





















Ancient Wisdom





How to use this Prayer Resource

About the Ancient Wisdom Prayer Resource

The Prayer Resource contains 20 prayers on the theme of Ancient Wisdom. The prayers are in two sets – which can be used interchangeably.

SET 1

- 1. Ancient wisdom
- 2. Connection to the Earth and Cosmos
- 3. Attentiveness and Presence
- 4. Community
- 5. Seeking the Way
- 6. Uluru Statement from the Heart 1
- 7. Uluru Statement from the Heart 2
- 8. Story Telling
- 9. Sacred Living
- 10. Protection

SET 2

- 1. Connection
- 2. Hospitality
- 3. Ritual and Celebration
- 4. Sacred Symbols
- 5. Prayer
- 6. Friendship
- 7. Creativity
- 8. Childhood
- 9. Pilgrimage
- **10. Sacred Places**

For ease of use, the prayer resource is presented in two folders. Each folder contains 10 copies of each of the ten prayers, and an Acknowledgement of Country.

The prayer cards contain a reading on the theme, a follow up reflection and discussion question as well as a scripture quote and a prayer (references are included for all sources).

Prayer is essential at the commencement of meetings in a Catholic ministry for focus, to reinforce Catholic identity and to call God's blessings on the proceedings. Prayer time is also formative as it allows those present to examine aspects of life, faith and experience.





Ancient Wisdom

In his song Anthem (1992), Leonard Cohen sang, *...there is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in.* The ancient Celtic tribes and many indigenous nations believed that the world was indeed a revelation of Divine light and a place of everyday encounters with the Creator Spirits.

In this series of prayers, we invite you to let the light of Ancient Wisdom through the cracks of your spiritual landscape. To listen more attentively to the words of ancient peoples, mystics and saints who have walked the journey before us and whose wisdom gives us insight and nurture. To recognise that God has been moving in and through all human cultures and peoples.

Wisdom can be defined as understanding gained through knowledge and experience. In a spiritual sense, wisdom taps into the human search for meaning and the words and teachings of those who have undertaken this search.

Our spiritual quest can be enlightened and supported by ancient voices, ancient understandings of the human and divine, and the words of the millions of souls who have found the Divine in their lives, in their sacred places and in the lives of others.

One of these voices was Julian of Norwich. Her writings highlight the steadfastness of God's love. She was revered as a mystic in her own time and her words continue to resonate today. Julian repeats her declaration three times... All will be well and all will be well and every kind of thing shall be well. She is convinced that the nature of the Divine is loving-kindness, and she wants us to absorb this into every fibre of our being. (Rohr, R. accessed at *Center for Action and Contemplation*. 2020). Where have you seen true wisdom in your life and work? Wisdom is radiant and unfading, and she is easily discerned by those who love her, and is found by those who seek her. She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her... and she graciously appears to them in their paths, and meets them in every thought. (Wisdom 6:12-16)

God of Wisdom Open our hearts and minds to the insights of our spiritual ancestors and guides.

May we hear your voice in the words of the mystics and saints;

may we feel your compassionate gaze in the beauty of our natural world;

and may we see your love and mercy in the lives of those with whom we live and work.

Amen



Connections to Earth and Cosmos

A common belief in ancient societies was that the Divine presence existed in all creation, in every human being and animal and every facet of the natural world – visible and invisible. This understanding echoed through the writings of the great mystics of the Christian tradition, like Mechthild of Magdeburg (1212-1282), ... the day of my spiritual awakening was the day I saw and knew I saw all things in God and God in all things. Teilhard de Chardin wrote, God's first 'idea' was to become manifest — to pour out divine, infinite love into finite, visible forms. Chief Luther Standing Bear's words echo this belief: From Wakan Tanka, the Great Spirit, there came a great unifying life force that flowed in and through all things — the flowers of the plains, blowing winds, rocks, trees, birds, animals — and was the same force that had been breathed into the first human. (Ancient Echoes. 1995. p.40). For North American Indigenous people, the belief in the connection between all aspects of creation was deeply embedded in every aspect of their lives.

