

# *Teach Us To Pray*

**A Prairie Group Paper on Prayer by Rev. Kathleen C. Rolenz  
Thursday, November 7, 2013**

*He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray..." Luke 11: 1a*

The service was going along just fine until I heard a rustle in the pews, and noticed that several people had turned around in their seats to attend to the slumped body of a fellow church member. The anxiety in the sanctuary had begun to radiate out among the congregation. A nurse got up out of her seat and came over to the parishioner who by now, had clearly passed out. The rustlings turned into murmurings and I realized that I had to do something—I had to make something up on the spot.

I stopped the sermon. "It seems that one of our members has fainted. She is being tended to by a nurse and a doctor in the congregation. We are calling an ambulance to take her to the hospital. Everything that can be done is being done." There, the facts had been delivered, but there was something still needed; a palpable sense of unfinished business hung in the air. "Now," I said, "let us pray."

I said something simple, addressing it to the spirit of healing or wholeness or life or something like that, and then asked for good care of our parishioner, care for her family and church friends who will be tending to her; care for the emergency medical technicians and doctors and nurses, threw in a beloved community and before I knew it, she was being transferred out of the sanctuary and the service went on; yet the feeling in the room was as if everyone heaved a collective sigh of relief.

In the line afterwards, I half expected someone to object to having to "pray" as I usually couch prayer as "meditation/reflection/prayer," offering, in good Unitarian Universalist fashion,

plenty of “options.” Even my favorite atheist parishioner, who despises all religious language and anything that vaguely smacks of “the spiritual,” shook my hand warmly and said “you did a good thing there.”

“Lord, teach us to pray,” a disciple asked Jesus, “just as John taught his disciples.”<sup>1</sup> . As spiritual leaders, we are either taught or have developed a practice of prayer in various settings. We know that inevitably we will be asked to pray on the spot before an interfaith meeting, a prayer breakfast, in a hospital room, at the bedside of the dying. Prayer is one of the tools which we carry with us, pulling it out to call the gathered, frame a meeting or to mend a moment broken by dis-ease. We write sermons about prayer—beautiful, elegant prose that evokes Mary Oliver and the prayer of Thomas Merton, or Reinhold Niebuhr’s famous “serenity prayer,” and we read books about prayer. Perhaps we personally have a prayer practice, or teach classes on prayer, or during times of great crisis, such as September 11 or the murderous rampage in Newtown, CT, we may hold time open for prayer. As clergy, we serve as the “professional prayers,” but do we *teach* our people how to pray?

For the purpose of this paper, I intend to address the three questions asked in my assignment: (1) do we have a responsibility to teach our people how to pray; (2) Do we have a responsibility to lead them in prayer in various settings and then (3) “how should we go about doing that?” In order to answer these questions, I will discuss briefly the history of prayer in Unitarian Universalism to help us understand how prayer is been received or rebuffed in our congregational settings. Then, I’ll explore the ways in which Unitarian Universalists typically are exposed to prayer; in corporate worship, in group settings and as part of their private, spiritual practice. Finally, I’ll examine why we have a responsibility to teach our people how to pray, and explore a few ways that that is currently being practiced in Unitarian Universalism;

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 11: 1-4

## **Do we Have a Responsibility to Teach People How to Pray?**

*Yes.* That single word contains the bias of the author of this paper. I believe we have the responsibility to teach people how to pray because, as is so often the case, people come to our congregations with either a childhood understanding of prayer or a belief that it simply isn't a relevant practice for their lives. They struggle with "to whom it may concern," and the inevitable, "I really needed God to come through for me, I prayed, it didn't happen, and now I see it as a waste of time." Just as Unitarian Universalist clergy gamely take up the challenge of unpacking traditional theological categories and language (sin, salvation, evil, God), we must also continually offer up a more nuanced understanding of what prayer for a religious liberal-regardless of whether they are theist or an atheist/agnostic – can feel like. More importantly than a purely intellectual understanding, we must engage our congregants in a prayer practice because, as it has been famously stated in the quote from Lon Ray Call, "prayer doesn't change things; people change things and prayer changes people." Prayer has the ability to slow us down; to reflect on the meaning of grace and the possibility of redemptive love; it can provide a "rock in a weary land," and remind us of the reality of healing that comes from mercy often discovered in prayer.

