



WORKSHOPS – A3.2 TITLE : MAINTAINING VIBRANT PRAYER GROUPS	SPEAKER : JAMES MURPHY
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Before I begin, please allow me to share a personal note. I think it is a great honor to be able to speak with you, brothers and sisters who do such a good job of organizing Catholic Charismatic prayer meetings all over the world. To me, prayer groups are an integral element of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal and I appreciate all the effort, all the work, all the time you put in to keep this vital ministry alive.

I am also delighted to be able to share this time with my esteemed colleague, Deacon Christof Hemberger. He is a wonderful teacher, a valued co-worker....and a really good friend. It is great to be with him, and all of you here today.

The topics which the Deacon and I are covering will have to be brief due to time constraints. You can hear much more on these subjects by joining us at either the ICCRS Leadership Training Course or the Leadership Formation Institute. You can find out more about both of these programs on the ICCRS website.

Christof is covering some of the basic, yet essential elements of running a good prayer meeting. I will focus on just two areas today; how to give a good teaching and maintaining dynamic praise and worship. Again, due to the brevity of time, I am going to set aside most of the background theory and just share with you a few practical points.

Let's begin with dynamic praise and worship.

In my estimation, praise and worship is the most essential part of a prayer meeting. Everything flows from this. Sadly, when the praise and worship is weak, the entire prayer meeting suffers. In this moment, I am not referring to Eucharistic adoration, but rather a dynamic, charismatic experience of people spontaneously, vocally praising and worshipping God.

So, where do we start?

Once thing that is essential to praise and worship is to educate people on the Biblical principles and elements of dynamic praise and worship. To be fair to our fellow Catholics, many of them never grew up with an experience of dynamic praise. They are used to more traditional forms of prayer. So it is understandable that when we call for praise and worship, they are not quite sure as to how to respond. Or others, who did not grow up with this style, think it is only a way of prayer used in other Christian denominations. We have to teach them from a biblical and historical perspective the foundations of this way of prayer.



Unfortunately, our time does not allow me to actually give this teaching, but let me urge you to study this area very deeply and prepare teachings on it for your groups. Many people, even those who have been in our groups a long time do not know why we pray as we do. Let us give them those answers. We have to not only lead praise and worship, but be advocates of it, and explain it to others.

So the first step is to advocate and teach about the value of praise and worship.

The second step is to get people engaged in praise and worship. A prayer group leader is not supposed to praise God on behalf of the people. Rather, their responsibility is to encourage, aid, and support the people themselves in praising God. Don't praise God for the people. Praise God with the people.

How do we get people engaged? One practical way is that the praise and worship leader should be as physically close to the people as possible.....try not to be separate from them. Be sure you keep making eye contact with them, you keep turning towards them. Talk to them. Encourage them. They are not there to watch you pray, you are there to help them pray. Don't let the group be passive spectators.

Music can be a great way to help people praise, but let me offer a caution here. In some places, prayer meetings have turned into concerts! The music is great, but it has turned into a performance, with only the music ministry singing and the people passively standing there and clapping their hands. This is nice...but it is not praise and worship! The people are not engaged! Be careful not to just play one song after the other. There should be some music, but then the praise leader should be encouraging people to pray out loud, spontaneously, offering praise to God. As the vocal prayer continues, it may go into praying in the Spirit. After the people have actively engaged in praying, do another song. Again, when the song is over get the people to pray out loud.

Of course, you should also be encouraging a short scripture to be read, a prophecy to be given, or a vision to be shared. The person leading praise and worship must be attentive to several things going on at once! You should consider having one person in charge of the music working in collaboration with another person who has the overall responsibility of leading worship. This allows the music people to do what they do best, and the other person to facilitate the overall event of praise and worship.

As a worship leader, you should be able to be able to "summarize" what the Lord has said, or what the Lord has done up to this point in the meeting, and then encourage the people, exhort the people, to enter again into the worship of God.

The main thing to remember when leading praise and worship, is that you have to stay connected with both The Lord and the people. Watch what The Lord is doing, but also pay close attention to



how the people are responding. As much as you wish you could just “float off” with the Lord, your responsibility is to stay connected with where the people are, but keep urging them on.

