

# P *pray*

from **precare**, Latin  
**“to obtain by entreaty,  
engaging negotiations”**

to verbally or mentally address God;  
worshiping and practicing in a public way

Midweek comes, and in the middle of citywide peace activity, the peaceCENTER in San Antonio, Texas comes to a stop. Local and global issues, teaching in schools and places of worship, attending community meetings and holding vigils at sites of violence – these are just some of the many things that over-fill the daily schedules of the Core Team members and volunteers. But when midweek comes, we stop, and we pray.

To some it may look like a campfire gathering as we circle around a lone candle or some flowers that someone picked along the way. To others the morning may look like a staff meeting filled with details and the volunteering of tasks for upcoming activities. To us, well, we call it reCentering.

Half of the three hour time period is prayer and the other half is action. It is our chance to re-collect ourselves and our souls, to re-focus in the midst of our weekly and necessary busy-ness. Someone may bring with them a recently read article. Or someone may bring with them a meditation or prayer form to share from their faith tradition. Or we may bring the local newspaper and pass the pages among ourselves to carefully read and digest the

news. Or we may read out loud, one chapter and one week at a time, a book that we think speaks to the efforts of peace.

Before, during, and after any of these possibilities there is an open and free-flowing conversation among us. Sometimes there are tears, and sometimes overwhelming laughter! But, somehow in that holy conversation, our prayers begin to speak to our actions in the world. New ideas and ways to nourish older ideas are birthed.

And we move into our action time. It can appear to be a time of creative chaos but it is the working out of minds and bodies that are inspired through prayer and prayer-filled insights. Depending on upcoming events, the action time may be more structured to get all the work done that's necessary, but most of the time it's as free-flow as the prayer time, and just as much gets done. People randomly discuss what they're working on and the rest of us add our connections and enhance the work through networks and experience. Many times the air is filled with the words, "what if?" and "why not?" Sure, there are times we don't see things the same way but we hang in there remembering that it is commitment to peace that brings us together.

We practice what we teach. In respect for all the human resources gathered there, we begin and end on time to honor each other and not steal away this precious commodity. Our lives are transformed again. We are reCentered. We might share lunch together, but eventually we go our separate ways back into the world.

## **Dynamic between prayer & action**

A couple of times we decided to shorten our prayer time because we had so many details to take care of for an upcoming event. Bottom line, it didn't work well. Our time together became difficult, much like birthing a premature baby. After about the third or fourth time of that, and upon reflection, we decided that reCentering would remain equally portioned between prayer and action. We made a commitment to the dynamic.

When prayer and action are separated the result is a diminishment of both. When prayer and action are integrally connected they become a source of renewable energy and gift. This dynamic also carries into the larger community. As we'll see throughout these writings the dynamic between prayer and action is integral to education, to actions, to connections, and absolutely necessary to remaining in authentic relationship with the Holy and with ourselves!

### ◆QUESTions

- What out of my/our\* own experience can I/we\* say about the dynamic between prayer and action?

*\*ALL QUESTions throughout this book can be asked in the singular as an individual or in the plural form as a group.*

## The Individual and the Collective Center

Fragments of ourselves are scattered throughout our days, throughout our lives. Obligations at home, at work, in our family and social arena claim bits and pieces of our attention and our energy. Is it any wonder that we frequently feel depleted? Our culture demands an external focus. We are conditioned to feel guilty if we steal time for ourselves. Even in some faith traditions **doing** is more rewarded than **being** no matter the toll it takes on spirit.

Learning to slow to a stop each day and intentionally collect those bits and pieces that siphon off the ability to be present to ourselves and the Holy takes practice and desire. No longer wanting to go through life running on half power, many times near empty is a significant prayer. Being our own source is a delusion and finally we need to loosen this grip on our lives and take responsibility for choosing to let go.

By taking 10-15 minutes each day to sit, to breathe, to still the mind, a place of calm in busy schedules can be found. It is an intentional opening up of self to receive and reconnect. Individually this practice is a powerful source of presence, a point of departure. **People who are able to hold their center in the midst of confusion and chaos will be the birthing agents of healing into this broken world.**

When this attention to slowing to a stop and being receptive is done with a group the equation truly becomes that the whole is much, much greater than the sum of the parts. This is experienced time and time again at the peaceCENTER during reCentering. And, the energy that flows out of a collective and individual center takes on an energy that is more creative, exciting, and fun! Synchronicities abound. A project receives life and a lightness that makes all around stand up in honor and wonder at what is being born.

