PRAYER PRACTICES
FOR LENT

HANDOUTS
OPENING

1 Candle
We light our candles as a sign of God’s presence with us.

2 Breath Prayer
After a moment of silence, we pray the following breath prayer:
(BREATHE IN) Nothing can separate us
(BREATHE OUT) from the love of God.
Repeat three times.

3 Opening Prayer
FACILITATOR: In the Bible, there are many references to fire. It is a sign of God’s presence. It is where God calls Moses, where Jesus gathers his friends, and appears in tongues on the head of the believers as a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit...
Fire cleanses and warms, protects and illuminates. It is also beautiful, wild, untameable and mysterious.
We are invited to gather around a fire to feel its warmth and watch the flames. God is here, this is Holy Ground.
We meet in the name of God, our maker, redeemer and friend.
ALL:
In the warmth of the fire may we find peace.
In the flames of the fire may we find mercy.
In the light of the fire may we find blessing.
In the mystery of the fire may we encounter holiness.
As we gather in this place may you bind us together in love. Amen.

CLOSING

1 Breath Prayer
After a moment of silence, we pray the following breath prayer:
(BREATHE IN) Nothing can separate us
(BREATHE OUT) from the love of God.
Repeat three times.

2 Closing Prayer
FACILITATOR: We met in the name of God, our maker, redeemer and friend.
ALL:
We thank you for the warmth of your peace,
The flames of your mercy,
The light of your blessing,
The mystery of your holiness.
As we leave this place,
may you send us out together in love.

3 Blessings
FACILITATOR:
May the strength of God sustain us;
may the power of God preserve us;
may the hands of God protect us;
may the way of God direct us;
may the love of God go with us this night and forever.
ALL: Amen.
We blow out our candles.
PRAYER PRACTICES FOR LENT

WEEK 5

Visio Divina

1. Introduction:
   Background
   Summary of the Practice
   Ways to use the Practice
   Time

2. Outline
   The Practice in 6 Steps

3. Going Deeper
   Questions for Reflection
   Resources
   Feedback

4. Artworks for Online Session
Background

Visio Divina or Sacred Seeing, is a practice based on Lectio Divina, but rather than sitting with a Bible passage, it uses visual elements to help set your mind on prayer. It allows God to speak to you through the image or object. Praying through art is a multi-sensory way to connect to God. Visio Divina is one form of prayer using images – works of art, stained glass windows, icons, or images / objects in nature. It is a form of prayer that has been used throughout the centuries, mainly in Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches where icons are often used in prayer. It is growing in use across Protestant communities.

Summary of the Practice

Once you have chosen an Icon, image, painting or other object to sit with, there are four parts to a Visio Divina exercise: Observe, Reflect, Respond, Rest.

Ways to use the Practice

This is a practice that can be done on your own, as well as in a group with someone leading the practice. In a group setting, you might ask everyone to share what they have noticed or observed. If there are children in the group, encourage them to share first.

You might want to explore and extend your experience of this practice by making art in response, whatever form this may take.

Time

Visio Divina is a listening practice, which ideally should not be rushed. You could probably do the practice in about 10-15 minutes, though you could extend it as much as you want.
PRAYER PRACTICES FOR LENT
VISIO DIVINA

OUTLINE

1 Select
Choose an Icon, stained glass window, image, artwork or other object (for instance something from nature, like a flower or pinecone) to use for your time of prayer.

2 Settle
Begin by taking some time to get comfortable. You might light a candle to be reminded of God’s presence, or you might find it helpful to close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths. Continue breathing slowly, counting to three as you breathe ‘in’ and three as you breathe ‘out’. Imagine breathing out any heavy or difficult feelings you might be carrying. Imagine breathing in God’s deep love for you. Sit in the silence for a while.

3 Observe
Spend some time to consider the Icon, image, artwork or object. Look at the different shapes. Are there any tiny marks or variation in colour? What is the texture like? Does it have a smell? Is there anything that touches you, resonated, attracts or even disturbs you?

4 Reflect
What thoughts or questions is this image raising? What emotions do you feel? Notice any thoughts or feelings that have arisen as you observed. You may be reminded of something: an event in the past, an experience or a place. Make notes or drawings if this is helpful. Ponder in a moment of quietness. Stay with what you are already noticing or something that has stood out. Or go with other thoughts and feelings as they arise.

5 Respond
Speak to God from the quiet of your heart about what has stood out to you. Whatever is in your heart to say, ask, repeat, wonder or complain about. Alternatively, you could write down the thoughts that have come your way.

6 Rest
Rest in the quiet knowing God has been with you in your praying and listening, hears your prayers and is with you now.

*Where it says God, you can replace this with Jesus or the Holy Spirit and vice versa.
GOING DEEPER

Questions for Reflection

- How did you respond to the practice of Visio Divina? What was helpful? What was not so helpful?
- How might you use and develop this practice in your everyday life?
- How might this practice be used within your church community?

Note for when reflecting on these questions as a group:
The focus of this exercise is not on the content of people’s prayer or what they have spoken about with God. What we are inviting you to do is reflect on the practice itself, how it is or might be useful to you and your church community and how you might practically build it into your life. If someone does share something personal about their experience of the practice, we encourage you to simply say ‘thank you’ and hold what was shared, possibly with a short moment of silence before moving on.

Resources

Books

- Agents of Faith: Votive Objects in Time and Place, Ittai Weinryb (BGC and Yale University Press, 2018)
- Imaging Pilgrimage: Art as Embodied Experience, Kathryn Barush (Bloomsbury, 2021)
- Praying With Icons, Linette Martin (Paraclete Press, 2011)
- Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice, Sally M. Promey, ed. (Yale University Press, 2014)
- Soul Care: African American Practice, Barbara L Peacock (InterVarsity Press, 2020)

Online (Apps and Websites)

- Icon Gazing, Christine Valters Paintner
- Praying with Icons,

We would very much appreciate your feedback on this Prayer Practices for Lent Session and Handout. Click or scan QR code to share your thoughts.
PRAYER PRACTICES FOR LENT
VISIO DIVINA

ARTWORKS FOR ONLINE SESSION

Sunflowers
Vincent van Gogh

‘The sunflower is mine’, Van Gogh once declared, and it is clear that the flower had various meanings for him. The different stages in the sunflower’s life cycle shown here, from young bud through to maturity and eventual decay, follow in the vanitas tradition of Dutch seventeenth-century flower paintings, which emphasise the transient nature of human actions. The sunflowers were perhaps also intended to be a symbol of friendship and a celebration of the beauty and vitality of nature. The sunflower pictures were among the first paintings Van Gogh produced in Arles that show his signature expressive style. No other artist has been so closely associated with a specific flower, and these pictures are among Van Gogh’s most iconic and best-loved works.’

Image and description from www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/vincent-van-gogh-sunflowers

Man in A Shirt Drawer 2017-18
Lubaina Himid CBE RA

This is a portrait of a person painted on the inside lower panel of an antique wooden shirt drawer with gold handles. The unidentified subject is of African descent and wears short cropped black hair, a pale blue blazer and an orange undershirt. Although the title refers to the figure as a ‘Man’, the depiction appears to present an androgynous figure: one can detect pale pink lipstick as well as a bright yellow eyeshadow whose hue matches the background colour. Set against this bright yellow background, the subject’s colourful outfit appears aligned with contemporary fashion and situates the scene in recent history. However, this characterisation contrasts visually with the time-period suggested by the aged, scuffed and paint-splattered drawer.’