

EveryWhere and EveryWay: Calling One Another to Prayer An Cross-generational Rally Day Festival

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Setting and Audience

Rally Day typically includes a mood of reunion and excitement. There's lots of anticipation in the air. Rested up from the summer, children are excited and perhaps a little nervous about meeting their new Sunday school teachers.

Interestingly, these qualities of anticipation and mystery are the same qualities we often bring to prayer. Whether we are pouring out our desires or reveling in God's abundance, we experience a sense of connectedness, but we also wonder about how God will answer us.

Adults typically worry more than children about whether they know how to pray. For kids, prayer means "prayers". They pray the prayers they've learned for church, meals, and bedtimes. For adults, prayer broadens to include an understanding of "being" as well as "doing". Adults may long for prayer, yet feel intimidated or ashamed about learning how to pray. "How do I talk to God?" many adults wonder. "Especially if I've been silent for awhile." Adults may come into this cross-generational event like children—excited to learn and reunite with God and one another, but a little afraid of the unknown. They may wonder: Isn't prayer too sacred for a festival? Will I be asked to pray aloud? Consider a wide range of your community's needs and feelings as you prepare for this Rally Day prayer event.

Varieties of ability levels and generational interests are always factors to remember when planning an cross-generational event. Preparations should encompass non-readers as well readers and people with a range of mobility skills. What does this look like? Crayons and stickers should be available for the littlest ones; body prayers should be adapted for all physical levels; learning examples should be drawn from various age levels.

Theology

Prayer spans a range of forms from jubilant to contemplative. During this event we will focus on prayer as an energetic expression of seeking God and discovering that God is seeking us. Jeremiah 33:3 sets the theme verse for this event—"Call upon me and I will answer you."

We don't just seek God; God seeks us. Even the inclination to pray is a gift from God. When the disciples met after Jesus death and resurrection, Jesus moved through closed doors to reach them. This image also exemplifies the way Christ can move into our hearts—open or closed—and abide in us. As we share in cross-generational learning about prayer, we continually highlight God's action of looking for us, mirrored in our action of seeking God.

God uses prayer to change us and change the world. We teach our children that prayer involves the mystery of another language—God’s language. We also assure them that the tangible results of prayer can be seen all around us. As we plan activities and welcome generations of people, we share this grounding—prayer connects to God’s revelation of grace.

Goals

During this cross-generational event, participants of all ages will learn

- ◎ To pray with their body
- ◎ To pray with their church family
- ◎ To pray actively for the world

Festival Overview

This Rally Day cross-generational festival brings together learners of every age to focus on a spiritual discipline, prayer. We will celebrate prayer by practicing prayer with our bodies, our Sunday School family, and our world.

The **Event Opening** includes a ‘seeking and finding’ activity that challenges children, youth, and adults to seek out one another in order to “find God.”

During **Rotation1** participants use their bodies to pray.

Rotation 2 gathers together specific Sunday School classes for fellowship, prayer, a prayerful snack, and an activity of making a prayer placemat or poster. The emphasis on prayer allows Sunday School classes to get the year started on a faithful foot. Parents and other congregational members join the classes as part of this rotation; they add their prayers of support for children entering a new Sunday School year.

Rotation 3 is built around the witness of Ruth Youngdahl Nelson. Rally Day participants have a chance to sing about her (*When we sing, we pray twice.*) and learn about her life of active prayer.

We **Wrap Up** the event with a closing that reviews the day’s activities—body prayer, Sunday School class building, and the witness of Ruth Youngdahl Nelson.

Facilities and Set up

Utilize a large space. Allow room for an opening and closing gathering, as well as plenty of space for three rotations.

Rotation One requires floor space for movement

Rotation Two calls for tables and chairs (one set per class with extra chairs)

Rotation Three utilizes a gathering space where music and learning can take place.

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GATHERING ACTIVITY

Advance Preparation

Prepare nametags according to instructions below
Create you prayer mail box
Recruit a photographer and other volunteers
Prepare the prayer petitions on newsprint

Gather Materials

Necklace-type nametags (or make your own from cardstock and elastic cord)
Stickers coded beforehand (see the following instructions)
Digital camera
Photo Printer
Markers for writing names
Folders for sorting photos into Sunday School classes
Mailbox
Paper
Envelopes
Pens, Crayons, Markers
A handbell or other noisy instrument to be used later in the festival activities

Instructions

As participants arrive, they receive a nametag at a welcome table. They write their name on the card (little ones will obviously need help), slip it into the plastic holder, and hang it around their neck.