### ◆**QUESTIONS**

- How do I go about centering each day? Do I meditate? Is nature a part of my centering process?
- When and where do I or might I center with others?

## **Holy Conversation**

Talk among peacemakers and activists can be engaging, imaginative, and wonder-filled. It's expectant! It can also be hasty due to the urgency of local and global situations. Hastiness can lead to tension in the group. Making decisions may become more difficult. Creating the atmosphere where all conversation is considered holy can create a back and forth exchange of energy and ideas.

Simply, it is a way of talking and listening where all agree and consciously honor everyone's words as holy. This practice tends to slow down the process because people take greater care in the words they use and how they hear others. And that slowing down is just enough to open the door for wonder to be enjoyed, tensions allayed, and relationships nurtured. Practicing holy conversation during the prayer time encourages its use during action times. **Holy conversation enhances the flow of energy and ideas.** Prayer continues to inform action and action becomes a prayer.

### ◆**QUESTIONS**

- Have I ever participated in holy conversation, even if I didn't call it that? How might I introduce it into my life situations?

## Prayer from All Sides

**Simple logic tells us that if peace is going to be born into the world the effort will take all of us.** The outcome of this simple and logical equation is that peacemaking then requires people of all faiths working together for the common good. Working in opposition or debate about how peace is created and who's in charge is its own cycle of violence. And, if we are people of faith, no matter the tradition, then we also know that prayer is one of our strengths and is a necessity to life.

So, if prayer is our strength, why is prayer not integral in our planning processes? Not exactly knowing how to pray across faith lines and fear contribute to the lack of prayer in interfaith peacemaking and community organizing. It's much like delivering one's first child – we don't know exactly what we're doing and usually there's a bit more than a little fear! Labor, pushing, guidance, and love can help prayer enter into the interfaith world and the common ground of peace.

Prayer from all sides takes intentional labor and pushing of oneself and others. Going to other traditions' places of worship and prayer to experience their prayer reality is a good place to begin. Possibly having people come from other faith traditions to share their faith expression helps put a face on the "other" and begins to ease the fear. Guidance from people who are already praying across faith lines or gathering different faith leaders together to explore how prayers might work together are also excellent first steps.

Love, however, is the greatest nurturer when it comes to interfaith prayer and respect for others. This love is greater than us or love for our family and community or our love for the entire planet. This kind of love adds all those together and rolls them into the future generations as well. When the peaceCENTER gathers each mid-week for reCentering we pray with whomever shows up, whether we know them or not. We're able to pray together across faith lines because we look through the eyes of love that are focused on a living legacy of peace.

### ◆QUESTIONS

- What does interfaith prayer look like where I live? What are some of the fears that I experience? Where might I go to find out more about it or where it might be happening?

## Space

Physical space sets the tone for prayer, and for the actions that follow. The more fluid and open the space is – well, that’s how the prayer and action will be too! When the room is set-up with chairs in rows and some kind of podium or table upfront, then a dynamic of others-in-charge is also set-up. Gathering in a circle, even when amoeba shaped or concentric circles, sets the tone for shared prayer, shared knowledge, shared imagination, and shared accountability. People are able to see each other’s faces in a circle and there is an authentic power because everyone’s potential is being tapped.

However, the concept of space goes beyond the physical. Space also includes how we relate to one another and being open enough within ourselves and to each other to authentically share the prayer, share the knowledge, share the imagination, and hold each other accountable. When we gather to pray and to act in such openness the gathering is not a matter of personal agendas, the gathering is a matter of personal and shared gifts. **The space created provides a prayerful stance that pulls everyone into the openness so that something new might be birthed.**

### ◆QUESTions

- Have I ever entered a planning or prayer space aware that I was carrying my own agenda or felt like I knew the right way to do things? What would it take for me to let go of these feelings and be open to others who are different from me?
- When I’ve been to different gatherings or helped set them up, was the space set in a circular shape? If not, how can I imagine that into being?

## Listening & Observing

Many of us grew up in faith traditions rich with prayer forms and ritual, a secure way to be formed into a relationship with the Holy. As adults our faith matures and we grow into our spiritual life, then the need to find our own expressions of prayer, to find our unique voice, grows as well.

Just as we learned our native language as children by outward observation and listening in order to find our true spiritual expression, as adults we need to turn our powers of observing and listening inward. The experiences of our lives up to the present are unique to us just as yours are unique to you. So many times we miss the lesson and the gift of an experience because our attention is not focused.

