

# **PRAYiNG** **BY** **NUMBER**

**20 Creative  
Prayer Lessons  
& Activities**

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**VOLUME ONE**

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**PHYLLIS VOS WEZEMAN**

# Dedication

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To Sr. Elaine DesRosiers ...

... an answer to prayer! PVW

## Acknowledgment

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Thanks to Jude Dennis Fournier for collaborating on the lessons and activities in the book, *Praying by Number*.

Jude is Director of Religious Formation at John the XXIII Catholic Community in Albuquerque, New Mexico. His experiences as an educator range from teaching kindergarten in Iowa and high school in Chicago to leading retreats and workshops in countless locations. Jude also serves as a Hospice Chaplain and is involved in mission in places such as El Salvador, Haiti, Kenya, and Malawi. He holds an M.A. in Spirituality.

Jude and Phyllis thrive on finding unique bakeries, coffeeshops, and dessert cafes – purely as settings for planning projects!


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# Overview

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Prayer is \_\_\_\_\_. Fill in the blank. This timeless, yet timely, question has been pondered by teachers and students throughout the ages. And, this seemingly simple statement has been completed with answers ranging from a single word to multiple volumes. Webster defines prayer as “the act of praying; an entreaty, supplication; a humble request, as to God; any set formula for this.” Commentators and theologians call prayer communicating with God, opening one’s life to God, engaging oneself in the purposes of God, and total immersion in the holy presence of God.

Prayer is a vital part of the Christian life. Therefore, it is a subject worth studying. We learn about prayer in many ways. By turning to Scripture, we discover how people in the Old Testament and the New Testament talked with and listened to God. We glean insight into prayer by reading stories of the saints, and we gain instruction about prayer from people of faith today. Perhaps our best guide to learning what prayer is, however, is to actually pray. And, that’s what this book provides—twenty prayer opportunities for classes at church and school and for families at home. All lessons are designed to help participants explore and experience various aspects of and approaches to prayer.

This book furnishes twenty lessons based on the topic of prayer. Instruction takes place through participation as students explore and experience inviting, informing, and inspiring activities that are used to impart information and ideas. As a unique feature and a fresh approach, each lesson involves a number, from one to twenty, that becomes the focus for the experience.

Methods used to teach the subject matter incorporate architecture, art, banners/textiles, cartoons, creative writing, dance, drama, games, music, photography, puppetry, and storytelling.

Provided in an easy-to-use format, each lesson is organized into three parts:

- **Goal** states the purpose of the activity,
- **Gather** lists the materials required and suggests steps for advance preparation,
- **Guide** contains complete directions for accomplishing the task.

Prayer is for people of all ages—children, youth, and adults. While these designs are intended for young people in classroom settings, they may be easily adapted for use in small and large group worship, education, outreach, and nurture opportunities. They are ideal for parochial school programs, Sunday school classes, worship centers, children’s church, vacation bible school, mid-week ministries, kids’ clubs, intergenerational events, before and after school care programs, youth groups, retreats, confirmation classes, family devotions, home schooling, and more.

As you use this resource, may you be as eager and as open as Jesus’ disciples were when they pleaded, “Teach us to pray.” As teachers and students prepare and participate in activities, may your prayer life be enriched by discovering—or re-discovering—ways to talk with and to listen to God. As you carry the information and insight from the classroom to the world, may the power of prayer be reflected in your daily life.

# 1 God

## Goal

To involve participants in a letter writing project to be used in a “first day” prayer service, as a way to emphasize the theme “One God.”

## Gather

- Bible
- Candle
- Envelopes, one per person
- Equipment to play music
- Matches
- Paper, preferably stationary
- Pencils
- Pens
- Recording of tranquil music
- Stickers

## Guide

On the first day of a new year, month, liturgical season (such as Lent or Advent), or significant event, like the start of school, lead the group in a creative writing activity and prayer ritual involving the theme “One God.”

Begin by reading Exodus 20:3: “You shall have no other gods before me.” Ask the students to name the portion of Scripture in which this text is found. The passage is commonly called “The Ten Commandments.” Challenge a volunteer to identify the number of the commandment that was just recited. After someone answers “number one,” explain that this law is so significant that God put it first on the list. Invite a student to summarize the meaning of the commandment in a simple phrase or sentence such as “One God”!

In Biblical times, many people prayed to idols, or “gods,” of wood or stone. They thought these objects had great power and could hear their prayers. We know that a god of wood or stone has no power, can never answer prayer, and could certainly never love anyone. But God, with a capital G, can do all these things, for the Lord is the one true God, the only God. Only God can hear us and help us when we pray. Only God loves and sustains us.

Unfortunately, people sometimes have a hard time remembering and believing this simple truth. People create idols, or their own gods, every day. Modern day idols include things like clothes, hobbies, bikes, cars, super stars, and more. An idol is something that’s worshipped or revered—often more than the true and only God. Take time to think about idols or gods that may be part of life. Are things like being on the soccer team, attending music concerts, or buying the best bike on the top of the list? Are they more important than God?



First days mark new beginnings. They offer a time to focus on our relationship with God, and with God's only begotten Son, Jesus. Invite the students to write a letter, in their own words, highlighting the theme "One God." These letters, to be addressed to God, are to contain promises to be kept during a designated period, such as a season, month, or year.

Ideas should center on ways the participants will put God first in their lives. Give the students an opportunity to formulate thoughts and feelings. Share examples of promises such as "I promise to spend more time reading the Bible than playing video games," or "I promise to give some of my allowance to help someone else."

Encourage the young people to be honest and to write about tangible topics such as school, family, and friends, as well as intangible ideas like joy and pain. Distribute paper and pencils and guide the group as they compose their letters.

Once the letters are written, invite the learners to sit in a circle. Light the candle and play tranquil background music. Ask the class to share the letters as a group prayer. State that each person, in turn, will have the opportunity to read her or his letter. Since the contents may be very personal, assure the group that they may read their letters out loud or silently. After everyone has had an occasion to share, conclude the ritual with a prayer asking for God's help in keeping the promises.

At the end of the prayer service distribute envelopes, stickers, and pens. Ask the students to address the envelopes to themselves, put the note inside, and seal the letter with a sticker. Collect the projects. Near the end of the designated time period, mail the letters to the participants as a reminder to live a life that honors the one true God.

## 2 Prayer Partners

### Goal

By painting a mandala, participants will explore two parts of prayer and will covenant (agree or commit) with another person, and with God, to become prayer partners.

