

HOW TO DESIGN MORE FUNCTIONAL CHAPTER MEETINGS

Chapter 1 - The Purpose of Chapter Meetings

Form follows function

The famous American architect Louis Sullivan coined the phrase “Form follows function.” Sullivan was stating that the purpose of something necessarily affects its design. Thus, if the purpose of something is to transport people safely on water, its design must enable it to float, to move purposely, and to be safe, e.g., stable enough so that it does not capsize in conditions it is likely to encounter. This is mere common sense. We would not want to buy a boat from a builder who was only interested in how beautiful his creation looked and paid no attention to how boats are to be used.

The Order of the Daughters of the King has a function, a purpose. In fact, it has two purposes. The first relates to the Church. The second relates to those women called to be Daughters.

The purpose of the Order for the Church

The National Training Manual states that the primary purpose of the Order is evangelism. Most Daughters, however, believe as do I that the primary purpose of the Order is prayer. Indeed, the Order has rules of prayer and service, but there is no explicit rule of evangelism. Be that as it may, prayer, service, and evangelism are all functions of the Order, regardless of which one of these we might consider primary. They are all important.

The purposes of prayer, service, and evangelism are oriented toward the entire Church. Daughters pray for those on their chapter’s prayer list as well having an obligation to pray for their priests and congregations. Through service, Daughters exercise ministry toward others,

even though the form of service may be different in different chapters and among individual Daughters.

Thus, one function of the Order is to minister outward to the Church through prayer, service, and evangelism. In addition, a chapter should serve as a model of Christian community just as each Daughter should model an individual Christ life. The design, the form, of chapter meetings should, therefore, follow these functions.

The purpose of the Order for Daughters

Just as there is an outward oriented purpose of the Order, the Order is intended to enrich its members spiritually. That is, fidelity to the obligations a woman assumes when she becomes a Daughter should be a framework within which she can grow spiritually. In becoming a Daughter, a woman is assuming obligations above and beyond the ordinary. She is committing herself to living within a framework which should open her more to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit which will draw her more and more into the Life that is God.

She binds herself to special service to Our Lord Jesus Christ. Her acts undertaken under the rules should be special acts of love for Christ, and this love should deepen and grow as she continues faithful participation in the Order.

As a Daughter seeks a more profound and loving relationship with Christ and to model her life more after that of Christ through her obedience to her vows and the rule, she must be supported in her efforts by her sisters in the Order. This support comes principally through her chapter. Supporting its Daughters in their fidelity to their vows and supporting them in their spiritual pilgrimage is an essential function of a chapter and its meetings; hence, chapter meetings must be designed with this function in mind.

Some of the characteristics of a functional chapter meeting

Chapter meetings allow Daughters to plan their service activities and to update the prayer list. Although this work is important, it does not necessarily assist Daughters to grow spiritually, nor will it, of itself, assist the chapter to model Christian community. In order to be achieve all of its purposes more fully, a chapter meeting should do each of the following:

- Develop a sense of Christian community among its members
- Provide accountability in the keeping of the vows and observing spiritual practices
- Develop a deeper understanding of the vows and obligations of Daughters
- Encourage and support Daughters in their spiritual and personal lives
- Seek to model what a Christian community should be

These purposes are not disjoint but are interrelated. Moreover, a chapter should engage in periodic self-evaluation to determine how well these purposes are being met. Below I will discuss these desirable attributes of chapter meetings more fully and suggest practices to help bring them about. I will also later suggest a structure of chapter meetings to facilitate these practices.

Chapter 2 - Five Desirable Attributes of Chapter Meetings

Develop a sense of community among its members

Community is so broad a term that I must define more precisely what I mean by the kind of community that a chapter should become. All members of a chapter have individually taken vows as Daughters of the King. But they are each also part of a larger organization that is international in scope. Chapters should recognize that they are part of a whole and must be connected to that whole to gain the full benefit that comes from being part of an Order.

The chapter is also associated with a church. The chapter will, for better or worse, be a topic of conversation in the congregation. Therefore, at the least, the members of a chapter should relate to one another in Christian charity, with compassion, a loving concern for one another's welfare, and in a spirit of mutual respect in order to edify those who observe how Daughters relate to one another and their church.

