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Faith Sharing

for teens

25

**Experiences
That Connect
Faith and Life**

Michael Theisen

FaithSharing for Teens

For
Barbara and Roy Theisen
March 2, 1957 to March 2, 2007

Celebrating 50 years of commitment
. . . in good times and bad
. . . in sickness and health
anchored by faith

Thanks, Mom and Dad,
for the model you are to all of us.

FaithSharing for Teens

25 Experiences that Connect Faith and Life

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Contents

Introduction	7
Part One: Faith Sharing with Scripture	13
Scripture 1: Anger	14
Scripture 2: Anxiety and Stress	17
Scripture 3: Hope	20
Scripture 4: God's Presence	23
Scripture 5: Love	27
Scripture 6: Peace	30
Scripture 7: Friendship	34
Scripture 8: Justice	38
Scripture 9: Forgiveness	41
Scripture 10: Discipleship	45
Part Two: Faith Sharing with Guided Meditation	49
Guided Meditation 1: And the Word Became Flesh	51
Guided Meditation 2: Come to Dinner	55
Guided Meditation 3: Lost and Found	59
Guided Meditation 4: The Treasure Left Behind	63
Guided Meditation 5: Hand Delivered	67
Part Three: Faith Sharing with Media Messages	71
Media Messages 1: Sing a New Song	72
Media Messages 2: TV Guide	76
Media Messages 3: At the Movies	79
Media Messages 4: On the Cover	83
Media Messages 5: Signs of Strength	88
Part Four: Faith Sharing with Objects and Images	93
Objects and Images 1: Signs of the Times	94
Objects and Images 2: Many Objects, One Faith	98
Objects and Images 3: Forecasting Faith	101
Objects and Images 4: Rock of Ages	105
Objects and Images 5: Seeds Scattered and Sown	109

Introduction

Faith Sharing: Connecting Faith with Life

Faith sharing is a relatively simple, yet profound, experience of seeking out the presence of God in the world and in our daily lives and sharing our discoveries with others. The more we are able to locate the intersection of our lives with the presence of God, the wider our eyes will open to see the active grace of God at work throughout our life journey.

Because God's presence cannot be defined or expressed by mere words, faith sharing often uses a metaphor, visual image, or other stimulation, such as music or guided meditation. This allows the participant to go beyond words in order to enter into and express this deeper level of connection with the ultimate mystery that is God.

Adolescents are at an opportune age to be introduced to faith sharing because of their increased ability to think metaphorically and symbolically. With the emergence of symbolic thought, teens become fascinated by the many levels of complex meaning ascribed to ordinary words and images. At this stage of intellectual development, it becomes natural for young people to get caught up in a higher level of reflection about life's ultimate questions, which inescapably leads them to wonder about the presence of God in the world.

Teenagers are also entering a period of "searching faith," where they begin to struggle with big questions about God, church, faith, and life. This searching is actually a positive movement, although it may appear on the outside to be anti-institutional, rebellious, and negative because of the amount of questioning and complaining often exhibited. The period of searching faith is an excellent time to introduce faith-sharing techniques and experiences because they are designed to encourage searching and questioning. Those who minister to and with young people can seize the opportunities presented by this moment of growth by introducing creative faith-sharing techniques that will challenge young people to step back and look for signs of God in their day-to-day lives.

The relational aspect of faith sharing is another reason why it is successful with young people. During the process, faith is shared with others. It is during this time of dialogue and connection that young people not only discover the meaning behind their own faith journey but also expand their insights simply by hearing about other people's journeys of faith. The more we can help young people to recognize that God is always with them, the more open they will be to looking for God's active hand at work in the world and in their lives.

The More We Look, the More We See

The faith-sharing process is a simple one: step back, reflect, and share. The various strategies used in *FaithSharing* all build upon this simple, yet profound, process. In fact, it behooves us as leaders to not complicate this process. We can show young people that faith sharing is not “rocket science” and that it can often be done in a relatively short amount of time, anywhere and at any time. Through frequent use of faith-sharing practices during gathered ministry times, young people can break open the Word of life within their ordinary surroundings.