This connectedness can be seen in the initiation ceremony of the Omaha Indians. When an infant is born the child is taken out under the sky and presented to the universe with the invocation: Ye Sun, Moon, Stars, All ye that move in the heavens, I bid you hear me! Into your midst has come a new life. Consent ye, I implore! Make its path smooth... (Berry, T. Evening Thoughts. 2006). Where do you see this connection with all of creation? In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

(John 1:1-4)

Divine Presence Instil in us, a love of all creation and an understanding of our connection to everything that exists. May we open our hearts to the wisdom of the universe: The beauty of the flowers The blessings of wind The solace of night And the divine benediction of the Earth. Open our minds to a new way of seeing and believing. Amen



Attentiveness and Presence

Attentiveness, mindfulness and meditation are often viewed as gifts of Eastern spirituality, yet silence and quiet contemplation are strong elements of the Christian mystical tradition and the quest to find the Divine within. The Jesuit Jean-Pierre de Caussade calls the present moment a 'sacrament'. It is holy because it is the portal through which God and angels walk into our lives. Think of the Lord visiting Abraham and receiving hospitality at Abraham's tent in Mamre (Genesis 18:1-33), *... to live with attention to the present moment is to be open to Divine visitation* (Haase, A. *Becoming an Ordinary Mystic.* 2019, p.9).

It's no small matter for a soul given to restless thoughts to realise the truth: that God is within you. And to understand that you don't need to go to heaven in order to speak to the eternal Fathers - or enjoy God's company... Nor do you need wings to find God. You only need stillness, and a willingness to look within. (Adapted from St. Teresa of Avila in Dowrick, S. Heaven on Earth 2013, p.124).

Of all things on earth silence most resembles God... (Meister Eckhart in Dowrick, S. *Heaven on Earth* 2013, p.157). How can you take more time for meditation and mindfulness in your ministry?

Be still and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth. (Psalm 46:10)

Divine Presence May we embrace the present moment as sacrament (pause). May we pause often to be still and listen (pause). May we find the courage to follow new paths and opportunities (pause). And may we take the time to celebrate the small miracles of our life and express gratitude for the sacred gift of each new day. Amen



Community

The importance of community is reinforced in all religious traditions. It is reflected in the songs and poetry, rituals and ceremonies, art and music, writings and architecture of humankind. When John Donne reminds us that, no person is an island, he was reflecting on one of the primal needs of the human person – to belong, to be connected to others, to be part of a community. How to live successfully as community has been the focus of much religious writing from the letters of St. Paul to the early Christian communities and the Jewish Shabbat meals, to the tribal cultures of many indigenous traditions.

We are not alone in this world, nor have we ever been, no matter how much we may feel otherwise. Many have come before us and will come after us feeling the same way, seeking as we are, searching for the "light." And it is in coming together-one by one, two by two, and on and on-that we form the converging tributaries that make up the mighty stream of just and righteous people flowing home to God. This is our calling as Christian faithful: to recognize the Christ in everyone. And to reach out a hand of hope, to speak a word of love, to sing a song of happiness, to share a tear of joy or pain, to speak a word of praise, to murmur a prayer, to stand together against those forces that would divide us, isolate us, and block our flow toward home. (Hayes, D. No Crystal Stair: Womanist Spirituality. 2016. p.35).

How does your ministry nurture community and connection?

Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...

(Colossians 3:12-15)

Remind us God of love and compassion that we are called into relationship with those with whom we live and work. Enable us to live with kindness and humility. Empower us to reach out to those who are vulnerable or marginalised. Show us how to build strong communities which are inclusive and nurturing. May we put the Gospel at the heart of our actions for community. Amen



Seeking the Way

The spiritual quest is often referred to as the 'way' and most of the world's religious traditions refer to seeking or following a 'way'. As Margaret Silf notes: In Judaism, the children of Israel followed the way out of slavery to the Promised Land. Islam regards the pilgrimage to Mecca as one of the five pillars of faith. The Buddhists seek the Way to Enlightenment. Chinese spirituality expresses the paradox of the journey in the Tao. The first Christians were known as the People of the Way, and Jesus identified himself as the Way (2001. p6). In the Celtic world life itself is a pilgrimage; a journey to wholeness and community and to a deep awareness of the Divine in all things. To see oneself on a journey is an important lesson from all spiritual traditions.