### Gather

- › Bible
- › Bible dictionary or concordance
- › Containers for water
- › Equipment to play music
- › Paint brushes
- › Paint, watercolors
- › Paper for watercolor painting
- › Recording of nature music

### Guide

Hold up a Bible and ask the students to name its two main parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. State that in each section of Scripture, God provides instruction on prayer. Offer two examples, one from each portion of the Bible. Use an Old Testament reference from one of the Psalms (e.g. Psalm 34:1-15) and a New Testament quotation like Matthew 21:22, or look up the word “prayer” in a concordance or Bible dictionary to find additional verses.

Next, ask the group how the number two is connected to the theme of prayer. Prayer is a two-way conversation between a person and God. Prayer involves two parts—talking and listening. Prayer can also include two people, called *prayer partners*, who commit to pray together for a specific period of time.

To make this theme meaningful for the students, explain that each person will pick a prayer partner and will make a promise to pray for and with that person for a designated period of time. Prayer partners make a covenant, or agreement, to give each other support and care. Relate examples from Scripture and from real life of this type of bond. Share the Old Testament story of Moses and Aaron’s partnership (Exodus 4:14-16), and relate the New Testament account of the relationship between Mary and Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-56). Explain to the young people that partnership can mean different things. There can be a partnership with God or there can be a partnership with another person to God.



If time allows, discuss listening and talking as an important part of any relationship. Ask the group questions like:

*When was a time you really listened to what another person had to say?*

*What good came out of listening to another?*

*When was a time when someone really listened to you?*

*How did the two people benefit from the exchange?*

Allow students the opportunity to share their experiences with the group.

Organize the group into pairs. Tell each pair that they will become prayer partners. Explain again that in this type of relationship each person will promise to pray for and with the other individual for a specific period of time, such as a month or a year.

As a way to seal this covenant, invite the partners to paint a mandala together. A mandala is an expression of what an individual feels on the inside while the painting is being created. Explain that both people paint at the same time; however, they do not talk to each other. The painting can be abstract or real, with both individuals contributing to the finished product.

Distribute one set of water color paints, two brushes, and one piece of water color paper to each set of prayer partners. Once the materials are dispensed, tell the participants to sit quietly with their partners. Play calm, relaxing music and invite the pairs to begin painting whatever comes to their minds. Allow time for work to take place. When all groups have finished, display the artwork for everyone to enjoy.

Conclude the session by suggesting additional opportunities to nurture the prayer partner relationship, together or apart. Partners may agree to pray for each other every morning or evening. They may also arrange to meet at a specific time each week to share joys and concerns.



# 3 Trinity

## Goal

To propose concrete examples of the concept of the Trinity and to construct a triptych to be used as the focal point of a personal worship center.

## Gather

- Construction paper or poster board, 12" x 18"
- Examples of "three-in-one" such as apple, cube, shamrock, triangle, water
- Glue
- Greeting cards or magazines, recycled (optional)
- Paper, foil wrapping (optional)
- Picture of leader or participant
- Resource sheets:
  - "Triptych Instructions"
  - "Three-in-One Symbols"
  - "Glory Be"
- Scissors
- Trims such as braid, cording, and rick-rack (optional)

## Advance Preparation

- Prepare patterns for arched panels.

## Guide

Apple. Cube. Shamrock. Triangle. Water. Show the participants examples of these items and ask the group to name what they have in common. Explain that each object is three-in-one. It has three parts, and yet it is one thing. Use a cube to illustrate that our world is three dimensional—containing height, width, and depth.

Explain that while we cannot possibly ever know all there is to know about God, Christians believe that God has three ways to help us understand the Love and Light and Energy God brings to earth. We call this the Trinity, or the three-in-one concept of God: God as Father or Creator of life, God as Jesus or Redeemer of life, and God as Spirit or Sustainer of life. Explain further that this does not mean we worship three Gods, but that the Trinity is a mystery we accept by faith and understand by experience.

Invite everyone to sing or to look at the words of the "Glory Be." This song represents one of the oldest Christian expressions of the understanding of God. Explore the words as an affirmation that God is with us in all ways: as the One who creates and gives us life, as the One who saves us from our faults and sins, and as the One who is ever present with us and gives us power to live in service of God's world. God has always been and will always be whole and complete, and when we look to God in worship, that wholeness heals our brokenness and makes us one with God and each other.

If possible, hold up a picture of one of the leaders or participants. Explain that a person can be thought of as a father/mother, as a son/daughter, or as a brother/sister, yet he or she is still the same person. It just depends on the relationship being expressed. In the same way, we have different relationships with God. Encourage listeners not to worry if seeing God as three persons, yet as one God, seems confusing. Explain that they are going to participate in an activity to make the message seem more clear.



Tell the participants that they are going to make a triptych, or three-fold display, that is an ancient Christian art form. The triptych was used to display three pictures or images about God or Jesus or the disciples, and to remind people of the Trinity. Each picture or image would be displayed in a separate arched panel, yet the three panels were connected.

First share the ideas to explain the Trinity, then invite participants to use those images or images of their own design to create a triptych celebrating the three-in-one concept of God.

There are many possible ways to make the idea of the Trinity seem easier to grasp. Relate as many as possible, then allow learners to use those or to develop their own to design their triptychs. Demonstrate or explain each of the following:

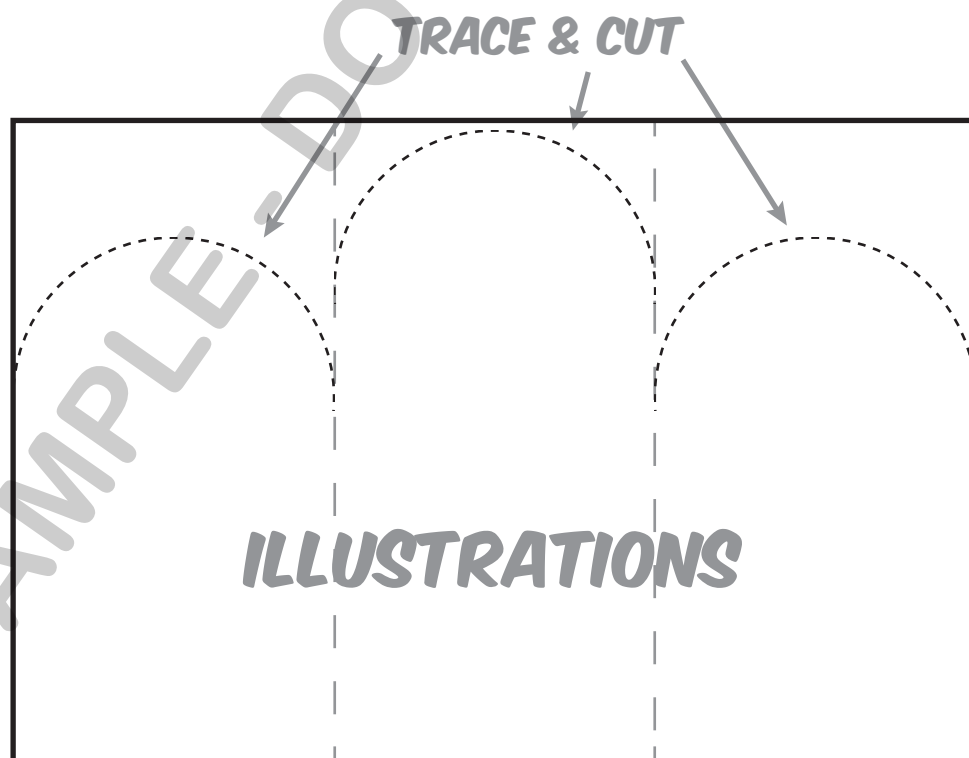
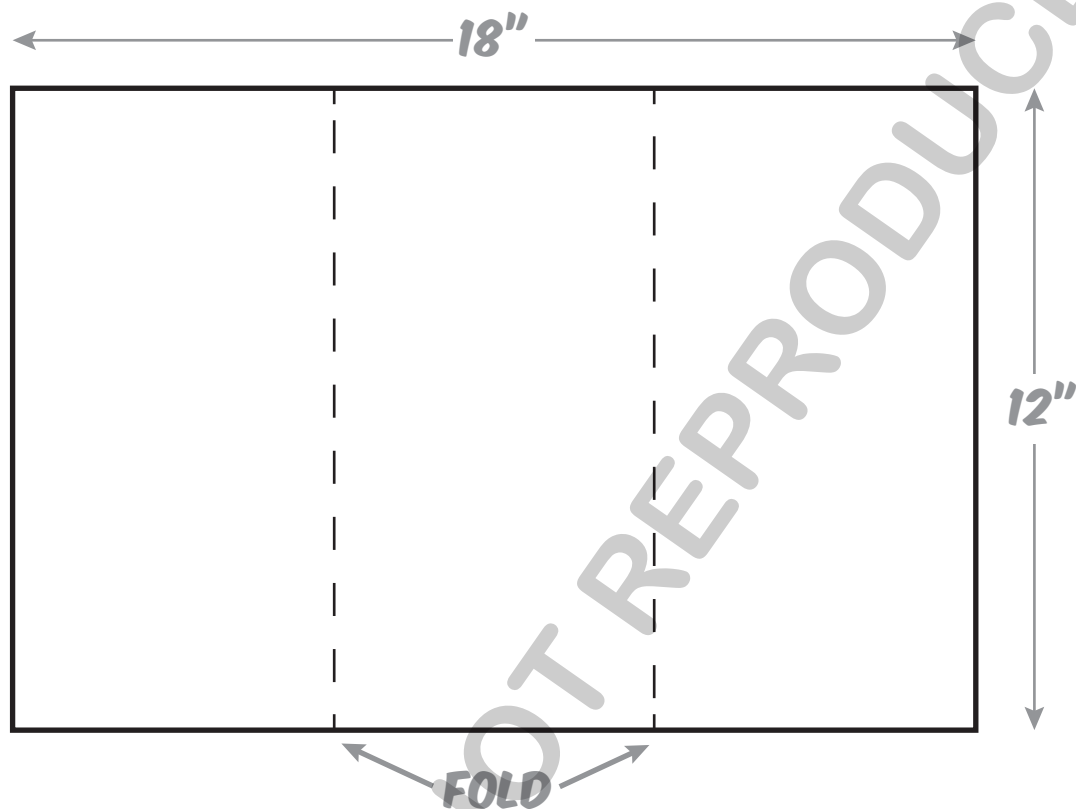
- **Apple.** An apple represents the Trinity in that it has three parts: the outer layer or skin, the sweet fruit, and the inner core containing the seeds.
- **Fleur-de-lis.** From French royalty comes this symbol also used as a sign of the Trinity, three flower petals, yet one flower. An iris could be used as the same symbol.
- **Pottery.** A clay pot is an earthen vessel like human beings—a trinity created by the potter's skilled hands, the wet clay, and the power of the turning wheel.
- **Shamrock.** Legend says that Saint Patrick explained the Trinity by using the three-leaved shamrock of Ireland, pointing out that it is one plant with one stem, yet it has three separate leaves.
- **Triangle.** While it is one distinct shape, a triangle is made of three sides.
- **Water** is two parts hydrogen and one-part oxygen, yet that same chemical substance can be experienced in its liquid form, or as a solid called ice, or as a vapor known as steam.

Allow the participants to choose a symbol or symbols to place on their triptych. They may separate one symbol into its parts and draw them on the different panels, or put a separate symbol on each. Another possibility would be to cut pictures from magazines or use old greeting cards to find symbols to glue on each panel. They may want to write a phrase on each panel suggesting the Trinity, such as the words to the "Glory Be," or a prayer such as "In the name of the Father who created us, the Son who redeemed us, and the Holy Spirit who lives in us." Or they may use a different prepositional phrase for each panel: "From the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit."

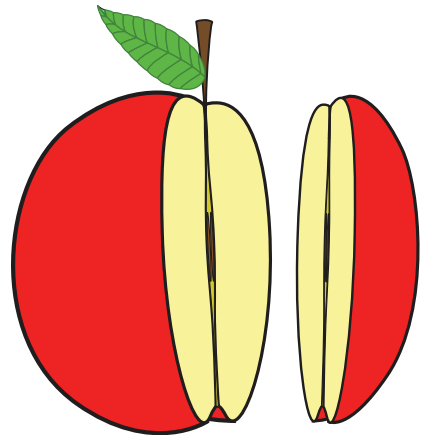
Demonstrate the process for constructing the triptych. Fold 12" by 18" poster board or construction paper into thirds across the width. Trace a pattern to create simple arches at the top of each panel. All three sections can be the same size or the center panel can be left taller. Adding gold foil paper for a background or trimming with cord, braid, or rick-rack will add an elegant touch to the triptych. Add the chosen design to each of the three panels. Once the design is complete, tell the learners to display the triptych as the focal point of a personal worship center for use throughout the entire year.