Members of a chapter should feel safe with one another, knowing that what they say in meetings will be held in confidence. Safety implies more than just confidentiality. To feel safe, a Daughter must know that she will not be judged, that her sisters will embrace her and love her in Christ unconditionally just as Christ loves all humanity unconditionally. The chapter should have the elements associated with a healthy, loving family that welcomes and supports all its members. Daughters should strive to see Christ in every human being, but they have a special obligation to see Christ in their sisters.

If a chapter is to be an instrument of spiritual growth and encouragement, it must become a community with the attributes I have listed. Daughters have ample opportunities for Bible study or other forms of formal religious education in their church or elsewhere. There are

numerous religious publications they can read. In addition, they have access to online courses, lectures on electronic media, and the like, by which a Daughter can learn more about her faith. But there may be few other places where she can experience a genuine Christian community in which she can be herself and know that she belongs and is safe. If her chapter is not such a community, it is failing in one of its primary functions and it needs to be redesigned so that it fulfills that function.

Building a chapter into a strong Christian community may seem like a tall order, but it is important if the chapter is to exercise its purposes. How can such community come about? I will talk about that in the next chapter.

Accountability

I firmly believe if a Daughter is to be faithful to her vows, she must be accountable to someone other than herself. She must be able to talk about any problems she is having keeping her vows. She must have a place in which she can continue to explore their meaning in her life, and, yes, her understanding and practice of her vows will almost certainly evolve over time.

I am not suggesting that a chapter judge anyone. Even if a Daughter admits she is not keeping her vows, she should still feel loved and accepted by her sisters. But having to admit to her sisters that she is not keeping her vows may well inspire her anew to recommit herself to trying to keep her vows. If there is some issue in her life that is overwhelming her desire to keep her vows, for example, she is going through a painful divorce or has experienced a serious loss, then the chapter can support and uphold her in love during this difficult time and even commit to keeping her vows for her until she is back on her feet.

Again, a Daughter being accountable to the chapter in her obligations as a Daughter is not

confession, nor is it meant to embarrass or demean her. But it should make her think about what it means for her to be a Daughter, and, if she is struggling, to seek support and wisdom from her sisters who should give such support and wisdom with respect and never judgmentally.

Develop a deeper understanding of the vows and obligations of Daughters

Just as a chapter should provide accountability in keeping the vows, so, too, it should provide a continuing study and discussion of the meaning of the vows and obligations a woman assumes when she becomes a Daughter. But is this not covered in the twelve sessions prior to admission? Not so. The twelve sessions are, in my opinion, altogether inadequate to provide a women discerning whether she is called to become a Daughter what becoming a Daughter implies. If the vows are for life, exploring what it means to be a Daughter is also the work of a lifetime. Becoming a Daughter is not the end of a process of spiritual exploration and formation, but merely the beginning. Learning how to be a Daughter, just as growing more and more into the life of Christ which is what being a Daughter should help bring about, is a continuing process.

Is coming to a deeper understanding of the vows just a subset of being accountable in keeping them? Not at all. The spiritual life is not linear. Although someone may be constantly progressing toward living a more Christ-like life, progress usually resembles less a straight line than a spiral where she keeps coming back to the same concepts, the same principles of living, the same Christ, but each time she returns her understanding is deeper. We change as we grow spiritually just as we change as we grow physically. Therefore continuing examination of what it means to be a Daughter is not only in order; it is a necessary component of continuing spiritual growth.

Encourage and support Daughters in their spiritual and personal lives

Because a chapter should model an ideal Christian family, it should provide safety, support, and comfort for its members. Daughters should care about the joys and sorrows in the lives of other Daughters, and not just in their own chapter but throughout the Order. Many dioceses and provinces have mechanisms to ask for prayers from Daughters throughout their particular region.

A Daughter should feel safe in sharing her important life experiences with her chapter. And the chapter, as an embodiment of the Body of Christ, should rejoice in her joys and feel sorrow in her grief. If a Daughter feels that her sisters do not really care about her or do not hold in the love of Christ, she will not consider chapter meetings safe, be hesitant to share, and reluctant to attend meetings.

