

Praying with people:

Guidance for prayer ministry

As disciples, we play an important role in accompanying one another on the discipleship journey (methodist.org.uk/TravellingCompanion).

One way we do this is to pray for each other. Some churches have a prayer team who pray with people during or after a church service. This often involves asking God to do or change something, or to provide guidance – for example healing prayer; prayers for life transitions like new jobs, homes or vocational discernment; or praying for people experiencing disappointment, grief or other challenges.

The following principles of open, encouraging and safe prayer are intended for anyone interested in beginning such a team. No one should be forced to participate in this style of prayer, and this guidance is only intended for those who have already decided to explore it.

It may also be useful for praying in other public contexts, such as at local festivals, or during community activities like toddler groups or community lunches. It is based on Methodist theological and safeguarding policy, and the experiences of Methodists who lead such teams.

Who can pray?

Prayer is something everyone should be encouraged to do, including our children, young people and vulnerable adults. However, in the context of a prayer ministry team, extra safeguards must be ensured so that any vulnerable people are given appropriate support.

As with all activities, make sure you **complete safeguarding training**. You should also familiarise yourself with the Methodist Church's guidance on spiritual abuse: methodist.org.uk/Safeguarding/Spiritual-Abuse

Try to always pray in pairs but if this is not possible, stay in a public space where other people are present. Do not enter a private space alone with someone you are praying with. It is advisable to pray with someone of the same gender, but this is not always possible.

For more advice and guidance on safeguarding and prayer, please speak with your aligned Learning Network Officer or District Enabler, if you have one, or your District Safeguarding Officer.

As a team-building and theological exercise, consider exploring the **Sunshine and Showers** prayer course together (methodist.org.uk/Sunshine). You may find it helpful to practise praying for each other in the team first. Decide what

prayer will look like and what resources you need. Is it at the front of the meeting room, or in a side hall? Do you need identifying badges? Should there be a space equipped with drinking water and tissues, for example?

Assure your team that if they feel unconfident, out of their depth, or nervous for any reason, it's okay to pause and find someone to support them. They should not feel pressured to pray if they feel that the person needs support that they're not able to give, or if listening to their story might bring up any triggers.

How do I pray?

- Ask the person's name, what they want prayer for, and what expectations (if any) they have for what God might do. Never make assumptions about what prayers a person wants.
- In non-service contexts like a local festival or coffee morning, you should check if the person is happy for you to pray at all, if they would prefer you do so immediately or later, and aloud or in silence.
- Repeat their request back to them to make sure you've understood. Remember and remind them that God's response to the prayer may not be what the individual (or you) expects.
- You could begin with deep breaths, to centre yourself in God, and asking the Holy Spirit to come afresh and bring the blessing of Jesus.
- The very simplest thing we can offer is to ask God to bless the person in their circumstances (naming these, to show you have listened) and say amen.
- It is important to pray aloud, so that the prayer seeker knows what you're saying. But it is okay to have moments of quiet, when you are listening to God, watching to see what God is doing, or simply because you're not sure what to say next. You might say to the person, "I'm going to stay quiet for a moment in case God is saying anything to you, but I'm still praying silently". Take a moment, gather your thoughts and ask God for inspiration.

It's okay to ask questions or speak to the person while you are praying – for example if you forget the name of someone they have mentioned, just ask them!

- Keep your eyes open to spot any physical signs that the Holy Spirit is at work in the person, that they're having an emotional response, and to keep an eye on your environment. In some cases, people may have a more extreme spiritual or emotional response such as falling over. Or, you may spot that they're bored or uncomfortable and waiting for you to stop praying.
- 'Laying of hands' is a common (and biblical) prayer practice. Always ask permission first and only lay a hand – gently – on a non-sensitive area like the person's shoulder or arm. If praying for physical healing, you could ask the person to place their own hand on the area where healing is requested.

- **You could consider offering anointing with oil, if the person being prayed for would like that. It may be helpful for the prayer team to have talked together about this practice. See the Methodist Worship Book (p.407-421) for helpful instructions.**
- If you practise praying in tongues you may wish to do this, but you should be sensitive to the person being prayed for. It may help to seek consent to do this, and to explain what praying in tongues means to you.

Some prayer requests may feel more challenging than others. Session 5 of the Sunshine and Showers prayer course explores some of the challenges around healing prayer. Remember: healing is not the same thing as curing.

The Conference has given guidance about healing prayer and neurodiversity. When praying with a neurodivergent person, it's important to prioritise what they are asking for in prayer and to focus on their safety and flourishing. Healing prayer in this context may be about healing society, the church and the world as well as the individual and, as with all healing prayer, should be open to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. It is not prohibited to pray for the healing of neurodivergent conditions, but you should only do this if the neurodivergent person themselves has explicitly asked for that. You can read the full report at: methodist.org.uk/HealingMinistryAndNeurodiversity

The Methodist Church is firmly against, and prohibits the practice of, conversion therapy: methodist.org.uk/ConversionTherapy

Deliverance ministry must only be practiced by someone thoroughly trained and appointed by the Methodist Church. The Chair of the Deliverance Ministry Panel may be contacted for further advice, or find further guidance here: methodist.org.uk/DeliveranceMinistry

If such ministry is requested, we advise praying for God's peace and comfort as an immediate pastoral response and asking if you can take the person's details for the minister in pastoral charge to follow up later.

Are visions okay?

No matter how much we train and prepare, God can always take us by surprise! When we ask the Holy Spirit to show up and we open ourselves to actively listening for what God might say or do, God might speak by giving us a word, picture, Bible verse, or a more general feeling or 'message'. It can be powerful to share what God gives you with the prayer seeker, particularly if it confirms something they were already thinking.

You are encouraged to share these thoughts, but before sharing, ask yourself whether it's an encouraging and loving message or picture, and only share if you can answer 'yes'.

Be open to the spiritual and mysterious nature of God's communication, but also be humble to your own conscious and unconscious thoughts – not everything you feel will be from God. Do not give directive, firm, prophetic messages like 'God says' or 'God wants you to do X'. Instead, say 'I think God might be saying', 'does this mean anything to you' or 'I'm not sure if this means anything but I sense that...'.

If the person immediately has a positive response, thank God and pray in light of the message. Be aware that you may have got it wrong. Always encourage the person to take the thought away and reflect and pray about it themselves. Never make someone feel like there is something wrong with them if they don't connect with what you had to say.

How do I finish praying?

Take your lead from the person you are praying for. If they start to fidget, it's a good sign to wrap up.

You could ask the person how they feel. For example, has the pain you were praying for lessened, or has God brought any peace? If they respond positively, thank God. You could use a prayer from the Bible, such as the Priests' Blessing in Numbers 6:24-27. Always stress that they should refer to their doctor before making any changes in medication, treatment or medically-related lifestyle issues.

If they respond negatively, ask if they wish you to continue praying or not. God's time isn't our time, and a response may not be immediate. No one should ever feel like they have failed, or didn't believe hard enough to make a difference. No matter what does or doesn't happen, God still listened and God still loved.

Everyone should always leave a time of prayer feeling encouraged. Try to always end by reminding them that God loves them.