Note: Throughout this activity, be aware that many churches are making the effort to avoid using only male images to represent God. Use wording or language that reflects the tradition and teaching of the participants. However, the opportunity should be found to explain that God is not male or female, but the creator of both. We use words like "father" because we understand God as our loving parent, the sender of all good gifts. Many cultures represent earth as our mother (as St. Francis did), although the Holy Spirit seems to represent many of the mothering or nurturing qualities of God.

# Tryptych Instructions



# “Three-in-One” Symbols



# Glory Be

*Glory be to the Father,  
and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Ghost;  
As it was in the beginning,  
is now,  
and ever shall be,  
world without end.*

*Amen!*

## 4 Parts of Prayer

### Goal

To explore four basic parts of prayer—adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication—and to construct “prayer steps” as a guide for using this formula.

### Gather

- Book(s) of devotions or prayers
- Chalkboard and chalk, newsprint and markers, or laptop and screen
- Dictionary
- Hymnal
- Markers
- Paper, construction
- Paper, scrap
- Pencils

### Guide

Although there are many ways to create a prayer, learning a helpful formula or the basic parts or steps of prayer can be a useful guideline for students.

Begin by writing “Four \_\_\_\_\_” on a chalkboard or a sheet of newsprint. As the students arrive, have them guess, or print, possible words that could fill the blank. Of course, the answers could be four seasons, four directions, or the four evangelists. Explain that the actual answer that fits with this activity is “parts” or “steps”. During this lesson the pupils will discover that there are four important parts, or steps, to every prayer.

Prayer is the way we talk to God. Sometimes a prayer can be one word, lots of words, or just a feeling in the heart. To help in conversing with God, it is useful to learn that there are four important parts of prayer:

- **Adoration** - praising God for God’s greatness
- **Confession** - telling God about something that was not following God’s laws
- **Thanksgiving** - thanking God for love and for gifts
- **Supplication** - asking for God’s help or guidance

Organize the students into four groups and assign each cluster one part of prayer: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. Supply the teams with resource materials, such as books of prayer, hymnals, Bibles, and dictionaries. Also provide scrap paper and pencils or pens. Direct the students to look up their assigned prayer words in the dictionary and to write definitions on the scrap paper. Instruct the learners to skim through the books to find examples of prayers that fit their respective category. Suggest checking hymnals to find songs with the “prayer” words as themes and reading the words to the hymns.

Also recommend that the groups look up specific Psalms:

- Adoration: Psalm 95:1-7
- Confession: Psalm 32:1-7
- Thanksgiving: Psalm 100
- Supplication: Psalm 70:1-3,5

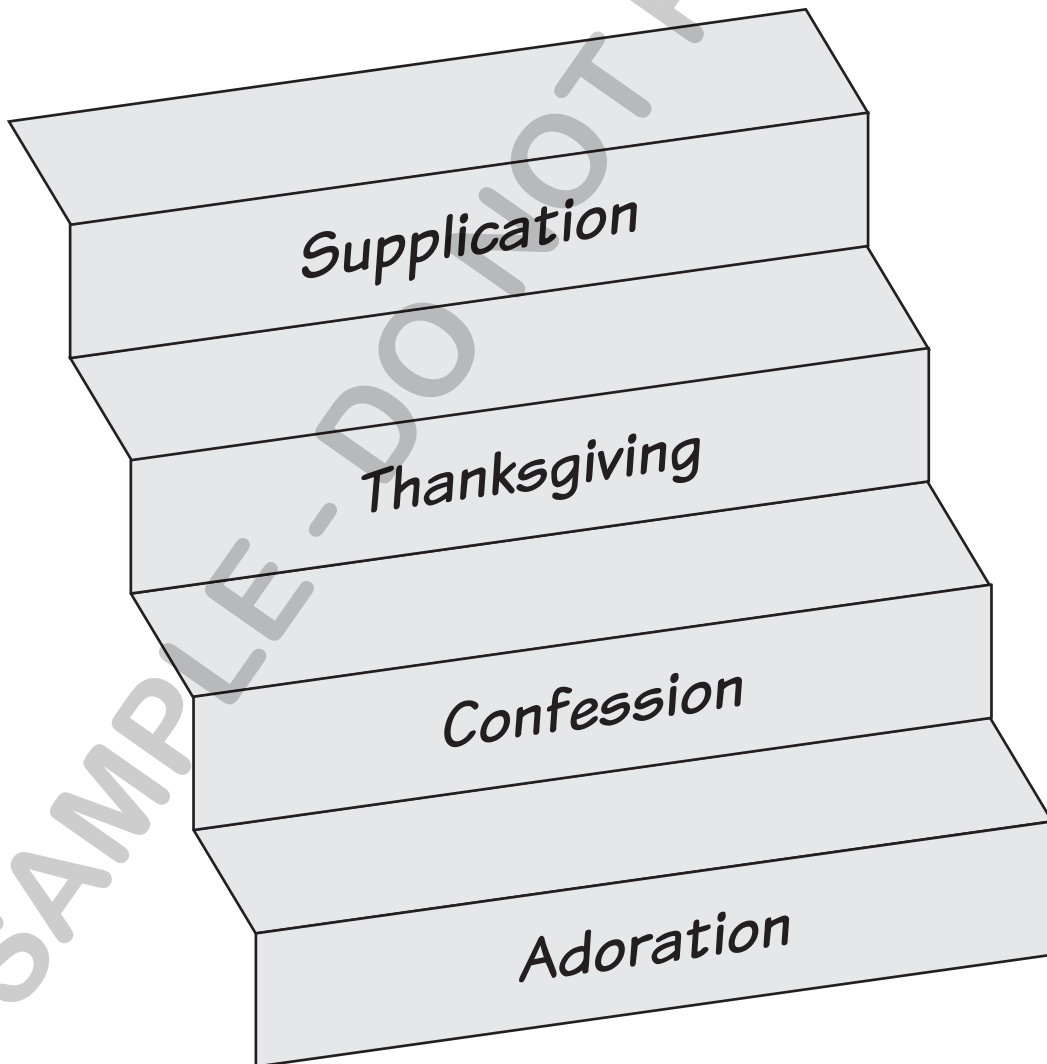
After a designated time, ask each group to share their discoveries about the meaning of their word and specific examples of this type of prayer.