Seek to model what a Christian community should be

I am sorry to say that many chapter meetings appear to other parishioners as no better than social gatherings, gossip sessions, or even opportunities to complain about the priest the Daughters have promised to support (and, yes, it has happened). How much better it would be if others could see a chapter as a model of Christian community in which the members support and encourage one another to grow spirituality, in which genuine Christian love is the order of the day. Such a model would be one of the best tools for evangelism that Daughters could offer. If a chapter demonstrates Christian love, then others will be encouraged to seek and to live out that love as well. Christian love is contagious.

A chapter should perform the five functions I have listed. They may be others as well, but if a chapter models these five, it will do well indeed. Because it is within chapter meetings

that these functions will be effected most, chapter meetings should be designed to carry them out.

How can this happen? That is the subject of our next chapter.

Chapter 3 - Tools to Design More Effective Chapter Meetings

General rules for the conduct of meetings

There are general rules that should prevail at all chapter meetings, aside from specific activities to foster the goals listed previously. First, civility should always be observed. No more than one person talking at the same time, courtesy and respect in what is said and how it is said, staying on topic, confidentiality, and a moderator who will keep meetings on track and on time. Meetings that tend to wander without seeming purpose or direction will discourage even the most dedicated Daughter from wanting to attend. In other words, meetings should be seen as safe, interesting, and oriented toward furthering the goals of the Order. There should be agreed upon starting and ending times. Daughters should be present on time and stay for the entire meeting whenever possible.

Telling and listening to stories

I personally believe that telling and listening to personal stories is akin to a sacrament. Stories are often more effective at revealing deep truths than dry doctrine. Our personal stories are our gospels, how Jesus is acting in our own lives, just as the canonical Gospels tell how Jesus impacted the lives of the people of his place and time.

Telling our own story enables us to clarify how God has, and still is, working to draw us more and more into his own Life. Listening to the stories of others gives us an appreciation on how God works in the lives of others.

Stories can build community by drawing us into the lives of other members of the chapter. They can help us understand how others came to be who they are, their hopes, their dreams, their fears, their successes, failures, joys and sorrows. They help us recognize and honor

our common humanity.

No one should be made to share what she does not wish to share. And whatever is shared must always be held in confidence, never judged or criticized, but only respected and treated with the utmost love and compassion. Telling stories requires vulnerability. In being vulnerable, we risk being wounded, but we also open ourselves to the possibility of the unconditional love that should characterize a Christian community in general and a chapter in particular.

Understanding needs and concerns, praying for one another

Daughters pray for the needs of others. They should also understand and pray for one another's needs. A chapter meeting would do well to follow the opening devotional with an opportunity for members to "check in," to tell of any special concerns, events, needs, successes, failures, etc., in their lives that they want their sisters to be aware of. They should not only be free to ask for prayers but even for special assistance such as getting a ride to a doctor's appointment or someone to be with them at a difficult time. If Daughters are to be concerned about others, they should first be concerned about each other. Such concern and prayer for one another is a powerful tool in building Christian community. Daughters should always try to be available to one another in time of need.

Members of a chapter may also form prayer partnerships in which two Daughters covenant to pray for one another over a period of time.

Discuss living the vows and a Christian life

Chapter meetings should include helping Daughters be faithful to their vows and living a model Christian life. This aspect of a meeting should never be negative or judgmental. This is to be a supportive spiritual aid carried out in love and compassion, not an Inquisition.

At each meeting specific Daughters could be asked in advance to share any difficulties they are having in keeping their vows or obligations. They could also share their successes and joys that have come from living as a Daughter. If they are having trouble living their vows or rules, they could explain the source of their difficulty so that the chapter can offer encouragement and prayers. Again, there is to be no judgment, but there is accountability. If a Daughter is not keeping her commitments as a Daughter, she should seek prayer and help from her sisters to strengthen her resolve. Realistically, Daughters who are not keeping their obligations as Daughters are unlikely to come to chapter meetings in the first place. But chapter meetings should uphold, support, and challenge those Daughters who do come; these Daughters can benefit from the support and encouragement of the community. When someone discusses her life as a Daughter, she might also explain how she interprets the vows and rules in the context of her particular circumstances since this can be instructional for others in interpreting and keeping their own vows.