In summary:

- 1. We must be advocates of praise and worship, teaching our people the understanding of it, but also the methods.**
- 2. We must engage the people. We do this by staying close to them, by the use of music, by encouragement and exhortation.**
- 3. A worship leader must be able to manage several things at the same time.**
- 4. A worship leader must be attentive to God...but also attentive to the people.**

LET’S TALK A LITTLE NOW ABOUT THE SECOND AREA OF A GOOD PRAYER MEETING...GIVING EFFECTIVE TEACHINGS

There are three things necessary to give a good teaching:

- 1. Proper discernment of the teaching to give**
- 2. Preparation of the material**
- 3. Proper delivery of the teaching**

All three of these are essential for a good teaching. Just like a tripod; if one of these three legs is “short” the entire teaching will fall over!

Let us examine these three elements, one at a time.

Element 1: Proper discernment of the teaching to give.

We do not give teachings just so people can hear us talking! Hopefully, we are delivering an important message that is helpful for the people to hear. No matter how well a teaching is given, if it is not the correct teaching....what good is it? You can get any kind of a teaching at a school or a civic organization....we want to proclaim God’s word!

So it is important to discern what God wants us to speak on, not just what we *think* is a good idea.

There are a few ways we can discern what the proper teaching for a group is:

One way is to simply obey those in authority and prepare what they ask of us ask of us. Let me offer a concrete example. I was contacted by the Jubilee Committee and asked, with my brother Christof, to give this teaching. The committee are good men and women of faith. They have both the pastoral responsibility and the pastoral authority of this event. They are not asking me to teach anything which violates the teaching of the Catholic Church. I have no reason to question their authority. If they want me to give a teaching on this topic...then I will give a teaching on this topic! Even though I did not get some kind of “revelation” to teach this subject, I am completely



confident that I am in the will of God on this, because I am simply being obedient to those in legitimate authority over me.

Perhaps in your group there is a leadership team who asks you to teach on a certain topic. Unless you have some legitimate reason to question them, take their request as God's will and do your best to prepare a teaching per their request. In a way this is the easiest discernment.....obey those who have authority over you.

Sometimes, we are not told what to teach on, we are only asked *to* teach...how do we discern the topic then?

You can discern this in two different ways; one is pastoral, the other is “an inner sense.”

Let's look at pastoral discernment. In this case, we do not receive a revelation from God. However we become aware of things within our group that need to be addressed. Let me give an example: I am helping a group of young people with their prayer meeting. As I meet with members of the group and get to know them better, I begin to notice how many of them struggle with issues of self-worth. So many of them really doubt that they are worthy of God's love. I might prepare a teaching to address this situation. Please note, in this case, I received no “heavenly message,” but my own pastoral instincts, hopefully guided by the merciful heart of Christ, have made it clear, that this teaching would be helpful. Perhaps a group needs to be exhorted to renew their personal commitment to prayer. Maybe a prayer meeting needs to rediscover the power of praying in the Spirit. I think you get the idea.

So, sometimes we can discern the content of a teaching by simply obeying the requests of legitimate authority for a topic.

Other times, our own “pastoral instincts” help us know what people need to hear.

A third way to discern a topic is what we call an inner sense. It goes something like this; you are praying,..... asking God to show you what the topic should be. Perhaps you don't sense anything immediately, but over the next few days, you notice that you are drawn to a simple thought, a single idea. Pay attention to that. The next day, as you read your Bible, you find a scripture passage that somehow connects with that thought. Later you are talking with a friend and they bring up something that reminds you of that original idea. Later, you are playing the radio and a song comes on that reminds you of that same original idea. God is using all of these things to help you understand something He is trying to show you! Pay attention.

Go back into prayer, bring all of this to The Lord. What are you feeling inside you? Do you find yourself thinking more and more about that topic? Is God giving you other little signs about this topic?

In this third method you will probably never be 100% certain you are exactly right, but you have the humility to submit it to the Lord and trust that He will bless this, because you are trying your



best to discern His will. If you want a 100% guarantee that this is the exact talk God wants.....then you will probably never give another teaching. Do your best to discern God's will, surrender it to the Lord, then act of what you have.

In the second and third methods (pastoral instinct and inner sense) it may be a good idea to share your thoughts with a trusted friend or a mature member of the prayer group to get their feedback and insights. I often talk to people before I give a talk and they help me see things I completely missed.

O.K. We have, using one of the three methods of discernment, chosen a topic to teach on. Now we move to the second step:

Preparing the material that we will teach.

Hopefully, you will have enough time to slowly, but carefully make the preparations well.

The first thing to do is carry some index cards, or a small table with you wherever you go for the next few days. As you are going about your day, suddenly a scripture passage comes to mind that might be helpful for your teaching ...write it down on one of the cards. Later in the day, you hear a news story on television that illustrates a point you hope to include in your talk....again write a quick note down on another card. During your prayer time, you get an inspired insight about the subject....write it down. The more cards you write, the more insights and ideas you will receive. It is important that you only write one idea per sheet...you will see why in a moment.

