

L' ARCHE® Syracuse

920 Spencer St, Syracuse, NY 13204
Phone (315) 479-8088 – Fax (315) 479-8118
E-mail: larche@larchesyracuse.org
Web: www.larchesyracuse.org



Holding the Sacred Space

L'Arche Syracuse is an ecumenical, Christian Community that is open to people of all faith traditions and those of no faith tradition. In light of that diversity, L'Arche Syracuse developed a variety of ways anyone in the community can creatively hold the sacred space.

Times of prayer or meditation in our homes vary in both style, length and approach, based on the composition and needs of the people and schedule. However the need for a daily time is an essential element of creating home, deepening relationships with each other, being true to our mission, and being in solidarity with the Federation of L'Arche and all those who struggle for justice in our world.

There are many opportunities each day to pray or meditate. It can be while alone for a minute, doing a chore, helping with routines, starting or ending a meal or meeting, accompanying a core person, discerning a decision, etc.

As a general rhythm of life and as a general rule of the homes, there is to be a designated time for prayer or meditation each evening. This usually happens after dinner, but can vary depending on the needs of the home.

General Guidelines:

1. Each home will decide, during a house meeting, what time works best for that home. Homes will also discuss what types of prayer or meditation the people find nourishing.
2. Each home will name a responsible person for leading the prayer each evening. Homes need to recognize some people will have a gift for planning/creating a prayer time/sacred space. Homes need to be gift finders in this area.
3. A person leading prayer needs to be organized and prepared so as to create an atmosphere conducive to prayer. Set up before you begin. Your equipment or supplies need to be assembled and prepared. Know what books, props, symbols, songs, etc. are needed and have them ready. If there are parts to play or readings to read, assign them before the prayer begins.
4. A person leading a silent meditation may have fewer items to set up. However there is still a need for appropriate chairs, cushions, lighting and perhaps a bell to mark the beginning and end of the mediation.
5. You may want to form a team with core members and assistants to plan prayer. Be creative and bring your individuality to this planning.

6. When preparing and leading, ask yourself, "How can the people present enter into this prayer or meditation experience appropriately, fully and comfortably?"
7. People should participate using their gifts.
8. The need for the holding of this sacred time must be a focus of both staff orientation and of functional accompaniment.

Specific Guidelines:

1. Remember as you plan, that holding the sacred space is an important tradition in our community and in L'Arche.
2. Establish prayer and meditation in the home as part of the regular rhythm of the home.
3. It is often helpful to pass a sacred object (religious symbol, photo, painting, flower, leaf, etc.) in order to help people focus and to clarify who can speak. Whoever holds the sacred object, has the opportunity to speak. Lighted candles are no longer considered safe objects to pass.
4. Keep themes simple, direct, concrete and repetitive. Best to make one point deeply.
5. Holding the sacred space can be visual i.e. images, videos or other visual tools. (e.g. *L'Arche I Am* video series)
6. Holding the sacred space can be music i.e. simple chants, familiar songs, etc. You can use our song book. Although live music is best, recorded music can also be used. Use instruments, including noise makers.
7. Holding the sacred space can be the sights and sounds of nature.
8. A sacred center, like an altar, is helpful as a centering piece and as a visual reminder of the theme.
9. Find resources that help calm and focus attention, such as a candle, icon, painting, and photo.
10. Even with reflections, allow for silence. Simple chants can help lead us to silence.
11. Keep readings short. Use any sacred text the home relates to (scriptures, poems, letters, excerpts from books, etc.)
12. Use other nonverbal ways of prayer such as movement, dance, skit, mime, a gesture, etc.
13. Invite people who are not comfortable with addressing God to simply state what they hope for, what burdens their hearts, or what they are grateful for. No one is forced to share, but everyone is invited to join the circle.
14. A home may establish a set of guidelines for their daily prayer or may offer varied methods and tools for their daily prayer (or both). Repetition, routine and familiarity help the core people to enter more easily and more deeply. Variety is good, but routine brings security and an ability to participate more fully.
15. Holding the sacred space can include art supplies, dress up clothes, or other resources your home discovers (e.g. prayer dice, cue cards, picture cards or other adaptive equipment for a particular core person).

Types of Prayer and Meditation:

Readings: Scriptures, poems, excerpts from books may be read aloud once or more than once. They should be relatively short. They can be discussed in general, or questions can be posed with them, or they can simply be a reading.

Silent Meditation: Sometimes started by a short chant or phrase, this can be a time of adoration, meditation, or quiet reflection. The silence may also be done in front of an Icon or candle or holy image. People can also listen to their breath or do relaxation practices.

Praying with a phrase or small repetitive chant: People can repeat a word, mantra, chant.

Petitions: Prayers of thanksgiving or petitions can be spoken around the circle.

Music as prayer: Listen quietly or participate with singing or instruments.

Movement as a prayer: Be creative; find a movement or gesture that fits a theme.

Dramatic presentation: An informal or a rehearsed acted out reading or story or lesson.

Discussion questions: Have a reading and related questions for discussion.

Videos: Find a good story or musical piece to pray and reflect with. Use the L'Arche "I Am" videos.

Remember L'Arche: prayers of petition or thanksgiving for a particular community or situation can be combined with learning about another community of the Federation.

Attend a service: There will be times of the year when the most appropriate prayer for an evening might be to attend a Taize or Seder service or a holy day celebration.

Informal Sharing: Go around the table and say what was a rose in your day and what was a thorn. Pray about them. Go around the table and say something that is a wow; a thanks; and or a help. Go around the table with any prayer question and listen and discuss. Sing in between sharing's of each person if you like.

Any Combination of the above: We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood [God], praying only for knowledge of [God's] will for us and the power to carry that out. — Step Eleven of the Twelve Steps

December 1, 2024