



A Season for Prayer and Renewal **Seeking a New Vision for our Congregation's Purpose** **in God's Mission**

A Congregational Resource

This resource offers congregations several flexible options for use in observing **A Season of Prayer and Renewal**. These options are intended to facilitate prayer, reflection and conversation in a spirit of attentiveness as we seek fresh visions for living out a sense of purpose in God's mission. Congregations may choose one or more of the following options or modify or add options in relation to the theme:

- **Prayer Petitions**
- **Weekly Sunday or Midweek** worship plan
- **Read the Bible**, a plan for having every member read the Book of Acts
- **Prayer Experiment and Re-Rooting in God's Mission**, two more resources
- **Appendix**, describing the prayer practices commended in this resource

Prayer Petitions



These prayer petitions, or ones like them, may be used in regular Sunday morning worship or in every Sunday or midweek worship services. These petitions could also be used before or during council, board or committee meetings.

Almighty God, your mission is to redeem the world. Inspire us by your Holy Spirit with passion and courage so we can join you in that work. Open our eyes to see you moving in our community. Open our ears to hear your call. Open our hearts to love our neighbors. Open our minds to imagine new ways of sharing the good news about Jesus in the world.

Holy and Loving God, your mission is to redeem the world. Renew us by your Holy Spirit during these 40 days of prayer, so that we have the courage to join you in that work. Open our eyes to what is broken in our communities, open our ears to hear the cry of those in need, open our hearts to our neighbors who do not know you, open our imagination to new ways of serving you.

Jesus Christ, you are the same yesterday, today and forever. Lord, we praise you for your constancy during these turbulent times in our culture and church. During these 40 days give us the courage to seek your vision for the future of our congregation. Open our eyes and ears and hearts to discover your will for our church.

Lord, you reign in the past, the present, and the future. During these 40 days help us to discover your purpose for us in this new day. . . .

Weekly Sunday and/or Midweek Worship

Printed below is an outline for weekly and/or midweek worship services that focus on discovering God's mission for your congregation. Pastors, rostered leaders, worship planning committees, and small groups might consider using the following order of worship, biblical texts, discussion questions, and prayer practices in worship services during the 40 day time period that has been set.

SUGGESTED ORDER OF WORSHIP

- Invocation
- Hymn/song (use familiar, easy-to-sing music)
- Prayer (use one of the prayer petitions listed above in this resource)
- Read Bible passage assigned for the week
- Discussion groups in the pews using the questions provided
- Sharing of "God sighting" stories
- Prayer together (using the "prayer starter" questions in the resource or other questions that arise from your reflection)
- Prayer practice review and preview (a time to equip disciples for using, on a daily basis, the prayer practices discussed in the Appendix to this resource)
- Blessing/benediction
- Sending hymn (again, familiar, comfortable)



SUGGESTED WEEKLY REFLECTION MATERIAL

Please note that the Appendix offers fuller explanations and suggestions for using the prayer practices of *Examen*, *Lectio Divina* and the sharing of "God sighting" stories.

Week 1, Exodus 3:1-12. God speaks to Moses via a burning bush. **LISTEN**

- **Discussion questions:** What is God doing in this Bible reading? How does this Bible reading relate to your congregation or community? What might God be saying to you through this Bible reading?
- **Prayer petition:** How does your church need God's help? How do you need God's help?
- **Faith practice to exercise during the week:** **Examen-Discernment**
- **"God sighting" story sharing**

Week 2, Ezekiel 37:1-14. Vision of the Valley of Dry Bones. **LOOK**

- **Discussion questions:** What is God doing in this Bible reading? How does this Bible reading relate to your congregation or community? What might God be saying to you through this Bible reading?
- **Prayer petition:** What looks "dry" in your congregation? What new life do you seek from God?

- **Faith practice to exercise during the week: Examen-Discernment**
- “God sighting” story sharing

Week 3, Luke 10:1-24. Jesus Sends Out 70 Disciples. RESPOND

- **Discussion questions:** What is God doing in this Bible reading? How does this Bible reading relate to your congregation or community? What might God be saying to you through this Bible reading?
- **Prayer petition:** Where is God sending your congregation? How is your congregation responding to Jesus’ call?
- **Faith practice to exercise during the week: Examen-Discernment**
- “God sighting” story sharing

Week 4, Luke 15. Finding the Lost. FORGIVE

- **Discussion questions:** What is God doing in this Bible reading? How does this Bible reading relate to your congregation or community? What might God be saying to you through this Bible reading?
- **Prayer petition:** Who is “lost” in your community? To whom is God calling your congregation to announce God’s gracious forgiveness?
- **Faith practice to exercise during the week: Examen-Discernment**
- “God sighting” story sharing