However, as T. S. Eliot reminds us, "Between the idea and the reality, between the motion and the act, falls the shadow...."<sup>2</sup> Personally, I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of classes I have offered on prayer in my current congregational setting. Why is that?

### **The Problem with Prayer**

Each summer, we invite worship associates to lead worship, which includes of course writing their own sermon and creating their own liturgy. We have noticed a curious pattern however. When they turn in their order of service for review, we notice that more often than not,

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<sup>2</sup> Eliot, T. S. *The Hollow Men*

they have forgotten to include a prayer—or even a time of silence. It seems as if it’s the first dispensable thing when there is pressure on time; or they simply don’t think about prayer in corporate worship. I sense a considerable discomfort with prayer. We insist that worship associates write at least one original prayer during their training, and offer it to their fellow associates, but somehow that action does not become a compelling memory when they begin scripting their own response. So what’s that about? What’s the Unitarian Universalist resistance to prayer?

We can trace this resistance to prayer; this questioning of the use of prayer to the Transcendentalists; to Emerson in particular. He writes:

“Prayer looks abroad and asks for some foraging addition to come through some foreign virtue, and loses itself in endless mazes of natural and supernatural and mediatorial and miraculous. Prayer that craves a particular commodity—anything less than all good, is vicious. ...[but] prayer as a means to effect a private end is theft and meanness.”<sup>3</sup>

Although I don’t believe our worship associates would cite Emerson as the reason why they forget to include prayer in their liturgical considerations, I believe that a suspicion about the efficacy of prayer is in the air we breathe in many Unitarian Universalist churches. In *Prayer: A History*, Philip and Carol Zaleski also cite Emily Dickinson’s wondering if there is in fact, a God to hear prayers, or if “God smirks at her naïve trust in the value of prayer. Stung, she throws prayer away and learns to doubt,” *to scan the Skies/with a suspicious Air.*” From her bleakest position on prayer, Dickinson writes “*there comes an hour when the begging stops, when the long interceding lips perceive their prayer is vain.*”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The American Transcendentalists, Lawrence Buell, Random House, Inc, New York, 2006. , pg. 25

<sup>4</sup> Zaleski, Philip & Carol. *Prayer, A History.* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), pg. 280.

So, we move from Emerson & Dickinson's challenge about the efficacy of prayer to another non-institutionalist, Walt Whitman. We don't need prayer because we have something better – we have the Self as an instrument of the Divine. If we remove the "God" to whom we must pray, then --to whom should we pray?"<sup>5</sup> (Note—I'm sure my colleague Jim Eller has explored this question in great depth in Paper #3) Whitman responds rather cavalierly, that he is, in fact God. "Divine I am inside and out and I make holy whatever I touch or am touch'd from. The scent of these arm-pits aroma finer than prayer..."<sup>6</sup>

The resistance to prayer includes the by-now familiar challenges of a liberal faith; can we pray together in church with persons who do not believe in God and therefore even the substitutionary "Spirit of Life," is just a code word for a larger, supernatural reality? Or, is it about the authoritarian nature of prayer that a minister speaks it, and others listen, whether they agree with the content or the spirit of it or not? Without a transcendent referent point upon which we can all agree, does prayer in our congregations become another version of positive affirmations and self-help therapy? As the Zaleski's pointedly note, within the current spirit of prayer in most quasi-secular institutions, as represented by persons who have marginal or no clear denominational affiliation (i.e., Marianne Williamson, Wayne Dyer, Neale Walsh,):

"countless sickness have been cured, lives made whole and despairing hearts mended; yet in this optimistic program of do-it yourself redemption, there is something that seems paradoxically, to vitiate prayer. All too easily prayers that are pure alleluia and no Miserere collapse into a dull monotone. All too easily, the dialogue between I and Thou becomes a monologue between I and Me...Eventually one tires of oneself, even of one's

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pg. 283.

