



Inviting God's Presence:

Congregational Committees
Seeking God

***Inviting God's Presence* for congregational committees is an urgently needed training tool - especially video format. Unless we learn the art of "being church" for each other, and not just "doing church," we will miss the next generation of leaders who desperately crave meetings with God, not just the agenda.**

Kent Ira Groff

founding mentor of Oasis Ministries and
author of *The Soul of Tomorrow's Church:
Weaving Spiritual Practices in Ministry Together* and
What Would I Believe If I Didn't Believe Anything?
A Handbook for Spiritual Orphans.



Inviting God's Presence: Congregational Committees Seeking God video and listening guide will assist congregational committees in seeking God's presence, direction, and guidance as they make deliberations and important decisions regarding the life and work of the local church. Power is available through the Spirit of God. Why not open our hearts, minds and wills, to the vigor, force, and strength of Almighty God?

Inviting God's Presence: Congregational Committees Seeking God began as a dream of the Leadership Development Taskforce of the North Central Region (five local associations) in partnership with the Baptist State Convention. The actual video script was put together by a special team of people committed to spiritual formation within the local church. Those who served on the team were: Mari Wiles, FBC Knightdale; Rick Hughes, Baptist State Convention; Karen Sherin, Hester BC, Oxford; Clella Lee, Lafayette BC, Fayetteville; Kevin Byers, Pilot BC, Zebulon; and Wendy Minton Edwards, Baptist State Convention. Special thanks to each of these for their commitment to the process and openness to the spirit of God.

This guide is divided into three sections.

Section One is a discussion guide. The video-tape is cued to pause at eight points. It is suggested that viewers stop the tape at each point. Questions are provided in the discussion guide that will help committees to personalize the teachings. They will guide committee members to reflect and ponder how the ideas in the tape might be incorporated into their committee ministry.

Section Two provides 20 additional suggestions of simple spiritual practices for committees. These are in addition to those provided in the tape.

Section Three is a list of resources that explain spiritual practices and how they can be incorporated into groups, committees, and teams within the church. Numerous spiritual practices are described in the listed resources.



Discussion Guide

Cue One

Cue One

Discussion following the Introduction.

- Recall Elijah's experience of hearing God's voice. When did he hear God speak? Have there been times when you personally sought God's voice? When did you hear God most clearly? Have there been times when your congregation sought God's direction? How and when did you best hear God?
- Why is it important for church committees to seek God, no matter what their responsibilities are?
- Are you aware of God's plan for the future of your congregation? How has that divine plan been revealed? Are there ways it is still being revealed?
 - How has your committee sought God's will in the past?



Cue Two

Discussion following the Biblical Vision of the Church Discussion.

- Why is the biblical vision of the church important? What happens when everyone thinks his/her wishes are what's most important?
- How do we "abide" in Christ as an individual? As a congregation?
- Why is God's strength and power essential for the body of Christ?
- How has your congregation sought God's presence and power in the past?

Cue Three

Discussion following the Stewardship Committee Meeting.

- What benefits are gained by beginning a meeting with participants sharing a relevant recent experience?
- Why are moments of silent, prayerful listening important in committee meetings?
- Recall a time when you or someone you know had a recent experience that prepared your heart, influenced your thinking, or changed your mind prior to a specific committee meeting. Did you share that experience with the group? How did it affect the progression and outcome of the meeting?

Cue Four

Discussion following the Building and Grounds Committee Meeting.

- How did the committee members demonstrate their dependence on God? Recall times when you have been a part of a committee that relied on God to supply the resources you needed.
- How did the group discern (determine) God's will?
- Why is recalling relevant biblical passages important in committee work? Recall a time when a specific biblical passage(s) helped you and/or a committee you were on come to a decision.
- What benefit was gained by each subgroup going to the specific area that it was addressing?

Cue Five

Discussion following the Church Council (Administrative Team) Meeting.

- Why is it important for everyone's perspective to be heard in a committee meeting? Recall a time when you left a committee meeting feeling like no one heard or cared what you thought.
- How did pausing for reflection on a biblical passage, story, or experience affect the committee meeting?
- What benefit does reading a passage several times provide?
- Why is it important for the group to share reflections following the Scripture reading?
- What benefit can be gained in a committee meeting for a participant to call for a moment of silence or a moment of prayer?

Cue Six

Discussion following the Future Planning Committee Meeting.