In addition to talking about fidelity to the vows and rule, Daughters might also discuss their successes, challenges, and even failures in trying to model a Christian life. There might also be exploration of the many real-world moral dilemmas that citizens face today and what an appropriate Christian response might be. To help in this, there might readings concerning contemporary models of Christian lives in various circumstances. Some potential study materials are included in an appendix.

With so many ways to stay in touch and carry on conversations on the Internet and electronic media, fruitful exchanges can take place via email, Facebook, etc., as a supplement to what takes place in chapter meetings. Regular communication is a possible means to help build

closer ties and a deeper sense of community. Through the use of a closed Google group, or similar tools, such exchanges can also be restricted solely to members of the chapter. This might also be a way to involve Daughters who cannot regularly attend chapter meetings.

Shared activities and worship

Planning and working together on service projects can not only advance the purpose of the Order but build community as well. Another way to build community and also provide a witness to the church that the chapter is a community is for the chapter periodically to attend Eucharist and receive Communion together as a group.

The chapter can provide additional opportunities for spiritual growth through quiet days and retreats. It can also sponsor events that are open to the congregation, area chapters, area churches, or even the general public, to provide opportunities for spiritual growth and promote evangelism.

Prayer can even be conducted online. Members of the chapter could say Morning or Evening Prayer online using Skype or Google hangout.

To make Daughters aware that the Order is larger than the chapter, workshops, retreats, and the like could be held for several chapters in a area. Daughters also should be encouraged to attend diocesan and provincial assemblies, and, when feasible, the Triennial Retreat.

Various other activities to promote a healthy chapter

Here are a few more ways in which chapter activities can be designed to achieve their intended functions.

- Share responsibility for leadership. Community and accountability require that leadership be shared. No Daughter should be president for more than consecutive two terms. If

only one woman is willing to be president, the chapter is dysfunctional and should consider disbanding.

- Mentoring new Daughters and candidates for admission. Mature Daughters can be paired with new Daughters as well as with candidates for admission to help them learn more about what it means to be a Daughter and encourage their participation in activities of the chapter.

- Daughter partners. Each Daughter can have a DOK partner in the chapter. Partners covenant to maintain regular contact, assist one another when needed, pray for one another, and pray together on a regular basis.

- Regular contact with sick and chronically absent Daughters. Daughters who are prevented from attending meetings for a sufficient reason should not feel excluded. A Daughter should be assigned to maintain regular contact with them. Chapter members should approach Daughters who can reasonably attend, but do not, to encourage them to attend. Chapter meetings should be made attractive enough that Daughters who can should want to attend.

Mechanisms to help improve chapter meetings

Request assistance from diocesan officers to gain ideas to improve the design of chapter meetings. Diocesan officers should be willing, even anxious, to visit chapters to offer encouragement and assure the chapter that the diocese is concerned about them.

A chapter should periodically evaluate whether it is achieving its desired purposes. Suggestions for improving chapter meetings should always be encouraged, though not all suggestions need be accepted. Evaluations should be directed at determining whether and how well chapter meetings and activities are meeting the stated goals,

Chapter 4 - The Structure of a Chapter Meeting

The components of a chapter meeting

Thus far we have talked about the purpose of the Order both with regard to the broader community and with regard to individual Daughters. We talked about specific attributes that should be taken into consideration in designing chapter meetings so that chapter meetings might better foster the purposes of the Order, especially toward member Daughters. In Chapter 3, we talked about specific ways in which desirable attributes might be built into the design of chapter meetings. In this chapter we talk about the components of a chapter meeting and suggest specific mechanisms that might be employed in each component to help bring about the desired attributes. Here is a suggested structure for a chapter meeting. I will discuss seven possible components of a chapter meeting, though not every component will be included in every meeting:

- I. Opening devotional
- II. Checking in
- III. Business and the prayer list
- IV. Personal sharing
- V. Spiritual reflection
- VI. Study, if time allows
- VII. Closing prayer