Tell the students that they will be constructing a tool to help them use the four parts of this prayer formula: A-C-T-S. Demonstrate the procedure for creating the prayer steps. Choose a favorite color of construction paper. Fold it the short way into half, then fourths, then eighths. Open the

paper and refold it on the same creases to form steps or a fan. On the bottom step, print the word "Adoration," and on the section above it write comments to demonstrate praise for God. On the next step, print "Confession," then above it enter something you need to tell God. Print "Thanksgiving" on the third step and on the section above, list reasons to be thankful. The last step is "Supplication" and the strip above can include anything for which you need God's help.

Provide the supplies and guide the students as they create their prayer steps.

Suggest that the students fold up their papers and use the craft as a bookmark. They could also stand the steps on a desk or dresser. Remind them that anytime they wish to talk to God, they can use the prayer step idea.





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**VOLUME TWO**

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To my longtime friend, Mildred Morrison ...

... whose life of dedication to God is an inspiring lesson in prayer! P.V.W.

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# 21 Meal Time Prayers

## Goal

To use art and creative writing to make table tent prayer kiosks to emphasize the importance of giving thanks before each meal—21 per week.

## Gather

- Construction paper, one large sheet for every two students
- Paper, ruled
- Pencils
- Pens
- Resource sheet
  - "21 Questions Game"
- Scissors
- Tape, clear

## Advance Preparation

- Duplicate copies of the resource sheet
- Cut 12" x 18" construction paper in half vertically.

## Guide

Since this prayer lesson involves the number 21, invite the participants to try to answer 21 questions related to numbers. Distribute a copy of the resource sheet to each participant. As an alternative, verbally ask the questions of the group. Invite the students to guess the number that corresponds with each statement.

## Twenty-One Questions

1. Letters of the alphabet [26]
2. Days in a week [7]
3. Digits in a basic zip code [5]
4. Hours in a day [24]
5. Sides on a stop sign [8]
6. Cards in a deck [52]
7. Wonders of the world [7]
8. Days in a week-end [2]
9. Items in a baker's dozen [13]
10. Days in February in a leap year [29]
11. Fruit of the Holy Spirit [9]
12. Minutes in an hour [60]
13. Quarts in a gallon [4]
14. Fingers and toes [20]
15. Days and nights of the great flood [40]
16. Persons in the Trinity [3]
17. Days in a traditional work week [5]
18. Seconds in a minute [60]
19. Inches in a yard [36]
20. Players on a baseball team [9]



For number twenty-one, ask the learners if they can guess what most people do three times a day. Many answers may arise, but “eat” is the correct response for this lesson. Ask the students to name the three meals people eat each day—breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Challenge the group to figure out how many meals most people eat in a week. Of course, the answer is 21: three meals a day times seven days a week equals 21.

Allow time for the learners to share their favorite foods and meals. Explain how important it is to be thankful for God’s gift of food. Ask the pupils to name one thing people should do before each meal. The answer is pray. Emphasize the importance of meal time prayers as a way to give praise and thanks to God for all of our gifts.

Tell the group that in this prayer lesson they will be writing meal time prayers and making table-tent kiosks as a way to remember to thank God before breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Distribute the ruled paper and pencils. Ask the students to write three prayers: one each for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. For example:

### Breakfast Prayer

*Dear God, thank you for this new day in which to give you praise. Help me to think of you often throughout the day, so that I may be mindful of all that you do for me. Bless the morning and all that it holds and bless this food so that it may give me the nourishment to work hard today. I ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

### Lunch Prayer

*Good and loving God, I have completed half of my day and I stop now for a moment to thank*

*and praise you. Be with me as I continue the rest of this day and help me if a problem becomes difficult. My mid-day meal is set before me; I ask your blessing upon it that it will give me the energy I need to finish my day. I ask this in the name of Jesus, who is my friend. Amen.*

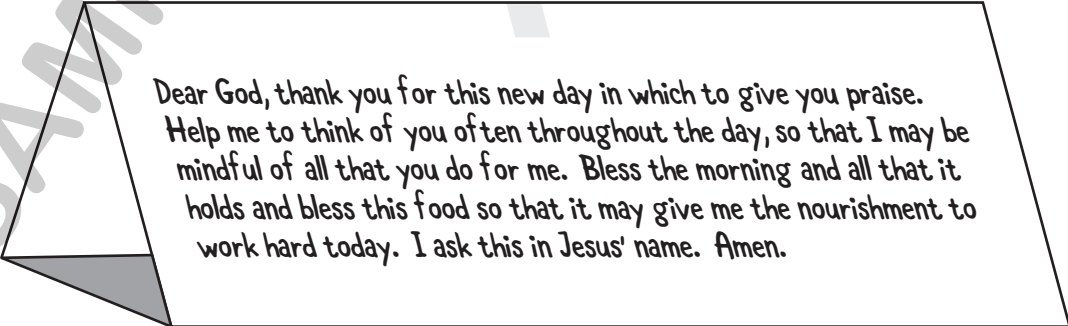
### Dinner Prayer

*God, Creator of all that is wonderful, thank you for making me a special part of your creation. Thank you for this day of good work, good play, and good learning. You have given me so many gifts and it makes me happy. Thank you for all the blessings of this day and now bless this meal and all those who made it for me; I realize many people’s hands have helped to bring it to this table. Bless it now that it may help prepare me for another day. Amen.*

Once the participants have had enough time to write their meal time prayers, encourage the students to read some of them to each other.

Distribute the construction paper, one-half sheet per student. Dispense scissors, pens, and tape. Instruct the learners to fold the paper into three equal sections to form a table tent, also called a kiosk. Tell the students to copy their meal time prayers onto one side of the kiosk, one prayer per section. When the writing is completed, direct the participants to form a triangle and to tape the open-end, or bottom, closed.

Invite the learners to use the prayer kiosk at home. It should be placed in the center of the table for all to see. Pray a prayer before each meal. Encourage the students to think about many people throughout the world who do not have three meals a day and to remember their needs in prayer too.