<sup>6</sup> Zaleski, pg. 283

higher Self. It avails much to pray, but when it becomes not more than a self-help technique, the adventure of prayer is over.”<sup>7</sup>

When I lead our Worship Associates in a workshop on prayer, I start with the ACTS acronym that I learned in seminary for how to construct a prayer on the spot, if necessary. It stands for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication. Anne Lamott has popularized this formula by creating the categories of WOW (adoration); OOPS (Confession) (my addition, not hers); THANKS (thanksgiving) and HELP (supplication). The adoration is the address, the “to whom it may concern”; the confession is recognition of brokenness; the thanksgiving, which usually falls easy to our lips, is gratitude; and supplication is a statement of how we wish our spirits or the world could be. T. M. Luhrmann, in her book *When God Talks Back*, acknowledges that while these categories frame the “content” of prayer, the evangelicals at the Vineyard Church claim that “prayer changes the way the person praying uses his or her mind by changing the way that person pays attention. People learn to attend in specific, structured ways when they pray and some people, the experts, become skilled at doing so.”<sup>8</sup> In our Unitarian Universalist settings, the most common use of prayer is in corporate worship. Less often we pray before small group meetings and in one-on-one spiritual direction, which gives guidelines on how to pray. What is so remarkable about the participants of Vineyard church is that there is a clear path—a clear progression in learning how to pray and how to deepen one’s prayer life.

The best way to pray out loud in public is to pray in private—to have a regular, disciplined daily prayer practice. Throughout the years I’ve been serving my current congregation, I’ve offered several courses, workshops and opportunities to learn prayer as a private spiritual practice, usually attended by the same faithful few. When I first offered

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<sup>7</sup> Zaleski, Philip & Carol. *Prayer, A History*. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), pg. 329-330

<sup>8</sup> Luhrmann, T. M. *When God Talks Back*, pg. 389

Spiritual Direction to parishioners after graduating from Shalem's Spiritual Direction program, I quickly discovered that most of the people who expressed interest wanted to talk with me, but were not interested in having a regular, continued prayer practice. Prayer then, became an intellectual exercise that was valued for a while, but took too much time, or perhaps they just became uncomfortable with it

### **Prayerful Time in Church**

Despite the fact that worship associates often “forget” the prayer time when creating their own liturgy, the professional ministers insist on it. The question then arises; do we write an original prayer each Sunday or do we quickly scan the worship web or Mark Belletini's old services for a prayer we could “steal” (giving the author full credit either verbally or in the order of service, of course.) Perhaps given the harried rush towards Sunday, we flip through the many books of prayer lining our shelves, telling ourselves that adapting or adopting another prayer for the occasion would do just fine. Although the author has done all of the above in her ministry, her preference is to avoid using pre-written prayers or reading poems instead of prayers at all cost. Her ideal would be to abandon the written prayer entirely, and to be so present in the moment; to the words, music, flow, mood of the service and the congregation, that an extemporaneous prayer, composed in partnership with the Holy Spirit, would roll from her lips as easily as the River Jordan. Alas, even the River Jordan gets clogged with debris and refuses to flow. So, at times like these, pre-written prayers help to provide a channel for the too often elusive Holy Spirit.

I seldom, if ever, read another's prayer as my own, although I do have some favorites “pray-ers,” such as Ted Loder's Guerillas of Grace, which provide a constant renewable source of inspiration for me, as do the prayers of Howard Thurman. Although I do not use them as

prayers, I often go to Rilke's book of Hours: Love Poems to God; and the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins to help frame my own prayer writing.

