

Worship Rituals and Practices

Cindy Merten

In *Welcome them Home, Help them Heal: Pastoral care and ministry with service members returning from war*, (www.welcomethemhomebook.com) the authors commit a chapter to suggested healing rituals to be used throughout the church year. A series of spiritual exercises that correspond with the church year are intended to provide a means for healing and restoration. These include an Advent and Lenten heart-cleansing ritual, a midweek worship series on *How to be a People of Faith in a Time of War*, a mid-week Lenten series on *How to be a People of Faith in a Time of War*, and suggestions for Memorial Day, Independence Day, All Saints Day, and Armistice/Veteran's Day.

A Veteran's Processional

Healing rituals can take many forms. One particularly meaningful ritual in our congregation included inviting veterans of different generations to lead in a processional as they carried in the Bible, the baptismal pitcher, the communion cup and plate at the beginning of our worship service. On the Sunday closest to July 4th, we invited four members who had all served in the armed forces over several decades to participate together. Four men smartly dressed in their uniforms and spit shined boots proudly processed the elements down the aisle to begin worship. Others who watched were moved as the eldest serviceman walked with his cane and was assisted up the chancel steps by the army chaplain. It seemed that the memories of all who had served merged with the promise of hope as these men walked together in footsteps of faith.



We added a procession of the elements that provides:

- ✚ A visual reminder of the focal points of worship in the Reformed tradition
- ✚ An opportunity for many people, young and old, of all abilities to participate

A Prayer Wall

For the last two Lenten seasons, we have created a place where children, youth and adults can write and tuck their prayers in a wall set aside for that purpose. This concept is reminiscent of the Western or Wailing Wall in Jerusalem where pilgrims come to pray leaving prayers written on small pieces of paper tucked into the crevices of the blocks.

Lenten Prayer Wall



In the tradition of the Western or Wailing Wall, as it is sometimes known, you are invited to write or draw your prayers of thanksgiving, lament, petition and praise. Fold them up and tuck them into the "rock" pockets. Your prayers are private and will not be read, but they will collectively be offered to God in worship.

Sit a moment. read a Psalm. write or draw a prayer. and put it on the wall.

Prayer Shawl Ministry

Many churches now have Shawl Ministry groups who meet together for the purpose of prayerfully knitting or crocheting shawls. Sometimes the shawls are called Prayer Shawls, Peace Shawls, Comfort Shawls, etc. The shawl maker begins with prayers and blessings for the recipient, and throughout the process continues in prayer. Upon completion, the shawl is blessed by the group and given to someone in need. Several groups throughout the country send shawls to veterans and families of those fallen. The shawls may be dedicated in the context of a worship service or more privately with the group that made them. See the following websites for more information on Prayer Shawl Ministry.

<http://shawlministry.com>

<http://webpages.charter.net/ps4fs/shawls/>

Praying in Color

Sometimes we simply do not have the words to pray, and as Paul says, the spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. Sybil MacBeth, in her book *Praying in Color*, introduces a method of intercessory prayer that has the potential to engage the spirits of children, youth and adults in an active and visual way. Drawing with markers or crayons and carrying the prayer with you serves as a visual reminder of your prayer. For people whose hearts ache, who don't always have words to express difficult emotions, this form of prayer offers a way to pray for family, friends and the world. For more information, see <http://www.prayingincolor.com/MacBeth.html> or <http://www.prayingincolor.com/examples.html>



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