Dear God, thank you for this new day in which to give you praise. Help me to think of you often throughout the day, so that I may be mindful of all that you do for me. Bless the morning and all that it holds and bless this food so that it may give me the nourishment to work hard today. I ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

# 21 Questions Game

1. Letters of the alphabet
2. Days in a week
3. Digits in a basic zip code
4. Hours in a day
5. Sides on a stop sign
6. Cards in a deck
7. Wonders of the world
8. Days in a week-end
9. Items in a baker's dozen
10. Days in February in a leap year
11. Fruit of the Holy Spirit
12. Minutes in an hour
13. Quarts in a gallon
14. Fingers and toes
15. Days and nights of the great flood
16. Persons in the Trinity
17. Days in a traditional work week
18. Seconds in a minute
19. Inches in a yard
20. Players on a baseball team

## 22 Evening Prayer

### Goal

To encourage the use of the Bible for evening prayer and to illustrate that Scripture can guide prayer during all times of life.

### Gather

- Bibles
- Copy machine
- Markers
- Paper, 8 ½" x 11"
- Paper, glow-in-the-dark (optional)
- Paper, yellow construction
- Pencils
- Resource sheets:
  - "Star Patterns"
  - "Where to Look in the Bible When..."
- Scissors

### Advance Preparation

- Duplicate copies of the "Star Patterns" worksheet for the students to share.
- Make a copy of the "Where to Look in the Bible When..." worksheet for each participant.

### Guide

Time is every moment there has ever been or ever will be. Time is also a system for measuring duration. Since a day is divided into 24 one-hour segments, many countries of the world, as well as the military, measure time on a 24-hour clock rather than the 12-hour clock that we normally use. A 24-hour system avoids confusion over morning, afternoon, and evening. With a 12-hour system, if someone says it's 10:00 o'clock, that could mean its two hours before noon or two hours before midnight. Using a 24-hour clock, 10:00 hours is morning and 22:00 hours is night.

The Bible is a book that meets our needs at any time of the day. The Bible is also our guide for prayer, the way we communicate with God, through all the times of our lives. Many people turn to the words of the Bible to help them put their thoughts and feelings into prayers. Scripture verses can help us pray when we are happy or sad, calm or afraid, well or sick. Many Bibles and devotional guides contain a list of "Where to Look When..." In this lesson, this type of list will be used as a guide for evening prayer.

Hand out the "Where to Look in the Bible When..." resource sheet to each participant.

Distribute the Bibles and invite the participants to choose two or three themes from the list that are of interest to them and to look up the passages. Provide time for locating and reading the verses.

Encourage the learners to share what was gleaned from the Bible. What did the passage say? Did it offer advice? Did it provide an answer? Invite participants to read selections aloud for further discussion.





Once everyone has had an opportunity to share, explain that these passages are a good guide to use when we want to express our emotions in the form of prayers. Each person will have the opportunity to make 22 stars and to print Scripture references on them that can be used as an aid to evening prayer. The “Where to Look in the Bible When...” stars may be taken home and, with permission, attached to the walls or ceiling of the bedroom.

Distribute glow-in-the-dark sheets or yellow construction paper along with star patterns, scissors, pencils, and markers. The glow-in-the-dark paper will add to the night time, evening prayer atmosphere. Instruct the students to trace and cut 22 stars from the paper. Once the stars are prepared, direct the group to letter a different “Where to Look...” word and Scripture reference on each shape. For example:

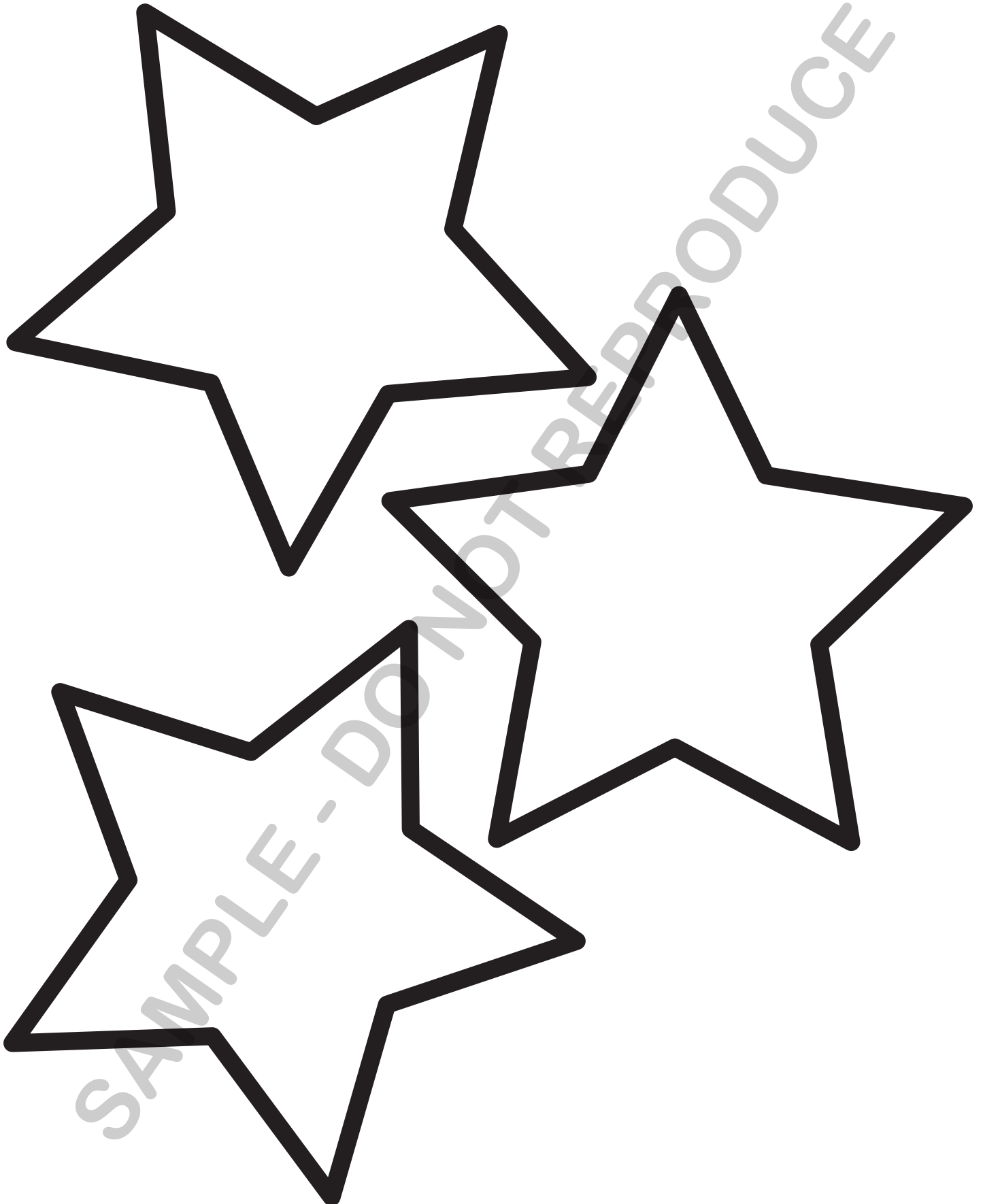
- Afraid: Psalm 27
- Guilty: Psalm 51
- Hurting: Hebrews 12
- Tempted: James 1

Note that the word and the reference should be written on the same side of the star. Encourage participants to use the markers to decorate or illustrate each star.