Week 5, Matthew 22:34-40. The Great Commandment. LOVE

- **Discussion questions:** What is God doing in this Bible reading? How does this Bible reading relate to your congregation? What might God be saying to you through this Bible reading?
- **Prayer petition:** How does your congregation love God? How do the disciples in your congregation love their neighbors?
- **Faith practice to exercise during the week: Examen-Discernment**
- “God sighting” story sharing

Week 6, Matthew 28. The Great Commission. GO

- **Discussion questions:** What is God doing in this Bible reading? How does this Bible reading relate to your congregation or community? What might God be saying to you through this Bible reading?
- **Prayer petition:** What is the Risen Lord Jesus Christ commissioning your congregation to do?
- **Faith practice to exercise during the week: Examen-Discernment**
- **“God sighting” story sharing**

HYMN IDEAS

Be Thou My Vision - ELW #793, *We All Are One in Mission* - ELW #576, *Here I Am, Lord* - ELW #574, *I Love to Tell the Story* – ELW #661, *The Spirit Sends Us Forth to Serve* - ELW #551, *We Are Called* - ELW #720, *O Zion, Haste* - ELW #668, *This Little Light of Mine* - ELW #677, *Lord You Give the Great Commission* - ELW #579



A Season of Prayer for Change

Read the Bible

Encourage all disciples in your faith community to read through the book of Acts during a 40-day time period that your congregation has set. Use the practice of praying the scriptures (*Lectio Divina*, described in the Appendix to this resource) or the reflection questions listed below for dwelling in the scriptures.

Read through selected scripture readings using *Lectio Divina* or the following set of questions:

- What is God doing in this story?
- What is God saying to me through this story?
- What is God saying to us (our congregation) through this story?
- What are we hearing God ask us (our congregation) to do through this story?

Another option would be to gather a small group of key leaders and innovators in the congregation to “dwell in the scripture”; discuss and pray together to discover the congregation’s purpose; and explore ways your congregation might participate more deeply in God’s mission in your local context during this Season of Prayer and Renewal.

A plan for reading through the Book of Acts in 40 days:



Day 1 Acts 1:1-11	Day 21 Acts 13:43-53
Day 2 Acts 1:12-26	Day 22 Acts 14:1-28
Day 3 Acts 2:1-13	Day 23 Acts 15:1-35
Day 4 Acts 2:14-42	Day 24 Acts 15:36-16:15
Day 5 Acts 2:43-47	Day 25 Acts 16:16-40
Day 6 Acts 3:1-26	Day 26 Act 17:1-14
Day 7 Acts 4:1-12	Day 27 Acts 17:15-34
Day 8 Acts 4:13-37	Day 28 Acts 18:1-17
Day 9 Acts 5:1-11	Day 29 Acts 18:18-28
Day 10 Acts 5:12-42	Day 30 Acts 19
Day 11 Acts 6:1-7	Day 31 Acts 20
Day 12 Acts 7:1-60	Day 32 Acts 21
Day 13 Acts 8:1-40	Day 33 Acts 22
Day 14 Acts 9:1-31	Day 34 Acts 23
Day 15 Acts 9:32-42	Day 35 Acts 24
Day 16 Acts 10:1-48	Day 36 Acts 25
Day 17 Acts 11:1-30	Day 37 Acts 26
Day 18 Acts 12:1-25	Day 38 Act 27
Day 19 Acts 13:1-12	Day 39 Acts 28:1-15
Day 20 Acts 13:13-42	Day 40 Acts 28:16-31

Prayer Experiment

In addition to any of the ideas mentioned previously in this resource, you might try this experiment. Send the pastor and several members of the congregation and/or the church council out individually to the local coffee shop or café, to sit on a park bench, sit in their car in the grocery store parking lot, hang out at the library, post office, or any public place and pray this simple prayer: *“Lord, help me to see what you see.”* After listening prayerfully for one hour, they should reconvene to share what they heard. This simple outing may open the eyes and hearts of some to see God’s mission in their community or rural context and imagine new ways to enter into that mission.