My colleague and respondent, Rev. Luke Stevens-Royer suggested that it would be helpful to include in this paper a full prayer that I have written for worship. I include a full prayer here<sup>9</sup> while at the same time, I believe that prayers, like sermons, are meant to be heard and not read; and are responsive to the demands of the day. While certainly there is a place for published prayer, I find that most prayers lose their power once committed to the printed page, and prefer, like the Holy Spirit, they bloweth where they listeth...

### **The Uses of Prayer**

I put this question to the test by surveying colleagues and asking them "do you teach prayer to your congregants? If so, what do you do?" Part of our struggle is that we do not know how to pray because we have had no early experience in prayer. To my knowledge, there is no curriculum in Unitarian Universalist churches that engage children with a regular prayer practice which could include, as is the case in some Baptist traditions, children offering a prayer in front of the entire congregation. In the Vineyard faith tradition, members are carefully trained on how to pray; there is a discipline and an acknowledgement that some are better at it than others.

Unitarian Universalists not only don't get much practice at extemporaneous prayers, but there are precious few occasions where we are expected or invited to pray. We are asked to pray before dinner at weddings and certainly at memorial services; where we have ample time to prepare something in writing if we wish. However, to my knowledge, we have no expectation or training to enable our adult laity to be able to offer spontaneous or extemporaneous prayer when called upon to do so. Asking a member of our congregation to stand up in front of his/her congregation and say simply "pray" would most likely cause extreme distress! We do not train

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix II for Prayer

our people to pray and with the ever-present ambiguity around to whom the prayer is directed and the lack of a regular, private prayer practice, it's unlikely that most of our laity will be invited to pray out loud in a Sunday morning service anytime soon.

Of course, praying out loud before a congregation is not the litmus test of either piety or practice. When put together in small group settings, or invited to attend a retreat on Spiritual Practices, our people *do* pray. Perhaps the most common practice is a simple chalice lighting and reading that serves as a “centering” time. I’ve been pleased to hear that the small book of quotes I produced with Skinner House “Sources of Our Faith,” has been used as at time for centering before meetings. Another member told me she reads a quote a day and meditates on it; spending time with the quote and seeing how it might pertain to her life; a form of UU *lectio divina*. At the beginning of the UU Christian Fellowship Group I lead, I always ask them to answer the question of “How Goes it With Thy Spirit?” instead of “how are you doing?” which often reframes the focus towards a deeper, more spiritual reflection on the state of their soul instead of the state of their renovated kitchen.

So, what do some of our colleagues do? I’ve successfully taught and led the model that I first experienced from Rob Eller-Isaacs at a retreat about ten years ago. Based on the belief that Prayer is a form of deep listening, he invited us to pair with a partner and for five minutes, talk about whatever is on our mind and/or our hearts. The other person listens fully, intently, with no interjection of his/her own story or reaction. Then, they switch. After another five minutes, the group regathers, and each person takes a turn of standing behind their partner, laying hands on their shoulders and praying for him/her based on what was said. At first, I was terrified. Prayer is a holy thing; what if I get it wrong? What if it is trite or trivial? What we quickly discovered was that a sincere prayer, based on what we heard, was profound enough and very moving. I’ve

used the same method to train lay pastoral associates and they have never forgotten it and always use it as an opportunity to pray with a parishioner.