The Content of *FaithSharing*

FaithSharing offers four different but related approaches to encourage young people to share their faith. Each approach uses a different focal point for faith sharing:

- Part 1: Scripture
- Part 2: Guided Meditation
- Part 3: Media Messages
- Part 4: Objects and Images

The experiences in each of the four parts use the simple process of stepping back, reflecting, and sharing.

The faith sharing with Scripture experiences in part 1 use a process adapted from *lectio divina*, an ancient monastic process of reflecting on a reading from Scripture or others’ spiritual writings. The ten faith-sharing experiences in part 1 invite participants to reflect on a Scripture passage. They hear it three times, each time taking the meaning to a deeper level, and gradually open themselves up to allowing God to speak to and through them to others in the group. After completing these experiences, the participants and leaders will be familiar with the faith-sharing process. Additional experiences can be crafted by selecting a short Scripture passage and developing a question to help facilitate the reflection and the small-group sharing.

The five guided meditations in part 2 help take the listeners on a journey of faith in which they encounter the hand of God at work in their lives. Young people love guided meditations, mostly because meditation allows them time to do something they do not normally get to do: remain quiet and still. Within this stillness the listeners are led on a journey to face the issues and questions that are occupying their minds in the present moment. And when God is brought into this mix of concerns, the listeners are brought to a new level of insight and possibility.

The experiences in part 3 use objects and images to help young people share faith. An object or image is introduced to focus the group, so that people can begin to think symbolically and metaphorically about who God is, how God is present in their daily journey, and what God may be asking of them at the present time in their lives.

The experiences in part 4 use media messages. The participants focus on a form of media (song, magazine, billboard, movie, or TV show) as a starting point for making connections between life and faith.

There are twenty-five faith-sharing experiences in *FaithSharing*, and each one focuses young people on the presence of God in the here and now. The users of *FaithSharing* are encouraged to create more experiences that use its engaging strategies to lead young people to a deeper awareness of God in their lives.

Considerations for Faith Sharing

Group Size

Group size is an important factor for effective faith sharing. If a group is larger than ten people, divide it into small groups of five to seven people. If the group meets together on a regular basis, try to use the same groupings as much as possible so that a sense of trust and familiarity is developed. This will enhance the faith-sharing process over time.

Where and When to Use *FaithSharing*

Each experience in this resource can be carried out in 15 to 20 minutes, so the experiences are perfect for incorporation into retreats, youth gatherings, religious education sessions, lock-ins, and campus ministry settings. To get the most out of these faith-sharing experiences, it is best to use them when distractions are at a minimum. If young people are involved in a class or another type of learning session, the transition to faith sharing will work best at the end of the session rather than the beginning. If faith sharing is used in a retreat or another day-long or overnight event, evening is a better time to facilitate this process than earlier in the day. In short, the more time young people spend together, the more effective faith sharing will be for that group.

Not Teaching Time

Faith sharing is not a time for teaching, at least not in the formal sense. Faith sharing is a time for reflection and dialogue, a chance for young people to seek out the presence of God within their daily struggles and joys. Ideally, the teacher or leader serves as the facilitator of a journey during faith sharing and should be very careful not to impose a teaching methodology in the sense that a particular learning outcome is sought. Instead, leaders should mentally step out of the teaching role before beginning to lead a faith-sharing process. In fact, if *FaithSharing* is used in a classroom or school

setting, which is strongly encouraged, have the students sit on the floor or actually move to another area of the room, so that the physical transition can serve as a ready reminder of the transition that is about to take place. This movement will also serve as a reminder to the leader to stop teaching and start facilitating faith sharing.

The leader, however, does not step out of his or her role as adult guide or mentor. He or she should be prepared to respond to comments that offend others or that inaccurately portray Catholic beliefs by reminding everyone to be respectful of others or by clarifying Church teaching.

Using the Mutual Invitation Process to Share Faith

Mutual invitation is a widely used process that allows everyone in the group to be empowered to share as well as to invite others to share. One person shares her or his reflection and then invites someone else in the group to share. The person just invited has the chance to share or pass. No matter what the person chooses to do, it is her or his responsibility to select the next person to share. The cycle continues until the last person shares and then re-invites those that passed the first time to share if they wish. It is important that this be done in a way that respects people's preferences not to share by allowing them to limit their sharing gracefully.