Ideally, a human life should be a constant pilgrimage of discovery. The most exciting discoveries happen at the frontiers. When you come to know something new, you come closer to yourself and to the world... When you discover something, you transfigure some of the forsakenness of the world. (O'Donohue, J. *Eternal Echoes.* 1998. p29).

What aspect of your spiritual journey have you found most difficult? Jesus said, I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)

God of the Way

May we seek inspiration from those who have found the way of compassion, mercy and justice. May our founders – Catherine McAuley, Nano Nagle, Elizabeth Hayes and Saint Francis – show us how to step boldly onto new paths.

May we walk with courage and perseverance, believing that you are with us, lighting the path. Amen



Uluru Statement from the Heart - Sacred Land

The Uluru Statement from the Heart was issued to the Australian people in 2017 following an Indigenous National Constitutional Convention. The statement reinforced the centrality of the land to Aboriginal life ... sovereignty is a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or "mother nature" and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors... This understanding of the sacredness of all creation infused with the Divine spirit is central to most ancient cultures. This Ancient Wisdom offers much to a world in which the natural world is sometimes not valued, where the sacred can be lost under a rationalist, consumerist and individualist culture.

Thousands of years before Moses looked over the river of Jordan, my ancestors lived on these very sand hills... From the Dreamtime, Creator Ancestors came to the Yawuru people and entrusted in us sacred law and culture. My ancestors have continuously maintained and practised that law and culture, and it continues to the present day. (Roe, J. in ACBC Social Justice Statement. 1996).

For thousands of years this culture of yours was free to grow without interference by people from other places. You lived your lives in spiritual closeness to the land, with its animals, birds, fishes, waterholes, rivers, hills and mountains. Through your closeness to the land you touched the sacredness of man's relationship with God. (St. John Paul II. 1986). For in God all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through God and for God. (Colossians 1:16)

The Uluru Statement from the Heart invites us to walk with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in a movement of the Australian people for a better future. How can your ministry respond to this invitation?

God of Holy Dreaming Great Creator Spirit, from the dawn of creation you have given your children the good things of Mother Earth. You spoke and the gum tree grew. In the vast deserts and dense forests. in the cities. at the water's edge, creation sings your praise. Your presence endures as the rock at the heart of our land. Lead us on Great Spirit, as we gather ... Enable us to walk together in trust from the hurt of the past into the full day which has dawned in Jesus Christ. Amen (Parker, L. 1999, Extract)



Uluru Statement from the Heart - We seek to be heard

The Uluru Statement from the Heart is a plea for the recognition of the place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within our country. The powerful conclusion begins with the statement: *In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard* (2017). The reference to the torment of our powerlessness prefaces a series of requests: a First Nations voice in the Constitution; a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia (Makarrata); a better future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children based on justice and self-determination; truth-telling about the past and a formal commission to oversee a process of agreementmaking between governments and First Nations. These requests "from the heart" seek to address systemic injustice and to move forward in collaboration and respect. We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the diseases and the alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practised discrimination and exclusion. It was our ignorance and our prejudice and our failure to imagine that these things could be done to us. (Keating, P, *Redfern Speech*, 1992)

We today take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians... A future where we harness the determination of all Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to close the gap that lies between us in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity... a future based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility. (Rudd, K, *National Apology*. 2008) What steps can you take to nurture reconciliation through your ministry?