Another colleague does something that he does monthly, called “Compassionate Connection.” After the service, he invites whoever wishes to gather in a side chapel. People receive a laying on of hands and words or prayers by the ministers. Another colleague has created a kind of singing ministry with a small group of people who volunteer to visit a person who is hospitalized and will bring the gift of music to the bedside. Still another congregant taught herself the Celtic harp and will bring that to bedsides of the sick or dying and play music for them; she never called it her “prayer practice,” but it clearly was for her. One colleague hosts a Spiritual Explorations Retreat every year, offering various prayer practices such as Centering Prayer or Daily Examen. Our knitting group knits “Prayer Shawls” and sometimes, if they know the person who will receive it, the women tell me they will “knit in” good thoughts into the prayer shawl, and attach a small tag “knit with love, from West Shore.” Erik Walker Wikstrom’s book, *“Simply Pray: A modern spiritual practice to deepen your life,”* introduces the idea of “doing something” with our prayer; and he suggests making and handling prayer beads as a way of engaging one’s body with prayer. His lovely book describes various ways that Unitarian Universalists can learn to pray, both as a private devotional practice, in small groups and to some extent, in corporate worship.

One of the best selling publications by Skinner House is Scott Alexander’s *Everyday Spiritual Practice,* published in 1998. In a recent conversation with Rev. Wayne Arnason and me this summer, Editor Mary Benard mentioned that it never goes out of print and is often in demand. We mused aloud about why, and Mary’s response was that people continue to seek spiritual practices as Unitarian Universalists. While Scott’s focus on spiritual practice is broad,

ranging from traditional contemplative practices like prayer or lectio divina to cooking, quilting and recycling, it cannot be denied that Unitarian Universalists crave spiritual experiences and we know that these are more likely to occur when we engage in a sustained and disciplined contemplative practice.

### **The Practice of Prayer<sup>10</sup>**

When I was assigned this topic for the paper, I immediately concocted a three session class on prayer for late summer/early fall. <sup>11</sup> I half expected to cancel it before it begun as other previous attempts had not reached even the minimum number for a class. I had eight people sign up plus others who said they wanted to just “drop in.” I closed the class at eight and decided for the next 21 days, I would send daily prayer practice reminders to the group, as well as holding each one of them in my daily prayer practice. The group went deep into prayer quickly, talking candidly and honestly; sometimes with laughter and other times with tears, about their prayer life. They were diverse in beliefs; some Christian, one Jewish, others not defined as anything other than plain UU’s; and yet, as I suspected, the theology mattered less than the experience. One person’s prayer to “Lovely Life” was accepted as valid as “Father God.” For the next three sessions we discussed not the concept of God or the address of prayer, but the felt and lived experience of it. Session I involved two simple contemplative prayer practices, followed by a homework assignment—to speak and/or write an ACTS (or Wow.Oops. Thanks. Help) prayer every day. Session II involved praying with scripture and poetry, and persons were invited to submit their sacred text for *lectio divina* contemplation. Session III was the “praying with others,” and I used Rob Eller-Isaacs’ model of listening to one

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendix for outline of this class, led in September 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Although I created the class, it was Inspired by a DMin Thesis project by Barbara Ten Hove on Teaching Prayer. I am indebted to her for her work in this area.

another in pairs, and then offering a prayer out loud for that person, based on what you heard by listening deeply and intently as your partner spoke.

As I suspected, the group wanted to continue past the three weeks, and were disappointed when I ended the class. They appreciated the quiet time with others; they spoke movingly of what it felt like to be prayed for and with; they appreciated my daily reminder emails that I was praying with and for them, as well as gentle nudges to devote just five minutes each day to prayer.

I have reported the data from the workshop, but have not reported on how this experience has changed me. I believe in, and hold like a touchstone, the quote “prayer doesn’t change things; prayer changes people and people change things,” or, as C.L. Lewis so powerfully penned: “I pray because I can’t help myself. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. It doesn’t change God. It changes me.”<sup>12</sup> I have been changed by the experience of regular, sustained prayer. I have a deeper and renewed appreciation for the members of the class in ways I did not before. I am more patient with parishioners, not just the ones I have prayed with, but the ones who have made me weary with their demands. I came away from the class feeling refreshed and renewed, as if together we had slipped into a secret pool of fresh water. I have felt that my relationship with God and my profound respect for Jesus has been strengthened by my ability to share it with parishioners; parishioners who are no longer concerned that I might try to impose those beliefs on them. For those brief ninety minutes, once a week, for three weeks, an island of peace was created the effects of which I hope will still be reverberating when this paper is read out loud.

