us to do—even though we might not be clear about what it is at the moment—and God is already at work in and through you and our congregation to accomplish this purpose. Why do you think it's important for us to cultivate a spiritual readiness for our journey with God? Without it, what happens to the journey? What role do hope and anticipation play?

### **DEVOTIONAL REFLECTIONS (10 MINUTES)**

The prophet engages in futuring fantasy. The prophet does not ask if the vision can be implemented, for questions of implementation are of no consequence until the vision can be imagined. The imagination must come before the implementation. Our culture is competent to implement almost anything and to imagine almost nothing. The same royal consciousness that make it possible to implement anything and everything is the one that shrinks imagination because imagination is a danger. Thus every totalitarian regime is frightened of the artist. It is the vocation of the prophet to keep alive the ministry of imagination, to keep on conjuring and proposing futures alternative to the single one the king wants to urge as the only thinkable one.

(Excerpt from *The Prophetic Imagination* by Walter Brueggemann)

*A Blessing for A New Beginning*

In out-of-the-way places of the heart,  
Where your thoughts never think to wander,  
This beginning has been quietly forming,  
Waiting until you were ready to emerge.

Then the delight, when your courage kindled,  
And out you stepped onto new ground,  
Your eyes young again with energy and dream,  
A path of plentitude opening before you.

For a long time it has watched your desire,  
Feeling the emptiness growing inside you,  
Noticing how you willed yourself on,  
Still unable to leave what you had outgrown.

Though your destination is not yet clear  
You can trust the promise of this opening;  
Unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning  
That is at one with you life's desire.

It watched you play with the seduction of safety  
And the gray promises that sameness whispered,  
Heard the waves of turmoil rise and relent,  
Wondered would you always live like this.

Awaken your spirit to adventure;  
Hold nothing back, earn to find ease in risk;  
Soon you will be home in a new rhythm,  
For your soul senses the world that awaits you.

(from *To Bless the Space Between Us* by John O'Donohue)

**PROMPTS FOR PRAYER AND REFLECTION (10 MINUTES)**

1. What is clearer to you about your spiritual journey after this prayer experience?
2. How would you like to continue intentionally praying and seeking spiritual growth and renewal in your life after this meeting?
3. How can this group continue to pray for you and support you on your spiritual journey?

**PRAYING OUT LOUD FOR EACH OTHER AND FOR OUR CONGREGATION (5 MINUTES)**

Give thanks that God is not finished with you or our congregation, but that God desires for us to join in the mission of bringing healing and hope to the world. Share with God your desire to follow Jesus with deeper commitment and faith in order to discover new life and joy.

**WEEKLY PRAYER ACTIVITY (5 MINUTES)**

Spend time in prayer and reflection each day this week praying for the future of our church. Pray that God would fill us with a sense of bold vision and greater love for God and others. Ask that we might develop a culture of discipleship where everyone is able to discover and develop their spiritual gifts and then to exercise those gifts in ministry to one another and to the world.

Pray that God would do a similar work in you. Ask God to reveal to you how you are being called to follow Jesus to new meaning and purpose in life.