In a society of instantaneous communication and entertainment from around the world it is no wonder that we are distracted and addicted to the next breaking story. The antidote to this fractured existence is deep listening, first to our holy selves and as a natural consequence to our holy others. Being able to see deeply into our own eyes helps us to look deeply into the eyes of those we meet. Compassionately listening to our own voice leads us to listen with compassion to others.

When we sit around the circle during reCentering, the nourishment comes from the intimacy of taking sufficient time to observe and to listen. As each of us shares not only our thoughts but our feelings each week, we birth new hopes and dreams knowing that they will be received and nurtured until they are viable and can grow into action. Peace and hope thrive when they are intentionally nourished in a community and family of hopeful and peaceful people. **By our acknowledgement and deep listening we provide an environment where our offspring thrive!**

#### ◆QUESTIONS

- How well do I listen and acknowledge my spiritual development and myself? How well do I listen and acknowledge others in the same context? What are some steps I might take to nurture my listening and active acknowledgement of self and others? How might I pray about this?

## Vigils

Violence happens. That's a current reality whether it is happening in our own homes or the streets of our community or in the homes and streets of foreign countries. Vigils take prayer beyond ourselves and out into the world. Vigils can happen anywhere and everywhere. Vigils have

been happening throughout the centuries and throughout the millennia all over the world.

**The word vigil comes from the same root as vigilant, and yes, vigilante.** The basic meaning is to be awake, alert, watchful – especially to danger. Vigils can take many forms and they always involve a gathering of concerned, committed people. Vigils can occur where someone has died suddenly or where an act of violence has occurred and people of faith are standing in a holy moment, in prayer, remembering and desperately supporting each other as they stay alert. When Gandhi gathered together 1000s of people daily on the beach to pray together and across faith traditions, they were holding vigil and staying awake in the midst of difficulties in their country. The same can be said for the story at the beginning of this chapter.

Vigils are a simple prayer form. After a site reveals itself, say in the case of a drive-by shooting, or a time reveals itself like September 11, 2001, people are invited together and asked to share prayers of peace being mindful that many diverse faith traditions are present strengthening each other as they gather on the common and holy ground of peace. Prayers can be planned or spontaneous and include those who have been impacted by the violence AND those who have participated in the violence. Vigils are prayer from all sides.

### ◆**QUESTIONS**

- Re-read the story at the beginning of this chapter. How is reCentering a vigil? When and where have I been at a vigil? Are there times when I participate in prayers that are vigilant, but not called vigils? (These questions apply to all the lead stories in the upcoming chapters!)

## **Arts**

Ask any artist or musician if what they do through their art is prayer and they will know what you are asking. Many of us may not view art as prayer, maybe something beautiful yet not necessarily prayer. The real beauty about art is that art connects both sides of the brain. The process is a holy mystery and science also concurs via a multitude of left-brain and right-brain studies. Many famous thinkers were also intense doodlers just as many famous artists were also astounding thinkers.

The culture in the U.S. today is very compartmentalized and promotes a world of specialists. When all those specialists are put together as a whole we probably have all the parts we need for survival, yet living in compartments creates isolation rather than promotes good neighbors and community development and peace. We are lacking wholeness and holiness. It's like putting Humpty-Dumpty back together again and the cracks are still there!

**No matter the age, art integrates both sides of the brain and helps to pull out and express things very deep in the human experience of living.** The venue of art is so broad that all of us experience creativity in some fashion – painting, collage making, poetry, sculpting, cooking, composing music, woodworking, gardening, playing an instrument, doodling, fabric design, sewing, mosaics, stained glass. Through the art process the Holy is addressed verbally, mentally, physically, beautifully, and sometimes publicly. This is prayer.

#### ◆**QUESTIONS**

- Do I experience any forms of art as prayer? What about other people I know? How might I explore art more as an expression of faith and prayer? How might I do this with others?

## **Meditation**

**In some faith traditions the ancient practice of turning inward in order to recenter oneself and reorient toward the source of the Holy has lost popularity since the invention of television.** Today most of us individually and collectively reorient ourselves toward the movie screen or computer or television. How did this happen? When did information and entertainment become a center point?

The fact is that humans have always liked to be entertained and informed. Until the last century we frequently had to go out of our individual dwellings to be with others for entertainment and information. Now with an external source of information and entertainment in every home in the U.S., sometimes 2 or 3, we have come to believe we no longer need companionship. We are willingly isolating ourselves and orienting ourselves, not toward the holy, but toward the screen.