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted in an article by Helderman, Arlene. *A Spiritual Orphan*, from *God Within: Our Spiritual Future – As Told by Today’s New Adults*; Skylights Paths Publishing, 2001.

So how “ought” we to teach our Unitarian Universalists brethren to pray? While language is important (what is prayer? To whom do I pray? etc.), the best way to teach Unitarian Universalists is for the Unitarian Universalist clergy to *simply* pray...of course, to pray in worship, but to pray before Board meetings and Social Justice gatherings; to pray one-on-one with members and friends, to talk about prayer as an everyday practice—as part of what we do without embarrassment or apology, and trust that when we stumble over our words or wonder if we will offend a non-theist, or feel even a little silly or embarrassed by doing something so apparently ineffectual, we recall the insightful wisdom of the Apostle Paul, "*...the Spirit helps us in our weakness: for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words*" - Romans 8:26

# Appendix I

## Praying Alone and Together

A Class in Three Parts 5:30 – 7:00 p.m. with Rev. Kathleen Rolenz

- 5:30 – 6:00 p.m.      **As we gather – some logistics**  
Class will be from 5:30 – 7 pm., not 7:30 p.m. to accommodate various schedules  
First 20 minutes – do you need time to eat or is starting at 5:30 okay?  
Class is now “closed,” not drop ins b/c of homework  
Homework assigned between classes; expected you’ll do your homework  
Conversation – Tell us your name and why did you decide to take this class?
- 6:05      **Chalice Lighting/Prayer**
- 6:10      **Overview of classes**  
**Group Guidelines – Covenant**  
What’s going to happen - This week – **Writing a prayer; developing a prayer practice.** Next week: **Praying with Text – Lectio Divina as private prayer practice.** Final week: **praying with others;** how to do an extemporaneous, spoken prayer for another person.
- 6:15      **Reflection – What is Prayer? Do UU’s pray?** *First, a confession from me! Then--*Different definitions: prayer as an act we intentionally do, as spiritual beings that connect us to the Holy, to each other and all creation. (2) Prayer as an expression of individual’s inner life; (3) Prayer is a form of deep listening.  
**Categories of Prayer:** (St. Ignatius) **Apophatic prayer** – Prayers without images; similar to Zen meditation; breath prayer, etc. Centering Prayer; Thomas Keating-idea is to direct your attention to God/Higher Power/Emptiness using a word or short phrase; returning to phrase. **Kataphatic** (with form or images) is another type of prayer; using images; i.e., icons, person of Jesus, etc.  
**Prayer as Dialogue;** petition, forgiveness, suffering, abandonment, serenity, loving, transformation, silence, praise, lament, gratitude, healing, Prayer as silent devotional practice; praying in groups; praying before events; praying in church on Sunday morning; national day of prayer; purpose is the same; to connect with something outside ourselves; expression of inner life; deep listening.
- 6:30      **Praying Alone – Listening Prayer/Apophatic**  
Sit comfortably, breathe with intention, close your eyes, relax. Let your mind go blank. Every time you get a thought, just go back to your breath, counting your breath. What do you hear? Your own mind? What is it saying? Notice what is happening in your mind, then respond simply with: *I pray that thought....I pray that anxiety...I pray that fear...etc.* Begin and end with sound of the bell.
- 6:35      **Reflection** – what happened in those five minutes?
- 6:40      **Praying Alone – Loving Prayer**  
Do this again – only in the five minutes of prayer; bring to mind someone who you care for; who is in pain, who is struggling; if no one personally comes to mind, then bring to mind a cause that

you care about; but try to make it very specific; a place that is being damaged, a person you have heard or read about; sit with them; bring image to mind...I am sending you my love...I am holding you in prayer. *We return from five minutes to the sound of the bell*