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. (Romans 12:9-10)

Creator of all things. Give us the courage to accept the realities of our history so that we may build a better future for our nation. Teach us to respect all cultures. Teach us to care for our land and waters. Help us to share justly the resources of this land. Help us to bring about spiritual and social change to improve the quality of life for all groups in our communities, especially the disadvantaged. Help young people to find true dignity and self-esteem... through Jesus Christ our Lord (http://www.natsicc.org.au)



All human societies have honoured storytelling as a way of capturing community events, passing on important lessons, communicating deeper truths and entertaining young and old alike. From the European cave paintings to Egyptian hieroglyphs, Greek mythology, Aboriginal song lines and Maori laments, story-telling cemented communal or tribal identity and preserved cultural, historical and spiritual traditions. Jesus taught through stories, through rituals and sacraments and continues to invite followers to listen and respond to stories of God's presence in our world. We engage with others through stories... as human beings, we are automatically drawn to stories because we see ourselves reflected in them...Every culture has stories to tell. These stories form the basis for how we think about the world and live our lives. Stories preserve culture and pass on cultural knowledge from one generation to another. Stories provide a timeless link to ancient traditions. legends, myths, and archetypes. But they also connect us to universal truths about ourselves and our world. (Corson-Knowles, T. accessed at tckpublishing.com. 2020).

Jesus told them another story: The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches. (Matthew 13:31-32)

When could you use stories to reinforce identity, mission and values in your ministry? God of the story May we sustain our communities and our world with stories: Stories of those who cared for others, Stories of those who stood up for justice, Stories of those who overcame burdens and obstacles, Stories of those who showed your love to the world. May our lives be living and unfolding stories. Amen



Sacred Living

The embrace of a non-dualistic worldview is a common feature of ancient spiritualities. The Celts, for example, perceived the sacred presence not only in human beings, but in all aspects of creation. The early Celtic Christians lived not just close to nature – but with nature. They had an overwhelming consciousness of the immanence of the Divine within the natural world. There was no distinction between ordinary everyday human existence and the Divine. The Divine was in every aspect of life, every waking moment and the sacrament of Divine presence was honoured and celebrated.

We are in touch with God every moment that we live, for the simple reason that God is life: not religious life, nor Church life, but the whole of life... spiritual awareness, then, is about being aware of God in the midst of the change and movement and flow of life, in the rising of the morning sun, in the work and relationships of daily life, in the great struggles of society and nation, in alertness to the interior life of the soul. in times of rest and sleep and even dreaming. We don't have to try to reach God through acts of devotion, for God is closer to us than our very breath... (Newell, J.P. Celtic Christianity: Listening for the Heartbeat of God. 1997. p.76).

God wants us to understand that we are more truly in heaven than on earth... We are God. That is what we are... God did not have to begin to love us because from the beginning we have always been known and loved... (Lady Julia of Norwich in Dowrick, S. *Heaven on Earth.* 2013. p.61). What are the ordinary sacraments of life in your ministry?

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God... who is above all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:4-6)

Sacred Presence in all Creation Awaken us to the wonder of your voice in the ocean waves, Your whispers in the rustle of leaves, Your smile in the warmth of the sun, Your gentleness in the beauty of the flowers, Your energy in the strength of the trees And your eternal love in the lives of those around us. Amen



Protection

Ancient Wisdom reminds us that we are never alone. Our God walks with us. Christian scripture refers to saints and angels surrounding us as a source of encouragement, assistance and reassurance. The Islamic Faith Tradition teaches that guardian angels reside on the shoulders of believers. The beliefs of Indigenous and Eastern spiritualities also acknowledge and reverence ancestors, those who have walked the path before us. These elements combine to reassure us of God's love and providence for the world.

In the Celtic world

... many protective customs surrounded the gateways of birth and death... One of the major duties of poets and storytellers was to be a genealogical guardian, keeping the memory of long-dead ancestors fresh in praise-songs. (Matthews, C., and Matthews, J. *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Wisdom*. 1994, p.115).

Most of us have an inner circle of people who are deeply trusted and loved, and beyond that there will be outer circles of people... for the Celts the circle would have been wider still, including... those wisdom figures who have gone ahead of us – our ancestors and our saints and angels... (Silf, M. Sacred Spaces: Stations on a Celtic Way. 2001. p.92). When have you felt the love of God protecting and nurturing your ministry?

Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father. (Matthew 18:10)

Loving and Protecting God, May we always honour those who have gone before us in love. May we cherish our friends and family – those who nurture, inspire and protect us. Pour out your blessings on those who are alone or disconnected by hurt, anger, poverty or shame. Help us to find ways of protecting and nurturing others. Amen