Some may think it odd that I have put study at the end, and only if there is time, because many chapters spend much, if not most, of their time in study of the Bible, a religious writing, church teachings, etc. However, my belief is that there are ample opportunities for those who

wish to engage in such studies to engage in them elsewhere, but chapter meetings should be more oriented toward the purposes of the Order. Study in itself rarely builds community, and if study is merely academic, it will rarely impact how someone lives. If there is to be study at chapter meetings, it should be study that can be applied in the life of a Daughter seeking spiritual growth, not just a presentation of factual information. I will discuss each of these components of a chapter meeting in turn, suggesting how it might be conducted to greatest effect.

Opening devotional

Clearly, each chapter meeting should begin with prayer. The form of this prayer can be flexible, from recitation of one of the prayers of the Order to a lengthier devotional prepared by one of the Daughters. On special occasions, the chapter may want to recite Morning or Evening Prayer, or even ask their priest to celebrate Eucharist for them. A lengthier devotional will, of course, make less time available for later components of the meeting, but form follows function, and the form can be varied depending on what function seems most important that day. For example, if a chapter member has died recently, it might be helpful to celebrate a Eucharist in her memory and allow the chapter to share memories of her life.

Note that not all components need to occur at every meeting. Thoughtful preparation should be given by those planning a meeting as to what might be most important for that meeting, always keeping to the fore the purposes a meeting should serve. Meetings should not happen by default, although room should always be left for the Holy Spirit to lead the meeting in a different direction than originally planned. But it must be the Holy Spirit that leads, not a Daughter trying to bend the meeting to her own purposes.

Checking in

This is a time when Daughters are invited to briefly state current special issues and concerns in their lives; events calling for joy, sorrow, or thanksgiving; and to express a need for prayers. This is generally not a time for extended discussion, and definitely not a time for problem solving. If a Daughter needs additional attention because of special circumstances, this should generally happen outside the context of the meeting. Checking in implies brevity, not extended discussion.

Business and the prayer list

Most of the business of the chapter can generally be conducted outside of the actual meeting, e.g. arranging for assistance at a reception, or informing Daughters of a new directive from National. Information shared with those present at the meeting will almost always have to be shared with those who are not present, so most such information can be shared electronically in advance, or by phone or postal mail for Daughters who do not have email. The business portion of the meeting should be handled as briefly and expeditiously as possible.

Likewise, the updating of the prayer list. Many chapters spend an inordinate amount of time on the prayer list because some Daughters want to discuss some specific intention or individual at length. This is inappropriate and often a violation of confidentiality. For more instruction concerning how intercessory prayer and the prayer list should be handled, see my paper on this subject written originally for the diocese of Texas at the request of the president. I include this paper as Appendix B.

Time of personal sharing

This is a time that can be devoted to any one of a number of activities that help Daughters tell their gospels. For example, one Daughter could be asked in advance to prepare some part of

her gospel to relate at a meeting. No one should be made to share what she does not wish to share, and there must be no criticism, even implied, of someone who chooses not to share. Giving a Daughter time to prepare her presentation prior to a meeting allows her to think about what she is willing to share and make her presentation more coherent. No one is permitted to make any negative comments concerning a presentation. Questions for clarification are permitted, but the presenter is not required to respond to any question.

Spiritual sharing

It might be best if a meeting had personal sharing or spiritual sharing, but not both. Both, however, are related to telling stories and building community through sharing personal gospels, albeit using different techniques.

One method to elicit sharing is to ask a question and invite all to respond. Here are some sample questions:

If Jesus were to grant you one wish, what would you ask for?

What do you sense is one of your current obstacles to spiritual growth? How are you trying to remove it?

Who has been a person in your life who has inspired you spiritually? Why?

What is your favorite prayer and why?

Another method to elicit spiritual sharing is lectio divina, using a passage of Scripture or from some other religious work. Responses involve how the passage speaks to individuals, not some formal interpretation.

Study can also be used as a means of spiritual sharing.