Prior to the event, leaders put a sticker on the back of each nametag with the letter G, O, or D on it. Sets of these letters are coded in triads with specific artwork so that participants can match them up. Depending on the size of your group, you can use simple or intricate artwork to delineate the sets of G, O, and D. Make sure to shuffle the nametags before beginning, but be sure that all three letters in each set are distributed.

A photographer takes digital photos of children and youth as they arrive and get their nametags. A volunteer sorts out photos into specific Sunday School classes for use in Rotation Two.

Set up a table with a large mailbox fashioned out of a box with a slit on the top. A real mailbox would also work. Suspend a sign above the table that says **Prayers are Letters to God**. As participants arrive they can write and draw prayers, seal them in envelopes and put them in the mailbox.



Note: Office supply stores sell boxes of extra small envelopes, the type you use for keys. These are very fun for kids to use in this activity.

Gather and welcome the group. Introduce the theme, theology, and goals for the event listed in the introduction. Tell the group that they will be part of the opening prayers. When we pray, we look for God and find out that God is looking for us.

Invite learners to notice the *G*, *O*, or *D* on the back of their nametag. Give them time to find the other two people whose encoded letters exactly match their own (you can encode the letters to be only slightly dissimilar if you want this to take more time and be more challenging). Give the group time to find one another. When triads have united, give each of them a prayer petition to read in turn from a sheet on the wall. After each petition, the large group responds, “Call to me and I will answer you.”

Prayer Petitions

Christ, come to us and live in us.

(response) “Call to me and I will answer you.”

Christ, abide in us and make us one.

(response) “Call to me and I will answer you.”

Christ, living bread, feed our souls.

(response) “Call to me and I will answer you.”

You died for us, we live for you.

(response) “Call to me and I will answer you.”

Christ, sent by God, we are sent by you.

(response) “Call to me and I will answer you.”

In Christ’s name we pray, Amen.



Note: If time permits ask each group to make up their own petition.



Option: Take the mailbox and extra envelopes/slips of paper to the sanctuary. Before worship begins, ask the congregation to contribute a prayer and place it in the mailbox!

TRANSITION TO ROTATIONS

- ⊙ Share a brief overview and instructions about each rotation, reminding participants they will have fifteen minutes at each rotation.
- ⊙ Be sure to have a handbell or other loud-enough instrument to announce rotation end times. Ask an older youth to be timekeeper/bell ringer!
- ⊙ Depending on your Sunday School set-up, clarify which classes will meet at Rotation 2 (the most complicated of the rotations) during each 15-minute time

period. For example, Pre-K through Lower Elementary could meet for the first time slot, Upper Elementary could meet for the second time slot, and Middle and High School could meet for the third time slot while the rest of the group goes to Rotation 1 or Rotation 3. Delineate how older adults and other adults can be involved in Rotation 2.

ROTATION 1: PRAYER IN MOTION

Shibashi consists of 18 simple movements similar to Tai Chi. People of all ages and abilities enjoy the meditative and physical benefits of this body centered prayer.

Advance Preparation

Well in advance, visit the Christian Education Web site to view a Shibashi DVD, download the movement directions, and find how to order or borrow a Shibashi DVD.

Invite a young person, particularly someone with dance or movement experience to be the leader. Encourage them to view the video and practice before hand.

Gather Materials

Shibashi DVD
Projection equipment
Movement directions take-home sheet

Instructions

Participants find a spot with a view of the screen and/or the volunteer leader. Follow along as they learn about expressing Christian prayer with their bodies. Make sure everyone has space and permission to participate according to their own physical ability.

ROTATION 2: CALLING ONE ANOTHER TO PRAYER

Advance Preparation

Determine how you will handle the pretzel making activity. See instructions below.