- Why is it important for committee members to pray and prayerfully listen to God before coming to the committee meeting? Recall a time when you spiritually prepared yourself for a committee meeting by seeking God prior to the meeting. What difference did it make for you? For the committee meeting?
- The Building and Grounds Committee was discussing relocating, but their questions for discussion centered around spiritual concerns. Why are these the most important questions for consideration? How would they help the group make a healthy decision? Recall a time when a committee you were a part of made a decision based on inappropriate questions and answers.
- What benefit was gained by group members writing their thoughts on the posters?
- Why was prayerful group reflection important?



Cue Seven

Discussion following the Deacon's (Governing Board) Meeting.

- Why is it important to begin the Deacon's Meeting with a biblical focus? Recall a time when you participated in a committee meeting that began in this manner. What difference did it make?
- The deacons passed a towel around as each one briefly shared. What difference did the towel make? Recall a time when a symbolic item was used in a committee meeting you were a part of. How did it affect the meeting?
- How did the committee meeting help the participants see God's presence in their daily lives? Recall a time when God's presence was real to you in your daily experience? In a committee meeting?
- How did beginning the meeting in this manner prepare the group members for dealing with the remainder of the agenda?

Cue Eight

Following Video.

- How can you invite God to be a part of your committee meeting?
- How can you listen for God's "still, small voice?"
- What biblical passages or stories describe your current committee meetings? After what passages or stories would you like to pattern your committee meetings?
- How will you recognize and honor God's presence in your committee meetings?

Inviting God's Presence:

Congregational Committees Seeking God

The practices demonstrated in this video to help committees work from a spiritual, discernment framework are only the tip of the iceberg. Literally hundreds of ideas, strategies, and tips can be found in the resources listed in the "For Further Help" section of this guide. Never try to use too many practices in one meeting. Choose one or two that seem appropriate for your situation. Evaluate how the practices go and use that learning as you choose other practices for other meetings.



For quick and easy reference, following are 20 simple suggestions that can be utilized to help committee meetings proceed smoothly, inviting God's very presence to provide guidance and direction as important decisions and ministries are planned and provided. You'll be surprised how quickly your work can be done and how much fun you can have with it when you go about it with God and God's Kingdom as the priority.

Spiritual Practices for Committee Meetings

- Discuss this approach to committee work with your committee members. Show the video, stopping at each cued part for discussion. Come to consensus that you want God's presence and voice to be a part of all your committee meetings. Seek commitment to this process from each committee member.
- If your meeting room will allow, arrange the chairs in a circle. Be sure there are enough chairs for everyone. Include one extra chair as a visible symbol of God's presence.
- Light a candle at the beginning of the meeting as a visible symbol of God's presence in the meeting. Extinguish the candle at the meeting conclusion.
- Include some form of Scripture praying. Don't just quickly read a text. But read it slowly and prayerfully as your prayer to God. Allow a few moments of silence for reflection on the text.
- Ask one or more of the participants to bring some meditative thoughts about the topic for discussion to the meeting. If you are on a Stewardship Committee, focus your meditation on stewardship concerns, etc. There are numerous books and resources in the section

“For Further Help” that contain brief meditations. Allow time for silent reflection and brief sharing.

- Invite group participants to call for prayer at any time he/she feels the need. Example - when the discussion gets tense, when difficult decisions must be made, when unpleasant issues arise, or even when wonderful news is shared, one might ask the group to pause for a moment of silence and prayer. It's amazing what a short break, to remind everyone of God's presence, can do to prioritize the focus.
- Begin the meeting by asking everyone who would like to share to tell a brief story of how God has worked in his/her life during the past week or month. Focus the sharing towards the topic at hand. Example - If you're on a Missions Committee, ask for the sharing to be around the mission needs that each one has seen or discovered recently, or the nudges they have felt to be involved in helping others.
- Use music as often as possible. Take a moment of silence as a soft, reflective song is played. Choose music that supports the topic for discussion.



- No matter what the topic of conversation or the decision to be made, ask the group if anyone can recall a Scripture text or Bible story that relates to the issue. Read the text and/or share the story. Discuss any parallels between the biblical encounter and the immediate situation at hand.