Getting back to basics by simply quieting our mind and body somehow authentically feeds our spirit. Setting aside a room or setting aside a specified time with a group of people for meditation is ideal. However, meditation can happen anywhere...indoors, outdoors, on a public bus. The only tools necessary are:

- a willingness to just be,
- some time to relax and simply breathe,
- an openness to change,
- some internal space, and,
- intentionally letting go of control.

The insights and inspirations that are born of this meditative moment each day are worth recording. Taking a few moments to write down the experience greatly enhances awareness of the holy undercurrent flowing with us through our daily experiences.

The practice of meditation varies from one faith tradition to another, but meditation is another avenue to deeper connections and richer, more authentic life experiences – however we experience it. Meditation helps us to see that our piece is a part of a much larger whole and not filtered through a screen.

### ◆QUESTIONS

- Many different kinds of meditation are tried during reCentering at the peaceCENTER in San Antonio. One favorite is lying on backs in a circle with heads close together in the center and feet on the outside. This half hour meditation is affectionately known as “United Noodles” or “putting our heads together!” How do I meditate? Or do I? How does it look or how might it look for me to meditate with a group of people?

## Body Prayer

As young children we learn to speak while touching, being touched, moving or running, engaging all of ourselves in the endeavor. It is our language of origin, our language of birth. As adults we frequently learn foreign languages sitting down, decoding, occasionally talking in the target language with disappointing results. Go figure!

Real, spontaneous language is born through engaging our whole body not just our minds. In this same way deepening our prayer experience by allowing the prayer to flow through our joints, muscles, membranes, organs and blood, gives us a different experience of integration and sacred being. We are no longer just talking to the Holy but becoming well-attuned instruments of the Holy's compassionate presence as we listen and respond with thoughtful reflection.

**Like a foreign language, as long as our prayer remains only in our heads, we can never become completely fluent.**

When we can feel prayer rising from the eternal source we experience an aliveness that permeates our whole being. We then feel our prayer in the marrow of our bones, then our prayer resonates at that level with everyone we meet. By incorporating (the very word means body) movement – walking, dancing, rocking, you name it! – we truly bring more of our energy to our prayer. Prayer is not an intellectual exercise, but an exuberant expression of our connection to the divine. We are no longer only talking heads.

Now we are liberated to read spiritual authors but are not compelled to buy the latest book in hopes of finding the answer outside of ourselves. The answers, as well as the questions, lie within us. As close as our breath and our body, we are, we live, we breathe in and out answers to prayer.

**◆QUESTions**

- During reCentering there are times of experimentation with body prayer – dancing peace, moving in spontaneous or ritual sequence – where the whole body is included and not just heads in prayer. Have I ever experimented with body prayer? If so, what did that feel like and have I ever shared that experience with others? If not, what might I do or where might I go to experience this?

**Reflecting**

As we grow spiritually we become more proficient travelers. Using compass and maps we find out where we are, where we have been, and where we are going. In this same way, our life's journey reveals some pattern if we know how to read and record the signs along the way.

Reflecting and recording the signs can be done verbally or nonverbally. We can keep a journal of words, a journal of images, or a scrapbook. Without some trace of our journey we must rely solely on memory to find our way. Having our thoughts or feelings expressed on paper makes it easier to reflect on those times where the Holy is at work. Marveling at the synchronicities of events when seen from a distance underscores our perceptions that there is a larger reality of which we are an integral part.

Learning to navigate by compass requires a refined ability to attune ourselves to the delicate prompting of spirit. **How many times do we ignore the internal pull or push and then convince ourselves that the correct course of action lies in following conventional and cultural wisdom?!** By monitoring our internal environment, we can give it at least as much weight as what we perceive externally. In time, we begin to trust our intuition as we feel the pull or push of the compass and give ourselves permission to speak and act courageously from the integration of head and heart.

At the peaceCENTER there is a box o'books, a collection of annual portfolios filled with photos, newspaper clippings, remembrances of the work done for peace in San Antonio since the center began in 1994. While it is encouraging to be able to gather with peacemakers, activists, and other people of faith, it is even more so to remember those who joined along in the past. These traces of sometimes small footsteps give a sense of history and a realization of place in an endless line of ordinary and extraordinary people who have worked for justice and peace on this planet.