Invite the pupils to take the stars home and to ask permission to tape them to a bedroom wall or ceiling. Encourage them to use the stars as a guide for prayer before bed time—at 22:00 hours (10:00 p.m.) or another time. The stars should serve as a reminder that God is present and available to us through prayer—all the time!



# Star Patterns



# Where to Look in the Bible When...

*God seems far away: Psalm 139*

*People fail you: Psalm 27*

*You feel defeated: Acts 1-8*

*You feel guilty: Psalm 51; 1 John 1-2*

*You feel happy: Psalm 95*

*You feel lonely: Luke 6*

*You feel sorrowful: Psalm 46*

*You have sinned: Psalm 51*

*You leave home to travel: Psalm 121*

*You need assurance: Romans 8*

*You need rest and peace: Matthew 12:25-30*

*You need to know God's will for your life: Proverbs 3:1-6*

*You need to make a decision: Proverbs 3*

*You want courage: Joshua 1:1-9*

*You wonder about death: 1 Corinthians 15*

*You're afraid: Psalms 27, 91, 139*

*You're discouraged: Psalm 34*

*You're hurting: Hebrews 12*

*You're sick: Psalm 41*

*You're tempted: James 1; 1 Corinthians 10*

*You're tired: Psalm 23*

*You're trying to figure out right and wrong: Colossians 2*

## 23 Psalm 23

### Goal

To use Psalm 23 in a prayer service.

### Gather

- Bible
- Candle, white
- Cloth to cover prayer table
- Copy machine
- Equipment to play recorded music
- Matches
- Paper, white construction
- Pencils
- Recording of tranquil music
- Resource sheets:
  - "Sheep Patterns"
  - "Psalm 23 Responsive Reading"
- Scissors
- Table

### Advance Preparation

- Make copies of the "Sheep Patterns" resource sheet. Cut sheep out of white construction paper, one per participant.
- Duplicate the "Psalm 23 Responsive Reading" resource sheet.
- Set a table in a prominent place in the gathering space.

### Guide

For many people, Psalm 23 is their favorite passage of Scripture. In this familiar chapter, God is seen as a caring shepherd and a dependable guide. We, like sheep, must follow God and obey God's commands. God is our only hope for eternal life and security. In this lesson Psalm 23 is used as the basis of a prayer service. Participants will have the opportunity to read the Psalm and to write phrases of a litany—a prayer in which people speak responsively—to illustrate additional metaphors describing God.

Invite the group to sit around the table that has been positioned in a prominent location in the gathering space. Place the prayer cloth, candle, and Bible on the table. Distribute copies of Psalm 23 and tell the students that it will be read responsively during the prayer service. Organize the participants into two groups. Open the Bible to Psalm 23, light the candle, and begin playing tranquil background music. Encourage silence as worship begins.

### Psalm 23 Prayer Service

#### Opening prayer

*Lord, Jesus, Shepherd of us all, you call us together and invite us to be the sheep of your flock. We know that if we stray from your care, you will find us and lead us back. We gather now to give you thanks and praise as our Shepherd who goes in search of the lost sheep. Amen.*

#### Psalm 23

Read responsively using the resource sheet.



## Prayer Response: A Litany

Explain that in Psalm 23 God is described as a shepherd. Throughout the Bible and in our everyday lives, God is experienced in many ways—for example, as a friend, a guide, or a healer.

Distribute a construction paper sheep and a pencil to each participant. Instruct the worshipers to complete the statement: The Lord is my \_\_\_\_\_. Tell the group that the symbols will be used in a litany—a responsive prayer—based on Psalm 23. Invite each student to write a word on the paper sheep. Allow time for ideas as well as for reflection.

Once everyone has completed the task, begin the litany by inviting the learners to take turns reading their metaphors. After each phrase is read, the sheep should be placed on the prayer table. Use the following format for the litany:

*Reader:* The Lord is my \_\_\_\_\_.

*All:* We praise your holy name.

## Sample Litany

*Reader:* The Lord is my advocate.

*All:* We praise your holy name.

*Reader:* The Lord is my comfort.

*All:* We praise your holy name.

*Reader:* The Lord is my companion.

*All:* We praise your holy name.

*Reader:* The Lord is my consoler.

*All:* We praise your holy name.

*Reader:* The Lord is my counselor.

*All:* We praise your holy name.

*Reader:* The Lord is my defense.

*All:* We praise your holy name.

*Reader:* The Lord is my friend.

*All:* We praise your holy name.

*Reader:* The Lord is my God.

*All:* We praise your holy name.

*Reader:* The Lord is my guide.

*All:* We praise your holy name.

*Reader:* The Lord is my healer.

*All:* We praise your holy name.

*Reader:* The Lord is my hope.

*All:* We praise your holy name.

*Reader:* The Lord is my light.

*All:* We praise your holy name.

*Reader:* The Lord is my life.

*All:* We praise your holy name.

*Reader:* The Lord is my love.

*All:* We praise your holy name.

*Reader:* The Lord is my mentor.

*All:* We praise your holy name.

*Reader:* The Lord is my Messiah.

*All:* We praise your holy name.

*Reader:* The Lord is my redemption.

*All:* We praise your holy name.

*Reader:* The Lord is my salvation.

*All:* We praise your holy name.

*Reader:* The Lord is my savior.

*All:* We praise your holy name.

*Reader:* The Lord is my spirit.

*All:* We praise your holy name.

*Reader:* The Lord is my teacher.

*All:* We praise your holy name.

*Reader:* The Lord is my truth.

*All:* We praise your holy name.

*Reader:* The Lord is my way.