Gather Materials

Placemat-sized cardstock—one per child
Poster-sized cardstock—one per Middle and High School class
Kids' photos for each class
Glue sticks
Pens
Stickers
Rounded pretzels or dough to make pretzels (refrigerated bread stick dough) also works
Plenty of volunteer helpers
Access to a kitchen and oven

Instructions

Each class gathers at a table (a couple of classes for each time slot). Make sure to include parents and older adults at the tables. Sunday School students, teachers, and supporters introduce themselves and share hopes for the year ahead. Each child has a placemat in front of them that they will decorate by first gluing on their photo and then decorating them.

Kids and adults can trade placemats and write prayers for one another on the placemats—hopes and support for the Sunday School year. Middle and High School students would probably prefer to make a poster for their classroom door or wall with all of their photos rather than placemats. Be sure they still write prayers for one another and their class.

Find a space to lay out and dry the completed placemats and posters. Teachers can make sure that these get to the appropriate classrooms for use during the year.



Note: Store bought pretzels will work just fine but if you are adventuresome baking pretzels on-site will add another sensory dimension to this rotation. Enlist your best bakers to advise and help out! Carefully calculate preparation and baking time. Make sure to have some pretzels pre-baked to save some time and volunteers can bake pretzels throughout the event so there is plenty to share with everyone. A wonderful smell permeates the Rally Day event when they pretzels are baking.

For the youngest children, distribute store-bought or pre-baked pretzels for a snack. Explain to them that round-shaped pretzels represented a prayer posture of arms crossed across one's chest. They can practice this shape as you share a table prayer.

At a second table, first or second graders or older could also make their own pretzels. They love to roll out dough into ropes, shape the pretzels into the prayer design, brush on melted butter, and sprinkle the pretzel with coarse salt.

Gather lots of volunteers and utilizing the assistance of all generations to help things go smoothly. Hand washing needs to be part of the choreography of this rotation as well.

Kids should finish their pretzel snack before moving to the next rotation.

ROTATION 3: AN EVERYDAY DISCIPLE TEACHERS US ABOUT PRAYER!

Advance Preparation

Re- read the RuthYoungdahl Nelson story

Make photocopies of the 'Ruth song' and the Litany/Readings

Ask someone to serve as leader

Gather musicians if possible

Gather Materials

Ruth Youndahl's story
Copies of the Ruth Song and the Litany/Prayers



Optional: Photocopy and distribute An Everyday Disciple Coloring Sheet found on the Christian Education Web site

Instructions

The leader should become familiar with the story of Ruth Youngdahl Nelson. Spend a few minutes retelling the highlights of Ruth's amazing faithfulness and bold witness. Divide the group in half for the readings or subdivide further if your group is very large.



Option: Perhaps older youth would take on the Reader roles.



Note: The litany and song make a wonderful addition to your worship service. Invite the Sunday school children to lead the litany and the song for the congregation.

Group Litany

Group 1:

There are all kinds of prayers. Some prayers are made with your own words, like regular talking. Some prayers use other people's words that you can remember and say.

Group 2:

Prayers can be said out loud or quietly inside. God can feel and know all kinds of prayers, no matter how they are prayed.

Reader 1:

What is a person called who sees God as the center of her life, who prays in every situation, and knows God wants her to take care of her family, her neighbors and people across the globe? That's an **EveryDay Disciple!** Ruth Youngdahl Nelson was an everyday disciple who changed the world. She showed so many people what it means to put faith into action by loving God and serving others. And today, generations later, she is teaching us how to pray and trust in God **and** that we must always seek God's peace.

Sing verse one and chorus of Ruth Youngdahl Nelson song

Group 1:

Jesus said, "When you pray, you can let God know that you love and honor God." What could we say to God right now that lets God know how much we love and honor God? (allow time for responses)

Group 2:

Jesus said, "When you pray, you can ask God for the things you need." What could we ask God for right now? (allow time for responses)

Group 1:

Jesus said, “When you pray, you can thank God for God’s good gifts to us.” What could we like to thank God for right now? (allow time for responses)

Group 2:

Jesus loved his disciple friends and prayed for them. Jesus also said we should pray for our enemies. Who is a particular person who needs our prayers today? (allow time for responses)

Reader 2:

And God was always there! That was one of Ruth Youngdahl Nelson’s favorite phrases to remind herself and others that no matter what situation she found herself in, she knew Christ was present in her life. She was not afraid to speak up against things she saw were wrong like war, or hunger, or people being mistreated. She wanted others to see Christ in what she said and what she did. She taught others by saying. “If you want to grow close to God you must take time for prayer and to read the Bible every day. Then take a little piece of God’s word with you to repeat throughout the day and to pass on to others..”

