How to Start a Prayer Group
Including Guidance for Online Gatherings

1. **Identify a small group of people** (three to six) to be the core planning team or steering committee for what will eventually become a larger prayer group. They should be willing to: (a) commit to a regular gathering for prayer for a certain period of time (longer than a month and shorter than a year); (b) offer their gifts in planning and leadership on a rotating basis; and (c) invite others to join the group for prayer.

2. **Determine a time and frequency** for gathering; once a week is recommended. Let the group come to a consensus on the time of day and day of the week. It is not essential for everyone to be present every time, but all participants should be available most of the time. If you can't come to a consensus, it may be necessary for one or more people to form or join a different prayer group.

3. **Determine a way to meet**. Meetings may be on-line, using video- or teleconferencing, or in-person, at a church, home, or other location. At this stage, it may be helpful to identify a person to keep a schedule of leaders and locations, if applicable, or to set up the video- or teleconferencing system. *See below for additional guidance for online gatherings.*

4. **Have an initial conversation** to establish norms and expectations for the group, e.g., participation or confidentiality, and discuss patterns or forms for prayer, e.g., services from the Presbyterian *Book of Common Worship–Daily Prayer* (BCW–DP) or the PC(USA) Daily Prayer app. Discuss items a. through e. below. Open and close the conversation with prayer.
    a. **Come up with a rough template** for the order of worship. Plan for a fifteen- to thirty-minute service. Consider the time of day (evening, night, morning, midday) as you think about the elements of worship. Be open to exploring new patterns and trying different practices.
    b. **Decide what media will be used** and how the order of worship will be shared. Will participants need Bibles, hymnals, prayer books or smartphone apps? If participants are meeting online, will one person share their screen? Or can the service be conducted without printed texts?
    c. **Determine a process for selecting biblical readings**, such as the three-year Revised Common Lectionary and daily readings (2018 BCW–DP, pp. 545–601), the two-year daily lectionary (2018 BCW–DP, pp. 602–641), continuous reading through a book or section of the Bible, or readings otherwise chosen by leaders for the week. Be mindful of the Christian year and other events in the church, the world, and the lives of participants.
    d. **Include music and other forms of art**, according to the gifts of those in your prayer group. You may also incorporate physical actions such as lighting candles or pouring water. This will provide for active participation and greatly enhance the experience of prayer by engaging the imagination and emotions.
    e. **Assemble planning teams** for the first few weeks of services. It is recommended to have two people for each service: one responsible for the order of worship and another responsible for music and the arts. Planning teams may wish to take responsibility for a short span of weeks or rotate on a weekly basis. Consider putting together pairs of leaders who may not know each other well.

5. **Designate leaders** for particular elements of worship, some of whom may or may not be planners for the day. This may happen through communications (email, texts, calls) prior to the meeting, or it may take place in the first few minutes as people gather for the meeting. Be sure that leaders are adequately prepared and equipped to do what is asked in a graceful and confident way.

6. **Have a few regular meetings** for prayer. Before each meeting, take time for introductions as needed. After each meeting, allow time for personal check-in and debriefing the service. Use appreciative inquiry: "I appreciated …" and "I wonder if we might …"

7. **Invite others to participate**. After a few meetings for prayer, let each person in the core group invite two or three other people to join the prayer meetings. Unless the group was formed around a particular identity or vocation, invite people from a variety of races/ethnicities and cultural traditions, including deacons, elders, pastors, musicians, educators, youth workers, members, and so on. If the group meets online, consider people from a variety of geographical locations, keeping in mind time zones, of course. Invite new participants to be involved in planning and leadership. At this stage, it may be helpful to identify someone to manage and maintain the email list of participants.

8. **A group of about twenty** seems to be a good size. This will ensure that at least ten to fifteen people are present for each meeting. When (or if) the group grows smaller than ten, it may be time to invite others; when (or if) the group grows larger than thirty, it may be time to split into two smaller groups.

9. **Discuss the identity and mission** of the prayer group at regular intervals, perhaps every three to six months. Is it time to try new patterns of worship, set a different day or time, split into multiple groups, or invite other people to participate? How is the group growing closer to God and one another in prayer? How is the group engaged in the life of the world and service to others?

Additional Guidance for Online Gatherings
- Include any necessary liturgical texts, biblical readings, or musical selections in a single document, e.g., word processing, projection software.
- Have one participant share their computer screen with others so all can see the order of worship; be vigilant about advancing the screen as needed.
- Involve multiple prayer leaders, readers, and musicians in each service, but not so many that it becomes cumbersome or tedious.
- For music, have one person sing and/or play while others sing with microphones muted; digital tracks can be played through one leader's computer.
- Use rubrics in the order of worship (if applicable) and/or spoken instructions by a leader to remind participants when to mute or un-mute their microphones.
- Find occasions for conversation and reflection on the themes and images of the biblical readings, whether during or after the service.
- In times of thanksgiving and intercession, provide ample opportunities for worshipers to share particular joys and concerns of the day.
- Allow for moments of silent reflection around the psalm(s), scripture, and prayer—even if it feels uncomfortable or awkward at first!
- Designate one person to be the "voice of all," speaking the bold print or unison lines in the service with microphone un-muted.
- End the time of prayer by un-muting all microphones and sharing the peace of Christ with one another.

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