**6:45 Reflection** – what happened in those five minutes?

**6:50 Construction of a Prayer for Homework Assignment**

Commit to 5 minutes each day, constructing a prayer. It can be written or spoken; but you'll be asked to read aloud your prayer at the next class. **DO NOT STRESS OVER THIS!**

## Praying Alone and Together

### PRAYER WORKSHEET/HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

## Classic Categories of Prayer –

1. **ACTS** (adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication.) OR
2. **Wow. Oops. Thanks. Help!**

### *Writing or Praying Your Own Prayer*

#### **Wow – (Adoration) To whom it May Concern:**

*Gracious God, Loving Presence, Wild One, Hopeful Love, Higher Power, She Who Brings Me Delight, Spirit of Life – thing about to whom or to what you are praying and find a name that works for you. Be as creative or outrageous as you wish; just make sure you are intentional about the address.*

#### **Oops – (Confession). Here's how I messed up:**

*You don't have to have committed a great big sin this week; it's a character review; how were you not your best self this week? How have you fallen short of your own hopes for yourself today or the day before; when did you think suspicious thoughts about another; did you gossip? Everybody's got character defects....*

#### **Thanks (Gratitude). Here's what I'm grateful for:**

*Think of the ways that you have been helped this day/week; consider the people who have made a difference in your life; think of the ways in which your life has been supported and sustained by others; or animals/this planet. Who or what are you grateful for?*

#### **Help! (Supplication)**

*"All our lives we are in need...and others are in need of us." What do you need? What is most important to you? What does the world need? What suffering would you alleviate if you could?*

**Bring Your Prayer to Class and be willing to share it with a partner next Monday.**

# Praying Alone and Together

A Class in Three Parts

5:30 – 7:00 p.m.

with Rev. Kathleen Rolenz

- 5:30 **Chalice Lighting/Prayer**
- 5:35 **Check in – How Goes it With Thy Spirit? OR What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present?** Each person gets two minutes; if you don't use it; we sit in silence with you.
- 5:55 **Group Guidelines – Covenant** ; agreed to give space; to speak keep confidences; to show up; to do the homework.
- 6:00 **Describe your 5 minute prayer practice; how was it? What did you learn? What did you practice?**
- 6:10 **Share written prayer with whole group OR Find a partner, share with them one of the prayers you wrote down.**
- 6:20 **Lectio Divina – or “Holy Reading”**  
Four key “ingredients” to Lectio: Read, Reflect, Respond, Rest.
- **Read** the scripture. Slowly. Quickly. Silently. Out loud. In a monotone. Dramatically. Like a prayer; like a whisper; like a Shakespearian monologue. Read it a couple of times.
  - **Reflect.** – What jumped out at you? What surprised you? What word caught your attention? What did you notice? What does it mean? What did it mean to you before (if you knew the text)?
  - **Respond** – in writing, in conversation, in dialogue with another; in dance, in an art piece, make a collage, make a song, sing, act it out, journal.
  - **Rest** – sit with it. Review the experience as if you were going over the highlights of your vacation with someone. Then go back to your breath or your word or your center and rest; let it go.
  - Do it all over again!
- 6:55 **Closing Thoughts & Prayer & Homework.**  
Continue prayer practice 5 minutes a day.  
Add Lectio Divina 3 x this week to your prayer practice.
- 7:00 **Adjourn**