Study

Study is generally oriented toward factual knowledge. As such, study is a poor instrument to achieve the purposes of a meeting. When there is study, it should be focused on individual spiritual growth and building community. When the chapter engages in a study project, the focus should be on applying what is learned to better carry out the purposes of the Order. Study might best take place in the context of, and be treated as, spiritual sharing rather than study..

Closing prayer

A meeting should always be closed with an appropriate prayer or devotional. The same considerations apply to the closing prayer as apply to the opening devotional discussed above.

APPENDIX A - Source materials for contemporary models of Christian lives (examples)

Gregory Boyle, *Tatoos on the Heart*

William Paul Young, *The Shack*

A biography of relatively modern individual who lived in a way that might provide lessons in Christian living. Note, however, that each individual will find their own way to live their Christian commitment in her own circumstances. It rarely works well to try to copy someone else's life. Examples of such individuals are Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Martin Luther King, and many others. You can also consult the liturgical calendar to find persons held up as models of at least some aspect of the Christian life.

APPENDIX B - A Primer on Intercessory Prayer

A Primer on Intercessory Prayer by the Rev. Dr. Michael Gemignani Chaplain, Daughters of the King, Episcopal Diocese of Texas

Introduction

This need for a primer such as this was suggested by a Daughter in Austin, and the request was endorsed by the current Diocesan President, Brenda Amos, and the President-elect, Linda Astala. I was asked by the latter two Daughters to prepare a primer and what you are reading now is the fruit of that request. I welcome suggestions for improving it. Given that it is likely to read primarily by Episcopalians, I do not expect everyone to agree with everything I have written. Please read it with an open heart. I pray that the Holy Spirit will teach you whatever it is that the Spirit wants you to learn.

What is prayer?

Although this primer is intended to be more practical than theoretical, a certain amount of theory is unavoidable. If we do not have a clear idea of what prayer is, and is not, then our prayer life may not be as rich or spiritually nourishing as it might be. Prayer, in essence, is intentionally directing our minds and wills toward God in love. We desire to be conformed to God through Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit and want to be God's instrument in the restoration of all creation to God through Christ. This is simply another way of saying that prayer is the expression of our desire to love God with all our hearts and minds and souls and strength. Prayer, then, can be expressed in varied and numerous ways. Our whole lives should be prayers since our whole lives should somehow be directed and offered to God in love. We can, and we should, pray always.

What is intercessory prayer?

Intercessory prayer is prayer in which we ask God to do something for someone or something. Thus, asking God to heal a sick friend and asking God to bring peace to the Middle East are intercessory prayers.

If God knows the needs of every human being, of what benefit is intercessory prayer?

If my spouse has a terminal illness, I would, of course, want her healed immediately and would ask God for that favor. But our faith tells us that God loves both me and my spouse with a love greater than we can possibly imagine, and that nothing can separate us from this love of God. Perhaps the "best" and most unselfish intercessory prayer is the one Jesus himself taught, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

I am not being flippant. We must believe in God's abiding love for all people. It may be that the best prayer is to place someone in the hands of God, asking God to give that person what that person most needs, and not what we think that person needs. After all, our greatest need is union with God, a union through which we come to know God as God knows us, a union through which we come to see God face to face, and come to love both God and all creation with a love that is God's own love.

Sometimes, as Paul tells us, we do not know how to pray, and at those times the Spirit in us prays for us. At times, we might best simply be silent and let the Spirit do our praying even though we may not hear or know what the Spirit is saying.

Yet, intercessory prayer is valuable for at least two reasons: First, God has called us to share in the work of restoring all creation to its Creator. We are, in effect, co-creators with God. What we do and say does make a difference in how we and others relate to God. God wants us to ask for the welfare of one another. This asking itself, by the power of the Holy Spirit, can bring powerful results. Second, because we are members of the Body of Christ and temples of the Holy Spirit, we are channels of grace and God's power on earth. Prayer releases spiritual energy for our own good and the good of others. Prayer brings positive change whether we get what we ask for in intercessory prayer, or not.

Is intercessory prayer always answered?