The reason mutual invitation works is that it essentially levels the playing field by avoiding "favorites" and giving everyone, not just the extroverts or natural leaders, the power both to share and to choose who shares next. This sharing of responsibility is an empowering experience for the whole group, and, once used, will likely become a sharing process of choice for many other group discussions.

Involving Youth

Research consistently indicates that the more the learner is involved in the learning process, the more he or she retains. The more we ask the question "How can the young people be more involved in this?" the more successful any event, strategy, or sharing experience will be. The same can be said for the process of faith sharing. The more we empower the young people to lead these experiences, the more these occasions will become opportunities for reflection and faith growth.

As Faith-Sharing Leaders

Once the designated leader begins to model the style and flow of the faith-sharing experiences in this book, the leader should begin empowering young people to take over the leadership (and selection) of the experiences. Empowering youth does not equal "dumping" responsibility on them without any training. Be sure the youth leader is prepared to lead the faith-

sharing session by having her or him rehearse the process ahead of time, especially in the case of reading the guided meditations. The sooner the young people are given the support to lead faith sharing, the quicker they will begin to take responsibility for their own journeys of faith.

As Readers

Young people should be invited to proclaim the Scripture readings found in the faith-sharing experiences. With the process adapted from *lectio divina* in part 1, it is recommended that three different young people serve as readers. Having different voices proclaim the same reading may help lend new meaning to it. The readers should rehearse, so that their reading is truly a proclamation of Scripture and not just an experience of “reading out loud.”

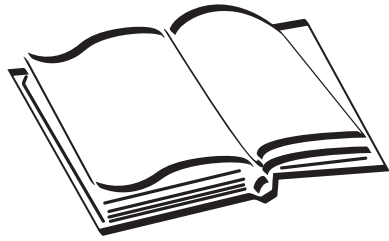
As Small-Group Prayer Leaders

Because faith sharing works best when one person initiates the sharing process, each small group should have a designated “prayer leader.” The prayer leader’s primary role is to begin when it is time to share and to encourage the small-group members to remain focused and reverent during the process. They may also help with distributing supplies and finding Scripture passages.

A Final Word

Ownership—that is what users of *FaithSharing* want to strive for: inspiring every young person to take ownership of their own faith. The leader’s goal is to help the young people embrace their faith and their journey and to help them come to know that God is a part of it all. The more we can lead teenagers toward owning their faith, the more active, involved, and faith-filled will be the people within our Church and the world. And that is good news for us all!

Part One



Faith Sharing with Scripture

What Is Faith Sharing with Scripture?

This approach to faith sharing is an adaptation of *lectio divina*, meaning “divine or prayerful reading.” *Lectio divina* refers to a method of reflection on spiritual writings, most often Scripture, that originated centuries ago in monastic communities. Individuals read or listen to a proclamation of a passage several times and meditate on words or phrases that strike them as significant. The goal of this process is to hear God speaking through the passage and to respond in prayer. The repetition of the same passage is intended to help the participants listen attentively with open hearts and minds and discover the meaning of the passage and its significance for their lives. The process engages the mind, but it is much more than an intellectual exercise. It is meant to foster a conversation between the participant and God.

The Adapted Process

FaithSharing introduces adolescents to a short process for faith sharing with Scripture in small groups. Each of the ten experiences included in part 1 of this resource invites the participants to prayerfully meditate on a selected Scripture passage.

The leader introduces each faith-sharing experience in this section with a few moments of centered breathing and then says a short prayer to help focus the participants on the word of God. Then he or she provides a brief introduction to the Scripture passage, which is read three times. The leader guides a process of reflection and sharing for each reading, each time with a different focus:

- Reading One: reflection on *one word*
- Reading Two: reflection on *one phrase*
- Reading Three: reflection on *what God is saying* through the reading

Once the process has been used several times, leaders and young people will quickly develop a proficiency in using this faith-sharing approach with any Scripture passage, in either personal or group prayer.

Scripture 1

Anger



Scripture: Ephesians 4:25–26,29–32

Overview

Anger, gossip, and bitterness often have their roots in fear and can easily get the better of us if we allow it. This reading from Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians will challenge the participants to reflect on how God is calling them to speak the truth with compassion and without fear, anger, or bitterness ruling their hearts.