# Praying Alone and Together

A Class in Three Parts

5:30 – 7:00 p.m. with Rev. Kathleen Rolenz

- 5:30 **Chalice Lighting/Prayer**
- 5:35 **Check in – How Goes it With Thy Spirit? OR What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present?** Each person gets one minute.
- 5:45 **Group Guidelines – Covenant;** *agreed to give space; to speak keep confidences; to show up; to do the homework.*
- 5:50 **Review of Prayer Practices for past 3 weeks:**  
**Praying Alone – Listening Prayer** – praying the “empty” space; focusing on a single word; counting breath, returning to the One space of silence. When thoughts or emotions arise—say ‘I am praying (for) that fear...’ or ‘I am praying (for) that to-do list.’  
**Praying Alone – Loving Prayer** – Seeing a person in your mind’s eye. Holding them in prayer. Returning to breath or empty space. Seeing another arise; or perhaps same person again – praying for another.  
**Wow. Oops. Thanks. Help** (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication)
- 6:00 **Lectio Divina – or “Holy Reading”**  
Four key “ingredients” to Lectio: Read, Reflect, Respond, Rest.
  - **Read Reflect Respond Rest**
- 6:20 **Share your “lectio” response and how the practice went.**
- 6:30 **Prayer as Deep Listening – Praying with and for Others**
- 6:35 **Partner 1 – 5 minutes**
- 6:40 **Partner 1 – 5 minutes**
- 6:45 **Rejoin large group – Pray for partner**
- 7:00 **Closing Thoughts & Prayer**

# Lectio Divina- Two Texts

## **1 Corinthians 13:4-13** New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant <sup>or</sup> rude.

It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;

It does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.

It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end.

For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end.

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.

For now we see in a mirror, dimly-but then we will see face to face.

Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

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## **In Blackwater Woods**

Mary Oliver

Look, the trees are turning their own bodies into pillars  
of light, are giving off the rich fragrance of cinnamon and fulfillment,  
the long tapers of cattails are bursting and floating away over  
the blue shoulders of the ponds, and every pond,  
no matter what its name is, is nameless now.  
Every year everything I have ever learned  
in my lifetime leads back to this: the fires and the black river of loss  
whose other side is salvation, whose meaning none of us will ever know.  
To live in this world you must be able to do three things:  
to love what is mortal; to hold it against your bones knowing  
your own life depends on it; and, when the time comes to let it go,  
to let it go.

## Appendix II

Prayer for Mother's Day by Kathleen Rolenz

Spirit of life,  
You've been a father and mother to us all  
We enter into this time of silence and reflection  
With mixed emotions.  
This is mother's day—a day set aside to honor, celebrate, and in some cases, simply to reflect on those women who gave us birth.  
Some of us come to this day with joy,  
With strong and tender feelings  
for the women who have earned the right to be called "mother."  
They not only gave us our lives, they are responsible for shaping our spirit.  
They have fed us, played with us, nurtured us, listened to us.  
They have given unselfishly for us. They have loved us unconditionally.  
If our mothers are still living, we make the extra effort to stay in touch,  
And find ways to give back a portion of the love which we have so abundantly received.  
If our mothers have died, we take time to cherish our memories of them  
Memories which may flood our eyes with bittersweet tears of longing.  
We miss her...and we feel that loss even more acutely on this day,  
While also being grateful for her strength, her wisdom and her beauty—  
And the gifts of life which she has passed onto us.  
For others, this day is not a time for celebration,  
But rather, a time for reflection.  
Perhaps we cannot bring ourselves to buy that Hallmark card,  
The ones that waxes poetically about a mother's love, or her presence in our lives.  
Rather, we may feel her absence, through death or indifference.  
We may have complicated, difficult, unhappy associations with "mother."  
  
Instead, may we use this time to reflect on those who have mothered us.  
The women in our lives who have been shown their love for us,  
Whether through motherhood or mentoring,  
Those tough, gentle, truth-telling, loving, wise, whimsical women  
Who have served as our teachers, our mentors, our guides, our friends.  
  
And on this Mothering Day,  
May we remember the Great Mother that sustains us,  
Whose body is the very substance of our existence  
The very ground we walk upon,  
The very source of our being.  
  
From whatever place of the spirit we come this morning,  
Let us once again, enter into a time of silence,  
Knowing that it is in silence, where great things fashion themselves. (silence for a time) Amen.