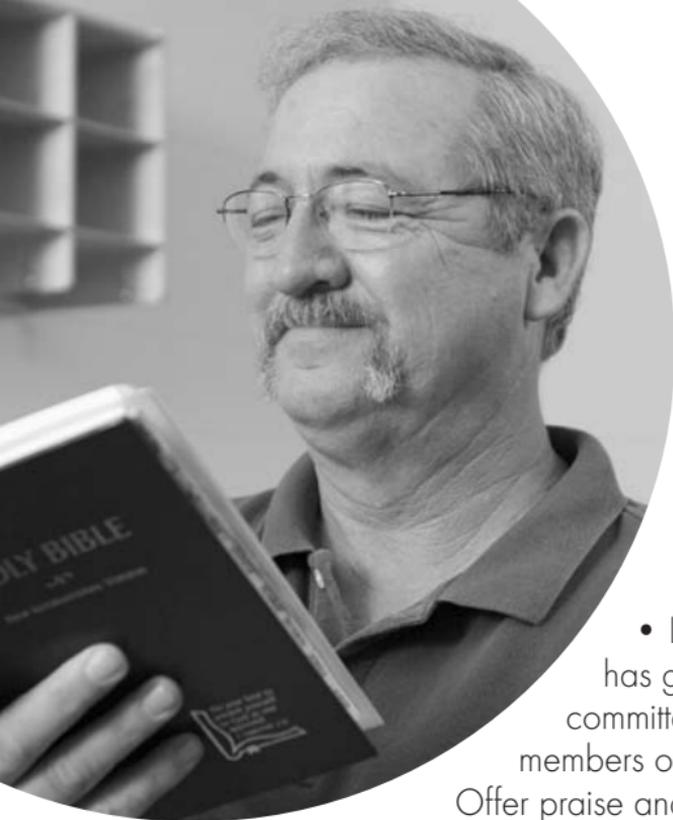
- No matter what the topic of conversation or the decision to be made, ask the group if anyone can remember how the church has dealt with similar issues in the past. Discuss the historical pattern of the congregation in relation to this concern. How can you, as a congregation, continue to be true to your longstanding beliefs and practices? How can the historical traditions be honored in a culturally relevant way? How can the original vision of the church be maintained?

- At the beginning of a meeting in which important decisions must be made, divide the meeting into fifteen-minute segments. Invite a different member of the committee to silently pray specifically for the work of the committee during each fifteen-minute segment.

- Utilize a form of prayer that is called Lectio Divina (Latin term for “Sacred Reading”). Choose a short text that is appropriate for the topic of conversation.
 - Slowly, prayerfully read the text. Pause.
 - Ask group members to each share one word of the text that “touched” or stood out to him/her.
 - Slowly, prayerfully read the text again. Pause.
 - Ask group members to share the feeling that is aroused within him/her in hearing the text.
 - Slowly, prayerfully read the text another time. Pause.
 - Ask group members to share how he/she believes God would have them respond to the text.
 - Conclude with prayer for the courage to make that response.

Various authors suggest slightly different patterns to this process. Feel free to experiment with your Lectio Divina prayer pattern.





- Look for ways God has gifted each committee member and the members of the congregation.

Offer praise and thanksgiving to God for those gifts. Encourage those identified to share brief testimonies at committee meetings, during worship services, etc. Affirm those who are gifted and who utilize their gifts. Invite others with gifts (which is everyone) to utilize them in the ministry of the Church.

- In a decision-making situation, ask the committee to ponder and discuss four questions:
 - What does Scripture teach about this issue?
 - What has been the experience of the Church universal throughout history in this matter?
 - What is reasonable and/or feasible for you in your context?
 - How are you experiencing God's presence/leaning in this matter?

This order is suggested. Scripture should always be the priority. These questions are generally referred to as "the Wesleyan quadrilateral."

- Begin a committee meeting by asking each participant to name one thought, idea, attitude, or issue he/she needs to lay aside in order to accurately hear God's voice. Possibilities might include: discouragement, anger, anxiety, weariness, fear, resentment, etc. Follow with a moment of silence and prayer that each of these would not interfere with your understanding and experience of God's presence.
- Invite each committee member to share what originally brought him/her to your church. Thank God for the ways the Lord has ministered to people through your congregation. Use that data to guide your future efforts.
- *Pass the Peace.* Begin or conclude a meeting by asking participants to one at the time look within the eyes of the person next to him/her, call his/her name, and say from the heart, "The Peace of Christ be with you." That person would then respond, "And also with you," and then turn and pass it on to the next person.



- Invite committee members to empty his/her pockets and/or purses and look for items that could be symbols of God and God's Kingdom. Potential items could be keys, medication, Bible or any written Scriptures, nail files, pictures, glasses, etc. Discuss how your committee is called to provide clear spiritual vision (glasses), provide spiritual relief (medication), open the doors of the Kingdom (keys), etc. through its assigned task.
- As an alternative to the normal refreshments served at committee meetings, take a few moments before making an important decision to serve water. Ask committee members to drink a glass of water in silence as he/she spends that few minutes in silent reflection.