Later, on a big piece of paper you write down the three key points of your teaching. What is the main point as you open your talk? What is the main point in the middle of your talk, and what is the main point that will bring your talk to a conclusion? Work on this a little bit until you are quite clear about your opening point, your middle point, and your closing point.

Now, spend some time in prayer, sit down at a table and spread all of your cards out. Look at all the ideas, scriptures, inspirations you have written down! Look at your three key points. Which cards fit best under which topic? Does your story from the news help illustrate a point in the opening, or is it better in the middle? Does a scripture work in the first opening point, or is it better in the closing. Play around with this. Move the cards around and see what works best for you.

If possible, leave the notes on a table and come back later to see if anything has changed in your discernment. I offer you one warning: you will have more ideas, more scriptures, more illustration than you will ever be able to use in the actual teaching. Don't try to get everything in. Your talk will be so overloaded, so "heavy" that no one will understand it!

Reviewing our three points will help here.

What is your opening thought? Can you give us an example which will help make your point? Is there a particular scripture which will help people understand? In other words.....look at all your notes and use three or four of your cards to enhance your original point.



Repeat the same procedure for the second point and again for your third point which begins to bring your talk to its conclusion.

Again.... DO NOT TRY TO USE ALL OF THE CARDS! Use only the few that help illustrate the points you are trying to make. Don't feel bad about all of those cards; the very act of writing all of that down actually has been part of the preparation within you to give this teaching...nothing has been wasted.

So where are we now?

You have your three key points, and you have the three or four ideas that support each point. Good! Now you need to put it in a format that you can use to deliver the talk. I think the best way is to create a simple outline of your three points and your supporting points. By this time, you are quite familiar with the material and just a few words on the paper will trigger your memory of what to say. If you write too many words on your outline, you may get confused when giving the talk and lose track of where you are. Some things I write out completely, though. Let's say that under my second point, I want to give a short quote from the Holy Father as an example. On my outline, I will write out the exact quote, so that I can read it directly from my paper. But if I am telling a story as an illustration, I don't need to write it out because I know the story well enough to tell it correctly. Write an outline...not a book!

Well, we have discerned our topic, we have prepared it....now we actually have to give it!

Step three: How to deliver the teaching.

There are a few things to pay attention to as you deliver the talk. The first one is more of a technical aspect. Our ICCRS President Michelle Moran, who is really a fantastic teacher always urges us to "own your space." By that she means to be prepared, be comfortable with the space in which you are speaking. Do you have a podium? Is the microphone working? Are you *sure* it's working? Can everyone in the audience see you or are some people seated behind a pillar or a large potted plant? Do you know where you need to stand so that everyone can see you? Are you physically comfortable with everything? These things are important because you do not want to deal with them once your teaching starts. I have seen great teachings ruined because a microphone quit, the room was too hot, people could not see the speaker...things of that nature. Take the time to deal with this before you begin the talk...or they will cause you trouble later.

The next thing to pay attention to is your own attitude. Are you nervous? Do you think you are better than the people you are talking to? Are you trying to impress people? Before you begin your teaching, ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten your heart. If the Lord shows you something about your attitude, surrender it immediately into the merciful hands of God. Sometimes a teacher gives a very good talk, but their attitude is so bad that it undermines the teaching itself! **Pay attention to your own heart.** Remember, you are giving the teaching as an act of service to God's people. True humility goes a long way!



Finally a word about the presentation:

Make good eye contact with your audience.

Be familiar enough with your outline that you can be comfortable and confident with what you are saying.

Be loud enough to be heard...but don't yell.

Speak slowly enough and clearly enough so that your audience can understand you.

Stay within the allotted time for your talk.

Two significant components of a great prayer meeting are leading dynamic praise and giving a good teaching. Seek God's grace and do your homework. You can be confident that God will help you as you serve His people. I am greatly encouraged by our beloved St. Paul who tells us in Ephesians 6, verse 13. One translation says it this way....."**DO ALL THAT YOUR DUTY REQUIRES, THEN STAND YOUR GROUND.**" In other words, whatever you can do to prepare and deliver a good teaching do so. Take responsibility. But then.... surrender everything to God, trusting in His divine aid. Don't worry about mistakes, we all make them. Offer everything to God....it will be o.k.

Thank you, and thanks again for the great work you are doing throughout the world to make our Catholic Charismatic prayer meetings an exciting encounter with God! God bless you. Amen.