A popular answer to this question is "Yes, but not necessarily in the way we desire." We might also hear that "No is an answer as well as yes," or "God answers prayer in God's time, not ours." At least these cliches are true, if understood properly, but there are other responses that are not only false, but can be spiritually harmful: "Alice was not healed because you did not have enough faith when you prayed," or, "Alice was not healed because she was guilty of some secret sin that blocked the action of God."

My strong belief is that no true prayer (prayer as used in this primer) is without spiritual power or transforming effect. Often we do not see or feel the results of our prayer, and so we assume that the prayer was ineffective. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe," Jesus taught us. We are here not to keep score or put extra notches in our prayer beads. We are here to do the work of Christ and to love others as we have first been loved. Pray and leave the rest to God.

Should intercessory prayer be specific or general?

One good Daughter I know reads the names of the persons for whom she has been asked to pray and says the following prayer:

Dear Lord, please heal and minister to those people in body, mind and spirit according to their individual needs and to your holy will for their lives through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

This is a beautiful prayer and recognizes that God will act in love toward those for whom we pray. There is nothing wrong with praying specifically, and there are those who advocate this as a “better” form of prayer, but I personally lean toward the more general form in keeping with “Thy will be done on earth as in heaven.” In the more general form, we abandon ourselves and those for whom we pray more to the infinite mercy and love of God. One cannot go wrong in doing this, particularly if we are not sure how we should pray.

Must we pray verbally or mention specifically all of the names of persons for whom we are praying?

Here my answer may surprise you. In my opinion, it is entirely right and proper to pray as the Spirit may lead you to pray. Let me give some examples. First, when I am driving to visit a sick parishioner, I often offer the driving itself as a prayer on behalf of the patient. Second, you may feel called to a quiet form of prayer, e.g., centering prayer, and find verbal prayer difficult, or, at times, nearly impossible. You could place your prayer list close to you at a time of quiet prayer and ask God to bless those intentions for which you are to pray as you make yourself available to God in silence. Third, as noted earlier, you may ask the Spirit within you to pray when you yourself find it hard to pray, or you are not sure how to pray. These examples are not intended to be exhaustive, but merely illustrations to show that intercessory prayer does not have to involve verbally telling God who every person on your list is and what they want. God knows and honors the intention of whatever form our prayer takes. God understands the heart better than what you might say.

What guidelines might apply to prayer lists?

My view is that each Daughters Chapter should publish as widely as possible the following information:

- 1) There is a prayer list to which persons may add intentions for which Daughters will then pray;
- 2) How to add an intention to the prayer list; and
- 3) How long an intention is generally kept on the list. I recommend until the end of the first full month after which it has been added to the list, unless the request is renewed.
- 4) Someone may add an intention without stating more than a first name and a general plea, e.g., Jane for healing, Bob for a promotion, although intentions may be more precise if desired, e.g., Jane Doe for cancer surgery next Tuesday.
- 5) The prayer list is for prayer support only, and if the petitioner wants more, e.g., a home visit by the priest, or meals after surgery, the petitioner should make these requests to the parish office or

appropriate parish ministry.

6) Although the Daughters do not make a point of publicizing intentions outside the Chapter, nor do they reveal the name of the person making the prayer request, the prayer list should not be considered a confidential document. Therefore, persons for whom prayers are sought who wish to remain anonymous should not be described in ways that are likely to reveal their identities. Understand that the Daughters do not deliberately “leak” the intentions, but when so many copies of a list are distributed, it is possible that one might be left inadvertently lying around for others to see.

7) Daughters like to receive follow-up information if the petitioner is willing to provide it, e.g., Jane has been released from the hospital and is doing well, or John Doe died yesterday.

Following these guidelines may help avoid misunderstandings and disappointments, e.g., if someone expects a home visit after making a prayer request, but has not indicated this to anyone.

Is this all there is to know?

Obviously not. Each Chapter, perhaps each Daughter, will have its or her own way to honor the commitment to intercessory prayer. One must not bind the Spirit, nor assume that one “one size fits all.” These guidelines are intended to answer some of the important questions that many Daughters have had concerning intercessory prayer. You are invited to share your ideas and comments to make this primer more helpful. God bless you all.

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