- Divide the committee into four small groups. Invite one small group to pray for the physical needs of the committee members, another group to pray for the financial needs of the committee members, one to pray for the emotional, social, and psychological needs of the members, and one to pray for the spiritual needs of the members. Close by joining hands or touching one another on the shoulder and lifting up the group to God, both individually and as a team.



For Further Help

The strategies utilized in the video-tape represent only a small number of the possibilities that can be used to help committees discern God's direction. Further ideas and suggestions can be found in the following resources.

44 Questions for Congregational Self-Appraisal

Lyle E. Schaller

Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998

The Art of Prayer: A Pathway to Spiritual Growth

Meryl Doney

Nashville, TN: Dimensions For Living, 1999

The Art of Prayer: A Simple Guide

Timothy Jones

New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1997

Attentive to God: Spirituality in the Church Committee

Karen Marie Yust

St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001

Be Still: Designing and Leading Contemplative Retreat

Jane E. Vennard

Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 2000

Beyond Consensus: Salvaging Sense of the Meeting

Barry Morley

Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1993

Beyond the Ordinary: Spirituality for Church Leaders

Ben Campbell Johnson and Andrew Dreitcer

Grand Rapids, MI:

William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2001

Calming the Restless Spirit: A Journey Toward God

Ben Campbell Johnson

Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1997

Celebrate Life: Rituals for Home and Church

Peter Young

Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1999

***Discerning God's Will Together:
A Spiritual Practice for the Church***

Danny E. Morris and Charles M. Olsen

Bethesda, MD: Alban Publications, 1997

Doors Into Prayer: An Invitation

Emile Griffin

Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2001

Growing Together:

Spiritual Exercises for Church Committees

Rochelle Melander and Harold Eppley

Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 1998

Grounded in God: Listening Hearts

Discernment for Group Deliberations

Suzanne G. Farnham

Hull & McLean, Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse

Publishing, 1998

A Guide to Spiritual Discernment

Rueben Job

Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1996

Imagining a Church in the Spirit:

A Task for Mainline Congregations

Ben Campbell Johnson and Glenn McDonald

Grand Rapids, MI:

William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999

***Inviting God In: Scriptural Reflections and
Prayers Throughout the Year***

Joyce Rupp

Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2001

Is That You, Lord:

Practical Methods for Learning Spiritual Discernment

Roberta Rogers

Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2000

Listening to God In Times of Choice:

The Art of Discerning God's Will

Gordon T. Smith

Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997

***Paths to Prayer: Finding Your Own Way
to the Presence of God***

Patricia D. Brown

San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2003

Paying Attention to God: Discernment in Prayer

William A. Barry

Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1999

Recovering the Sacred Center:

Church Renewal From the Inside Out

Howard E. Friend, Jr.

Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1998

Scripture & Discernment:

Decision Making in The Church

Luke Timothy Johnson

Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1983

Seeking & Doing God's Will:

Discernment for the Community of Faith

Garrie Stevens, Pamela Lardear, and Sharon Duger

Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1998

The Shattered Lantern:

Rediscovering a Felt Presence of God

Ronald Rolheiser

New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing, 2001

Six Ways to Pray from Six Great Saints: Francis of Assisi, Clare of Assisi, Ignatius of Loyola, Theresa of Lisieux, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross

Gloria Hutchinson

Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1982

***The Soul of the Congregation:
An Invitation to Congregational Reflection***

Thomas Edward Frank

Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000

***Soul Tending: Life-Forming Practices for
Older Youth and Young Adults***

Broyles, Burton, Carter, Cousart, Dyson, Meaker,
Mittman, Oliver, Pippin, Roberson, Sa, Vaughan,
and Youngman

Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002

***The Soul of Tomorrow's Church:
Weaving Spiritual Practices in Ministry Together***

Kent Ira Groff

Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2000

Spiritual Life in the Congregation: A Guide for Retreats

Rueben Job

Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1997

Spirituality Matters for Committee Meetings

Kent Ira Groff

Camp Hill, PA: Oasis Ministries, 1996

Spiritual Practices for Beginners and Leaders

Kent Ira Groff

Camp Hill, PA: Oasis Ministries, 1996

***Where the Heart Longs to Go:
A New Image for Pastoral Ministry***

Thad Rutter, Jr.

Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1998



Baptist State Convention of North Carolina •

Milton A. Hollifield, Jr., Executive Director-Treasurer

The missions and ministries of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina are made possible by your gifts through the Cooperative Program Missions Giving and the North Carolina Missions Offering. ©BSCNC