Estimated Time: 15–20 minutes

Preparation Steps

- Gather the following items:
 - paper and a pen or pencil for each participant
 - copies of *The Catholic Youth Bible*® or another Bible, one for each participant (optional)
- Mark the Scripture reading (Ephesians 4:25–26,29–32) in a Bible.
- Select one or more readers to proclaim the three readings.

Procedure

Step 1: Overview of Process and Creation of Faith-Sharing Groups

Introduce the faith sharing with Scripture process using these or similar words:

- This faith-sharing experience is adapted from an ancient Catholic prayer style called *lectio divina*, or “divine reading.” This prayerful reading invites us to open ourselves up to Scripture so that God may speak to us as well as through us to others around us.

- The process follows a simple formula. We will listen to the proclamation of a short Scripture passage three times. I will suggest a focus for your reflection during each reading. After each you will be invited to share some thoughts that came to mind during the reading. When it is your turn, please say “pass” if you do not wish to share.

If the group size is larger than ten, divide into small faith-sharing groups of five to seven. Select one person in each faith-sharing group to serve as a prayer leader.

Distribute paper and pens or pencils to each participant. If you are providing participants with bibles, distribute those also.

Step 2: Introduction and Reading One

Introduce this faith-sharing experience by inviting the participants to quiet themselves and focus on their breathing. Ask them to spend a full 30 seconds simply listening to their breathing, and then offer the following introductory prayer:

- Word of God, gift us with ears to hear your words and hearts that will seek your wisdom.

Proceed with the comments below:

- Listen closely to this reading from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. He writes about what to do with anger and bitterness. As you listen, think about how anger has affected you this week and open yourself to the one word that God is trying to speak to you today. Please select only one word. When the reading is finished, each of you will be invited to share your word with your small group.

Invite the designated reader to proclaim Ephesians 4:25–26, 29–32 slowly and prayerfully to the group.

Step 3: Sharing One Word

Invite the participants to share the one word they selected during the reading with the members of their small group. Ask the prayer leader in each group to begin. Remind everyone to share just the one word.

Step 4: Reading Two

Prepare everyone for the second reading using these or similar words:

- During the second proclamation of the passage, listen for the phrase or sentence that God is trying to speak to you today. It does not have to contain the word that you just shared. When the reading is finished, each of you will have an opportunity to share that phrase with your small group.

Invite the designated reader to proclaim Ephesians 4:25–26, 29–32 slowly and prayerfully to the group.

Step 5: Sharing the Phrase

Invite each small-group prayer leader to share her or his phrase and then give everyone else in the small group an opportunity to share their phrases. Remind everyone to share just the phrase, without further explanation.

Step 6: Reading Three

Prepare everyone for the third reading using these or similar words:

- Listen to the reading one last time. Open yourself up to how God is asking you to apply this reading to your life today. When the reading is finished, you will have some time to reflect on what God is saying to you and to share your reflection with your group if you wish.

Invite the designated reader to proclaim Ephesians 4:25–26, 29–32 slowly and prayerfully to the group.

Step 7: Sharing the Reflection

Explain to the participants that they will now have a short period of silence to reflect on what God is saying to them. Invite them to use the paper to write thoughts or draw images that come to mind during the reflection period. After a minute or two of quiet reflection, invite the participants to begin sharing their reflections in their small groups using the mutual invitation process.

Note: If the participants are unfamiliar with this process, take a minute to summarize the description on page 10 (see “Using the Mutual Invitation Process to Share Faith” in the introduction). Be sure to remind them of the option to pass.

Allow several minutes for this sharing.

Step 8: Conclusion and Closing Prayer

Conclude with these or similar words:

- Whether you experienced God’s response clearly, somewhat, or not at all, it does not take away from the fact that God has been present to and through us during this time, speaking to us through our thoughts, through our consciences, and through those around us about anger, bitterness, and forgiveness.
- As we conclude this time together, let us take to heart what we have heard from within and from one another during this time of faith sharing and allow it to challenge us to live as disciples today and in the week to come.

Close by inviting everyone to join hands and slowly pray the Lord’s Prayer together.

Scripture 2

Anxiety and Stress



Scripture: Matthew 6:25–30

Overview

Anxiety, stress, and worry are big obstacles for young people today. Many times, these problems arise when young people allow their thoughts to be overtaken by fears of “what if?” and laments over what has occurred in the past. This faith-sharing experience invites young people to center themselves on the well-known “lilies of the fields” passage from the Gospel of Matthew in order to discover God’s presence in their midst.

