

Dancing Prayer With the Physically and Emotionally Handicapped

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Dancing a prayer is possible for everyone. The heart beats. The breath breathes. Images form. Why dancing prayer? It is my conviction that God needs all of us to bring all of ourselves. Human research concludes that sensory deprivation equals mental deterioration. The kinesthetic sense need to be stimulated for the mind, body and spirit's health.

Starting with this in mind, I prayerfully let go of judgment and expectations. If my prayer is successful there is no pressure, at least from me. I invite and encourage the participants to give themselves permission to begin. Dancing prayer is in community. A suggestion for building the community is to lead everyone into simple breathing then stretching movements. As the stretching movements develop (recommend each stretcher use as much imagination as possible) and the energy begins to flow, give the movements a name as prayer. Look for a theme to show itself in the movements. If the word "stretching" suggests itself and feel comfortable, pick up a simple stretch that someone in the group moved. Make everyone try it. Pick another and another for everyone to try together. Can it go further? If so, have partners take a movement already practiced and add one of their own. A next step could be to have groups of three work with already familiar movements and add one of their own. This may be a good place to stop. Ask participants to share any words that may have come to them as they prayed (only if this feels comfortable). A corporate dance prayer can be developed out of any level of the above. If the group is limited to individual stretching movements offer the image of each individual prayer stretching its prayer in community to God. If the group has developed movements to share in the threes, the whole group might want to pray their favorite trio in unison or divide in half and pray two favorites, either simultaneously or with one following the other. As a help in building the community prayer, I might consider using words that were shared or music if is available. Take the group as far as their abilities will allow. Try not to underestimate these abilities.

Giving as well as receiving is especially important for handicapped people. Whenever possible, plan to have the created prayer shared with the whole church community. Refreshments, healing, a greater sense of community and delight have all been unexpected rewards.