Journals and scrapbooks are like a captain's log without which the starship will never reach its full potential. Reaching our full potential as we are originally created is our birthright. We have the responsibility and the right to claim our FULL potential!

### ◆QUESTions

- Do I keep a journal or scrapbook of my life experiences? If so, have I shown it to others to share in its richness? If not, what might I do to begin?

## Ancient Paths

Stop **dreaming!** If you were ever told this as a child or as an adult, please add “never” before it: “never stop dreaming” and say it three times before breakfast for one month! Occasionally well-meaning adults sometimes out of fear, sometimes from their own broken dreams want to extinguish that spark of imagination, which once released is sometimes difficult to control. Too many question marks, too many open-ended possibilities, too much laughter, too many tears, too much exuberance – too much life! Put it all away, close the lid, lock it up and throw away the key. “Don’t take any chances,” “a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,” “never speak to strangers,” “don’t trust people,” “there’s danger out there,” “stay here safe with me.” Perhaps well meaning, but oh so limiting!

Adults cannot relive childhood but the discarded key that locked it away can be retrieved to unlock the place where many parts of lives and ourselves are closed off. Dreams are one of the keys to the treasure chest of our many gifts and experiences when we bother to learn the language of metaphor and symbol. Dreams are a rich library that provides insights into maturing and recovering lost pieces of self on a journey towards wholeness and holiness. Our dreams visit us when we sleep, a daily occurrence, whether we remember and record them or not. They provide tailor-made sketches of who we are, who we might be, and how we are sometimes stuck.

In former times, people shared and explored their dreamscapes. Dreams were believed to provide important information for individuals and for whole groups. Interpretation of dreams was a sacred trust. Carl Jung revived the importance of bringing dreams into waking conscious life in order to enhance understanding of self. Dreams are a valuable tool and gift which help us and aid us to see our peace in the constellation of creation.

Mid-week reCenterings in San Antonio provide a nourishing environment where dreams can be received into a kind of peace nursery, where the dreams are cared for by the group and allowed to grow into possibilities and hopes. Following dreams frequently leads to action out in the larger community. However, sometimes they are laid to rest, perhaps to be revived at another time. Inevitably, given the profit margin in

peacemaking, we are forced to get seriously creative in order to live dreams into life. **There's a common joke that there is not much profit in peacemaking, but making peace asks each of us to be prophets in our increasingly violent climate.**

**Chant** is another ancient path. A form of prayer in many faith traditions is the use of song. St. Augustine said, "When we sing, we pray twice." Chant is an ancient use of music and breath that unites a community as one voice. This simple, melodic and repetitious form of centering prayer is enjoying a revival today.

Sixteen years ago the Monks of Santo Domingo de Silo enjoyed the top spot on the music charts, and advertisements in France announced their CD "Chant" as "a hit, 800 years in the making." One of the anomalies in our culture is that a practice from the 12<sup>th</sup> century has become a popular success. What's going on?

What is it about this participatory music that is so compelling and so soothing? We know from biofeedback that physiological changes occur when people meditate, calm their minds, and breathe deeply. Chanting allows this to happen effortlessly and without any formal training. The simpler the method, the more people can participate and share it with family and friends.

**Labyrinths** are another ancient and timeless tool to quiet the mind, help to center, and only employs the basic skill of walking to accomplish! As breathing is to chant, walking is to the labyrinth. Labyrinths differ from mazes in that there are no dead ends and no confusion. There is only one path leading to the center. The retracing of steps leads one back to the point of entry. The labyrinth is its own ancient path! They can be found around the world and were used in varied ancient ceremonies and religions. Today many labyrinths are appearing at retreat centers, educational institutions, places of worship, and even prisons.

Dreams, chant, and labyrinths are but three examples of ancient paths to peace. What is it about our modern culture that is causing us to embrace these all but forgotten, neglected treasures? How many of us are looking deeply into our faith traditions to uncover the wisdom of the past? What compels us to seek simpler, gentler ways of opening ourselves to the

Holy? These ancient paths are some how speaking to our contemporary paths.

### ◆**QUESTions**

- What ancient paths have I explored? What are they saying to my current path?

## **Potential Steps**

This chapter is by far the longest chapter because prayer and the sharing of faith are also by far the most underutilized pieces of peacemaking and community development.

Prayer is the missing peace!  
Many approaches are offered in this chapter.  
Too many to take on all at once.

Which 2-4 approaches might I focus on in the near future?  
How can these approaches be applied to family and friend relationships, as well as the larger community?