Sing verse two and chorus of Ruth Youngdahl Nelson song

Group 1:

EveryWhere and EveryWay, God calls us to pray.

Group 2:

We can pray alone and together. Remember to pray everyone! Prayer is the glue that holds us in community.

Reader 3:

Let us pray.

God, we give you thanks for the life and witness of Ruth Youngdahl Nelson. Help us to remember to pray EveryWhere in EveryWay, like Ruth did. Help us to believe, as Ruth did, that when we call, you will answer. Thank you for the courage, strength, and sense of purpose you give us when we join our lives with your love. In Jesus name, we can always pray. Amen

Sing verse three and chorus of Ruth Youngdahl Nelson song

Ruth Youngdahl Nelson Song: She’s Got the Whole World in Her Prayers (to the tune of *He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands*)

Verse 1:

Ruth Youngdahl Nelson was born in 1904,
She grew up learning about Jesus and prayed more and more,
She wrote books about prayer and spoke against war,

God taught her what we're living for...

Chorus:

She's got the whole world in her prayers,
She's got the whole world in her prayers,
She's got the whole world in her prayers,
Ruth's got the whole world in her prayers.

Verse 2:

Ruth was Minnesota Mother of the Year,
She raised seven children and held them all dear,
She talked to God at home and God was always near,
God led her through each time of fear... Chorus

Verse 3:

Ruth lived in Saudi Arabia, and even Duluth,
She changed the world by caring and acting out God's truth
She found God in her neighbor; she was a prayer sleuth
God showed us how to live through Ruth....Chorus



Option: Remind the group of what St. Augustine said, "When you sing once, you pray twice." If you still have time, you can sing some wonderful, simple songs from the ELW: *Come and Fill Our Hearts* (528); *Jesus, We are Gathered* (529); *Hallelujah! We Sing Your Praises* (535); *Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying* (752).

CLOSING

Gather Materials

Shibashi instructions to take home
Placemat and poster examples to bless
Mailbox of prayers
Chorus from the Ruth Youngdahl Nelson song
Closing prayer petitions printed on a sheet on the wall
Optional: Coloring Page

Instructions

- ☉ It's been a full morning! Take advantage of a closing time to review the activities and goals.
- ☉ We learned to pray with our bodies. Review a couple of the Shibashi movements and show the take-home sheets.
- ☉ We met our Sunday School classes and started the year with a prayer snack and calling one another to prayer. (Show a placemat and poster.)
- ☉ We found out about a great woman of prayer, Ruth Youngdahl Nelson, and were inspired by her prayer action in the world.

Sing the chorus of the song one more time.

If there is time, reassemble in the *G-O-D* triads formed at Rally Day Opening. Triads take turns reading the petitions from the opening (printed on sheets on the wall). The whole group responds after each petition: “Call to me and I will answer you.” Bless the prayers stored in the mailbox and thank God for knowing each person’s gratitude and desire.

Remind children and parents where to go for Sunday School next Sunday.

Close with a final blessing:

May the God who can get past closed doors, open our hearts to Christ’s love around and within us. Bless us as we learn this year and every year. Amen

Follow-Up and Evaluation

Collect the plastic necklace nametag holders for reuse. Make sure to enlist a clean-up crew to help put everything away. After the goodbyes and sorting out happen, try to take five minutes with some teachers and volunteers to talk about this Cross-generational event. Jot down their comments about what was strong and what could have gone even better. These notes prove invaluable for the next year.

Decide with the other leaders how the prayer mailbox will be used. Could it be part of an ongoing prayer emphasis?



Please Remember...Laminating the placemats vastly extends their durability. Thanking the event volunteers and Sunday School teachers with a phone call or email vastly extends their durability! While you’re at it, thank God for the blessings of a life of faith and the endurance to make this event happen.