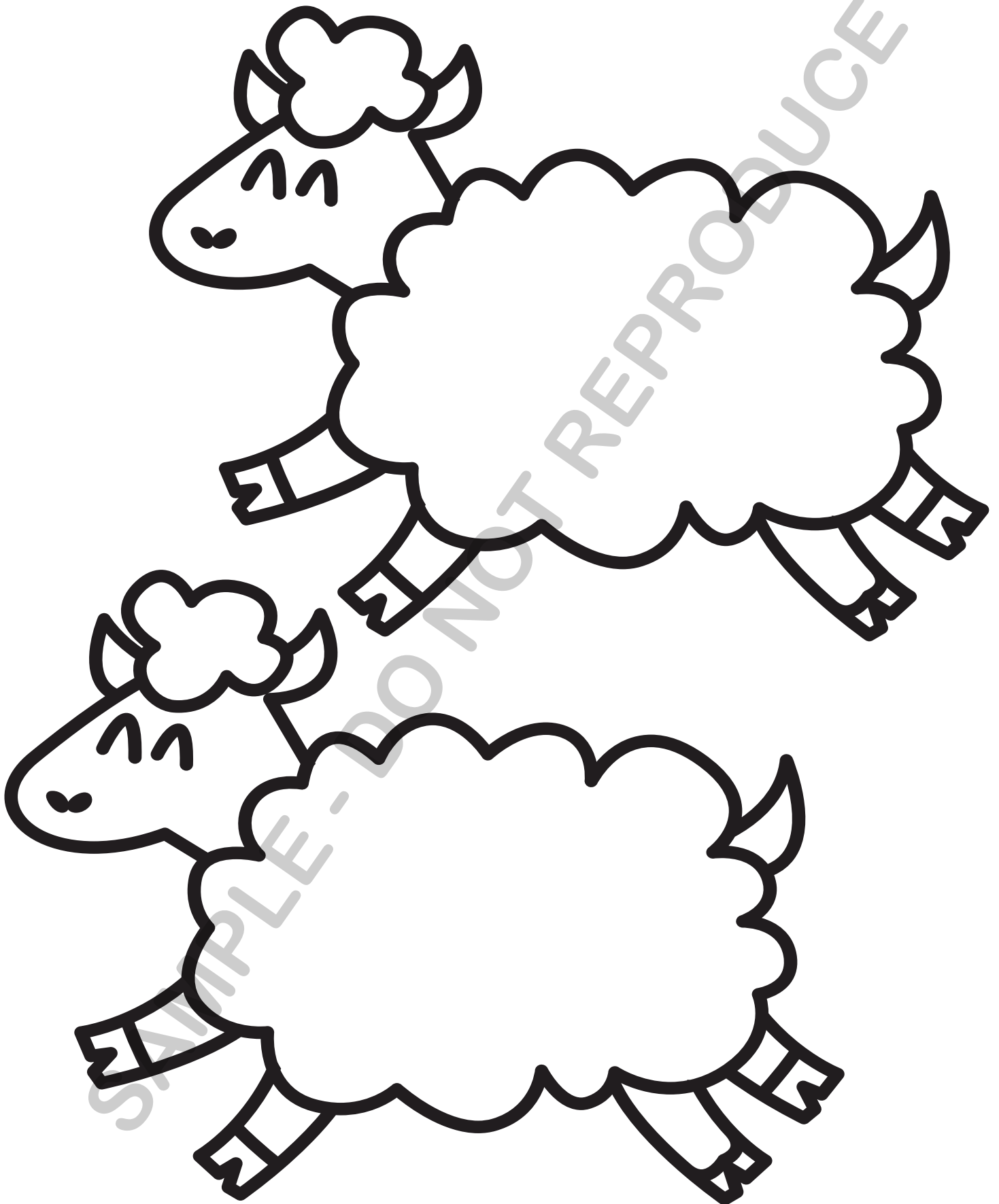
*All:* We praise your holy name.

At the end of the litany, stand and form a circle around the prayer table. Silently reflect on the responses to the statement “The Lord is my \_\_\_\_\_.”

## Closing Prayer

*Lord, God of all. You are many things to many people. Help us to remember your constant love. We know that we make mistakes and often make the wrong choices; but you always love us as your children, no matter what we do. Help us to spend our lives praising your holy name. Amen.*

# Sheep Patterns



# Psalm 23

## Responsive Reading

### Right

*The Lord is my shepherd,  
I shall not want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
he leads me beside still waters;  
he restores my soul.*

### Left

*He leads me in right paths  
for his name's sake.  
Even though I walk through the darkest valley,  
I fear no evil;  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff—  
they comfort me.*

### Right

*You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.*

### Left

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord  
my whole life long.*

# About the Author

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## Phyllis Vos Wezeman

As a religious educator, Phyllis Wezeman has served as Director of Christian Nurture at a downtown congregation in South Bend, Indiana, Executive Director of the Parish Resource Center of Michiana, and Program Coordinator for ecumenical as well as interfaith organizations in Indiana and Michigan.

In academics, Phyllis has been Adjunct Faculty in the Education Department at Indiana University South Bend and in the Department of Theology at the University of Notre Dame. She is an "Honorary Professor" of the Saint Petersburg (Russia) State University of Pedagogical Art where she has taught methods courses for extended periods on several occasions. She has also been guest lecturer at the Shanghai Teachers College in China.

As founder of the not-for-profit Malawi Matters, Inc., she develops and directs HIV & AIDS Education programs with thousands of volunteers in nearly 200 villages in Malawi, Africa including "Creative Methods of HIV & AIDS Education," "Culture & HIV-AIDS," and "Equipping Women/Empowering Girls."

Author or co-author of over 1,950 articles and books, she has written for over 80 publishers.

Phyllis served as President of Active Learning Associates, Inc.; a consultant or board member to numerous local and national organizations such as the American Bible Society, Church World Service, LOGOS, and the Peace Child Foundation; leader of a six-week youth exchange program to Russia and the Ukraine; and Project Director for four Lilley Worship Renewal grants. She is the recipient of three "Distinguished Alumni Awards" and recipient of the Aggiornamento Award from the Catholic Library Association.

Wezeman holds undergraduate degrees in Business, Communications, and General Studies from various institutions and an MS in Education from Indiana University South Bend.

Phyllis and her husband Ken (who met when they were in second and third grade in elementary school) have three children and their spouses, Stephanie (Jeff), David, and Paul (Deha), five grandchildren, Quin, Ayle, Lief, Ashley, and Jacob, and two great-grandsons, Maddox and Troy.