Estimated Time: 15–20 minutes

Preparation Steps

- Gather the following items:
 - paper and a pen or pencil for each participant
 - copies of *THE CATHOLIC YOUTH BIBLE* or another Bible, one for each participant (optional)
- Mark the Scripture reading (Matthew 6:25–30) in a Bible.
- Select one or more readers to proclaim the three readings.

Procedure

Step 1: Overview of Process and Creation of Faith-Sharing Groups

Introduce the faith sharing with Scripture process using these or similar words:

- This faith-sharing experience is adapted from an ancient Catholic prayer style called *lectio divina*, or “divine reading.” This prayerful reading invites us to open ourselves up to Scripture so that God may speak to us as well as through us to others around us.
- The process follows a simple formula. We will listen to the proclamation of a short Scripture passage three times. I will suggest a focus for your reflection during each reading. After each you will be invited to share some thoughts that came to mind during the reading. When it is your turn, please say “pass” if you do not wish to share.

If the group size is larger than ten, divide into small faith-sharing groups of five to seven. Select one person in each faith-sharing group to serve as a prayer leader.

Distribute paper and pens or pencils to each participant. If you are providing participants with bibles, distribute those also.

Step 2: Introduction and Reading One

Introduce this faith-sharing experience by inviting the participants to quiet themselves and focus on their breathing. Ask them to spend a full 30 seconds simply listening to their breathing, and then offer the following introductory prayer:

- Word of God, unclutter our minds and free our thoughts so that we may spend this moment with you.

Proceed with the comments below:

- Listen intently to this reading from Matthew’s Gospel as Jesus speaks to the crowd about worries and concerns. As you listen to it, place yourself in the crowd that Jesus is talking to and open yourself up to the one word that God is trying to speak to you today. Please select only one word. When the reading is finished, each of you will be invited to share the word in your group.

Invite the designated readers to proclaim Matthew 6:25–30 slowly and prayerfully to the group.

Step 3: Sharing One Word

Invite the participants to share the one word they selected during the reading with the members of their small group. Ask the prayer leader in each group to begin. Remind everyone to share just the one word.

Step 4: Reading Two

Prepare everyone for the second reading using these or similar words:

- During the second proclamation of the passage, listen for the phrase or sentence that God is trying to speak to you today. It does not have

to contain the word that you just shared. When the reading is finished, each of you will have an opportunity to share that phrase with your small group.

Invite the designated reader to proclaim Matthew 6:25–30 slowly and prayerfully to the group.

Step 5: Sharing the Phrase

Invite each small-group prayer leader to share his or her phrase, and then give everyone else in the small group an opportunity to share their phrases. Remind everyone to share just the phrase, without further explanation.

Step 6: Reading Three

- Listen to the reading one last time. Open yourself up to how God is asking you to apply this reading to your life today. When the reading is finished, you will have some time to reflect on what God is saying to you and to share your reflection with your group if you wish.

Invite the designated reader to proclaim Matthew 6:25–30 slowly and prayerfully to the group.

Step 7: Sharing the Reflection

Explain to the participants that they will now have a short period of silence to reflect on what God is saying to them. Invite them to use the paper to write thoughts or draw images that come to mind during the reflection period. After a minute or two of quiet reflection, invite the participants to begin sharing their reflections in their small groups using the mutual invitation process.

Note: If the participants are unfamiliar with this process, take a minute to summarize the description on page 10 (see “Using the Mutual Invitation Process to Share Faith” in the introduction). Be sure to remind them of the option to pass.

Allow several minutes for this sharing.

Step 8: Conclusion and Closing Prayer

Conclude with these or similar words:

- During this faith-sharing experience, God has been speaking to you through the Scripture readings, your reflections, and your small-group sharing. Let us take to heart what we have heard about stress, anxiety, and worry. Let it challenge us to live each day as a gift from God to be opened and lived to the fullest.

Close by inviting everyone to join hands and slowly pray the Lord’s Prayer together.

Scripture 3

Hope



Scripture: Romans 8:18–25

Overview

This faith-sharing experience uses a passage from Romans to address the theme of hope—what it is and what it is not. During the process, the young people are invited to reflect on the hope they yearn for now and in the week to come.