Appendix



Prayer Practices Resources for Use with *A Season for Prayer and Renewal*

Prayer of Examen

(This explanation draws on explanations from the book, *Leading a Life With God* by Daniel Wolpert)

The key to understanding the examen as a practice of discernment is to see how looking backward to identify the movement of God can lead to being guided by God into the future. The examen asks us to look back over a period of time or review an event looking for glimmers, moments, and actions that appear to be either “of God” or not “of God.” The former are life-giving things that bring fruits of the Spirit, while the later are life-denying, life-squelching and not of God’s Spirit. Over time the examen begins to reveal clear patterns in God’s action. We notice God’s presence and action in what is life-giving and we notice those kinds of actions move us in certain directions.

- a. **Recall** that you are in God’s presence.
- b. **Return** thanks to God for the gifts of the day.
- c. Ask God to **reveal** the truth as you look at your actions and attitudes with honesty and patience.
- d. **Review** the day or some period of time in your life or in the life of your congregation. Allow your mind to wander through that period of time - look for times of joy, peace, movement toward God, sorrow for sin, charity toward others (consolation). Look for times of unrest, darkness of the soul, sadness, thoughts that lead away from God, self centeredness (desolation). Some questions you might ask yourself about that period include:

What are you most/least grateful for during that time?

What felt life-giving? What felt life-draining?

When did you feel a sense of love, peace, joy, life (the gifts of the Spirit)?

When did you feel exhausted, dead, drained, angry, mean?

What specific events, thoughts, or experiences draw your attention?

What aspects of that time repel you?

Ask yourself, *When did I notice God during this time? What felt like a time of God’s absence?*

As some answers to these questions arise, notice what they suggest to you about the future, for you, for your congregation. How is God calling you, your congregation into being? Toward what actions, activities, or attributes is God drawing you, your congregation?

- e. **React and respond** to Jesus personally, putting into words your heart’s desire, asking for forgiveness, strength and hope to confront desolations and give thanks for consolations.

Lectio Divina: a Slow, Contemplative Praying of the Scriptures

- a. Read (Lectio)-slowly-quiet down in order to hear God's word; gently listen for a word or phrase that draws your attention - this is God's word for you this day; listen deeply to hear with the ears of your heart God's still, small voice.
- b. Meditation (Meditatio)-take the word in and ruminate on it, to ponder it in your heart, repeat it over and over again, internalize the word, a word that touches us and affects us at our deepest level. What thoughts and images arise for you?
- c. Prayer (Oratio)-dialogue with God and offer to God our whole selves, allowing ourselves to be touched and changed by God. What might God be saying to you, may be calling you to do through your prayerful reflection on this reading?
- d. Contemplation (Contemplatio)-silently rest in the presence of God and accept God's transforming grace. Wordless, quiet rest in the presence of the One who loves us. Enjoy the experience of being in the presence of God.

Group Reading and Reflection:



- a. Begin with a time of silent prayer (about 30 – 60 seconds). Into the silence a group leader slowly reads this passage through two times, with a pause between, while everyone pays attention to a word or phrase that particularly gets their attention, strikes them, draws their interest. Don't be caught by the literal meaning of the scripture. Rather, listen for the word or phrase that catches your attention. Silently focus on that word or phrase. Allow it to sift through your heart and mind. After the second reading, the reader should allow some silent time for this reflection.
- b. Each person, then, without elaboration or conversation, is invited to share their word (yes, it is an option to "pass" and not share a word or phrase if one is not comfortable doing so; that is fine). There is no right or wrong here, it is simply the word or phrase each person is drawn to.
- c. The group leader reads the passage a third time.
 - The group members are invited to listen for how God is speaking to them through the passage. They might also listen for possibilities of how God might be speaking to the church council or to the congregation through the passage.
 - After a time of silence, group members are invited to share what they have heard in this phase of the prayer.

In the group process, it is important that group members not comment on one another's observations but simply listen during the sharing period.

“God Sightings” – Sharing Stories



Where have you noticed God’s presence in your life, in your family, your place of work, in your community, in your congregation in the past day, week, year? Your responses to these questions are “God sightings” as that term is used in this resource.

Here are some good God questions:

- What is making God smile in this situation?
- What is breaking God’s heart right now?
- What is God dreaming about?
- What is God paying attention to that God is calling me/us to pay attention to?
- Where has God’s presence been strongly experienced, felt in our lives, in the life of our congregation in the past? Are there clues there about where God’s presence might be experienced strongly in the future, maybe in similar, but also somewhat new ways?
- If God’s mission is to bless the world and our mission is to get in on what God is doing, what opportunities are we seeing out there where God seems to be doing something, inviting us to do something?



This resource has been prepared by the New and Renewing Mission Table, the Faith Practices Table, and the staff of the Northwestern Minnesota Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. August 2012.

