Local Gathering Prayers and/or Prayer Service

This is a suggested format for a communal prayer service to begin a gathering. Leaders should feel free to adapt/change, shorten or substitute any other readings, songs or prayers that would be appropriate for the group. Where a series of meetings are going to be held, you may wish to use only one reflection and omit the Psalm Response. Be sure to create a simple environment for prayer by using a candle, small altar table, and any appropriate symbolic objects.

Presider: Grace and Peace to all in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!
All: Thanks be to God!

Opening Song: “All Are Welcome” (verses two and five)
(if this is not a familiar hymn for your participants, substitute something that is well-known and liked)

Let us build a house where prophets speak, and words are strong and true, where all God’s children dare to seek to dream God’s reign anew. Here the cross shall stand as witness and as symbol of God’s grace; here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where all are named, their songs and visions heard and loved and treasured, taught and claimed as words within the Word. Built of tears and cries and laughter, prayers of faith and songs of grace, let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Prayer: Loving God, we gather here today as your family, sure of our strong bonds of relationship with You, and with each other, united together in the Body of Christ.

Holy Trinity, we want to belong,
So teach us to accept.

We want a place where we are welcome,
So teach us to open our arms.

We want mercy,
So teach us to forgive.

We want peace,
So show us the eye of the storm.

We want truth,
So show us the way to question our unquestionable convictions.

We want joy,
So show us the way of deeper commitment to all that Jesus came to show us in Life.
Renew in us the vision of what it would mean
to live as though we really believed what Jesus taught,
And everyone was treated as sister and brother in the family of God.

**Reading:** Isaiah 43: 18-19 (*Doing something new*)

Remember not the events of the past,
The things of long ago consider not;
See, I am doing something new!
Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
In the desert I make a way,
In the wasteland, rivers.

**Reflection:** In this familiar passage from Isaiah, God is speaking through the prophet, reminding the people that creating something new is what God does in the present, not just long ago at Creation. As we begin our discussion of our Church’s synod on family, what is “something new” that you envision? (Pause for silent reflection)

**Psalm Response:** excerpts from Psalm 96
(Omit this Psalm to shorten service or if using only one reading)

**Right:** Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.
**Left:** Sing to the Lord, bless God’s name; announce his salvation day after day.

**Right:** Give to the Lord, you families of nations, give to the Lord glory and might;
**Left:** give to the Lord the glory due God’s name!

**Right:** Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice;
**Left:** let the sea and what fills it resound;
     let the plains be joyful and all that is in them.

**Right:** Then let all the trees of the forest rejoice before the Lord who comes,
     Who comes to govern the earth,

**Left:** To govern the world with justice and the peoples with faithfulness.

**Reading:** (taken from *Evangelii Gaudium*)
I have not sought to offer a complete diagnosis, but I invite communities to complete and enrich these perspectives on the basis of their awareness of the challenges facing them and their neighbors. It is my hope that, in doing so, they will realize that whenever we attempt to read the signs of the times, it is helpful to listen …lest we cling to a nostalgia for structures and customs which are no longer life-giving in today’s world. (108)

**Reflection:** Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Exhortation, is inviting the faithful to add to his reflections “on the basis of their awareness of the challenges facing them and their neighbors.” Do we have any mechanisms for doing this in our current church
structures? What could you suggest as a practical way to implement this exhortation? (Turn to the person next to you and discuss for three minutes.)

Intercessions:

Reader: Our response will be, “Gracious God, hear our prayer”  

Reader: For all people involved in relationships, that the intrinsic sacredness of unions modeled on the Trinity will be understood and supported, regardless of the life situation, we pray:  

Reader: For an exploration of new ways of looking at openness to life, that will take into account sustainability, responsible parenthood, medical advances, and the complexities of contemporary situations, we pray:  

Reader: For equal treatment of all, regardless of gender or sexual orientation and for the compassion and mercy Jesus showed to outcasts to become a hallmark of our Church, we pray:  

Reader: That while respecting the family as primary teacher of the young, the Church will develop better ways to listen to the faithful and pass on the core truths of our faith, we pray:  

Reader: We gather these petitions and all the deep needs of our hearts into one voice as we pray the prayer that Jesus taught us:

All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who have trespassed against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

(If you wish to have a brief closing prayer, then you can use the “Prayer Affirmation” that follows here at the very end of your gathering, with the Final Blessing. In that case, use the “Vatican Il Prayer here to end the Opening Service and move people into the discussions.”)

Prayer Affirmation (based on Nelson Mandela’s 1994 Inaugural Address)

Right: Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, which is most frightening.
Left: We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are we not to be?
Right: You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn’t serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you.
Left: We are born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It’s not just in some of us; it’s in everyone.
All: And, as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

Final Blessing: May the protection of the Blessed Mother and Saint Joseph always accompany all of you and help you to walk united in love and in caring for one another. I willingly invoke on every family the blessing of the Lord. (Pope Francis in Letter to Families)

(It is recommended that the following prayer written for Vatican II and used at each of its sessions be said in the small groups before starting – or substitute it into the opening prayer service as described above.)

Vatican II Prayer to the Holy Spirit

We stand before you, Holy Spirit, conscious of our limitations, but aware that we gather in your name. Come to us, remain with us, and enlighten our hearts. Give us light and strength to know your will, to make it our own and to live it in our lives. Guide us by your wisdom, support us by your power, for you are God, sharing the glory of our Creator and Savior. You desire justice for all, enable us to uphold the rights of others; Do not allow us to be misled by ignorance or corrupted by fear or favor. Unite us to yourself in the bond of love and keep us faithful to all that is true as we gather in your name. May we temper justice with love, so that all our decisions may be pleasing to you and earn the reward you promised to good and faithful servants. You live and reign with our Creator and our Savior, One God, forever and ever, Amen.