Estimated Time: 15–20 minutes

Preparation Steps

- Gather the following items:
 - paper and a pen or pencil for each participant
 - copies of *THE CATHOLIC YOUTH BIBLE* or another Bible, one for each participant (optional)
- Mark the Scripture reading (Romans 8:18–25) in a Bible.
- Select one or more readers to proclaim the three readings.

Procedure

Step 1: Overview of Process and Creation of Faith-Sharing Groups

Introduce the faith sharing with Scripture process using these or similar words:

- This faith-sharing experience is adapted from an ancient Catholic prayer style called *lectio divina*, or “divine reading.” This prayerful reading invites us to open ourselves up to Scripture so that God may speak to us as well as through us to others around us.

- The process follows a simple formula. We will listen to the proclamation of a short Scripture passage three times. I will suggest a focus for your reflection during each reading. After each you will be invited to share some thoughts that came to mind during the reading. When it is your turn, please say “pass” if you do not wish to share.

If the group size is larger than ten, divide into small faith-sharing groups of five to seven. Select one person in each faith-sharing group to serve as a prayer leader.

Distribute paper and pens or pencils to each participant. If you are providing participants with bibles, distribute those also.

Step 2: Introduction and Reading One

Introduce this faith-sharing experience by inviting the participants to quiet themselves and focus on their breathing. Ask them to spend a full 30 seconds simply listening to their breathing, and then offer the following introductory prayer:

- Word of God, gift us with ears to hear your words and hearts that will seek your wisdom.

Proceed with the comments below:

- Listen closely to this reading from Paul’s Letter to the Romans. He writes about the power and promise of hope. As you listen, think about what has given you hope or taken it away this past week, and open yourself to the one word that God is trying to speak to you today. Please select only one word. When the reading is finished, each of you will be invited to share your word with your small group.

Invite the designated reader to proclaim Romans 8:18–25 slowly and prayerfully to the group.

Step 3: Sharing One Word

Invite the participants to share the one word they selected during the reading with the members of their small group. Ask the prayer leader in each group to begin. Remind everyone to share just the one word.

Step 4: Reading Two

Prepare everyone for the second reading using these or similar words:

- During the second proclamation of the passage, listen for the phrase or sentence that God is trying to speak to you today. It does not have to contain the word that you just shared. When the reading is finished, each of you will have an opportunity to share that phrase with your small group.

Invite the designated reader to proclaim Romans 8:18–25 slowly and prayerfully to the group.

Step 5: Sharing the Phrase

Invite each small-group prayer leader to share her or his phrase and then give everyone else in the small group an opportunity to share their phrases. Remind everyone to share just the phrase, without further explanation.

Step 6: Reading Three

Prepare everyone for the third reading using these or similar words:

- Listen to the reading one last time. Open yourself up to how God is asking you to apply this reading to your life today. When the reading is finished, you will have some time to reflect on what God is saying to you and to share your reflection with your group if you wish.

Invite the designated reader to proclaim Romans 8:18–25 slowly and prayerfully to the group.

Step 7: Sharing the Reflection

Explain to the participants that they will now have a short period of silence to reflect on what God is saying to them. Invite them to use the paper to write thoughts or draw images that come to mind during the reflection period. After a minute or two of quiet reflection, invite the participants to begin sharing their reflections in their small groups using the mutual invitation process.

Note: If the participants are unfamiliar with this process, take a minute to summarize the description on page 10 (see “Using the Mutual Invitation Process to Share Faith” in the introduction). Be sure to remind them of the option to pass.

Allow several minutes for this sharing.

Step 8: Conclusion and Closing Prayer

Conclude with these or similar words:

- Through our sharing, God has been speaking to and through us about the theme of hope. As you reflect on what has been shared, focus on the hope in your life right now or your desire for greater hope, especially this coming week, and consider offering this to God in prayer now.

Lead a brief final prayer by inviting the participants to share one hope they have for the coming week. Ask the group to respond to each hope with “Lord of hope, hear our prayer.” Begin the prayer with these or similar words:

- Lord of all hopefulness, you have been present to us in our sharing. Now we ask you to be present to us as we bring to you our hope-filled petitions.

Close by inviting the participants to pray the Lord’s Prayer together.