



---

## Clergy Stress & Self Care Presentation

Health Through the Way God Designed Our Body  
Dr. Karen Shields Wright, MS, DM

---

# Table of Contents

---

<b>Setting the Groundwork</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Introduction.....	1
What you will come away with .....	1
We will review.....	1
<b>Definition of Health</b> .....	<b>2</b>
Two Universal Definitions of Health .....	2
A comparison of these two definitions of health .....	2
<b>Stress is a lived experience</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Definition of Stress.....	3
What are Stressors .....	3
<b>Our Body &amp; God’s Design</b> .....	<b>4</b>
The Nervous System .....	4
Central Nervous System .....	4
The Brain’s Function .....	5
Neural Flexibility.....	6
Peripheral Nervous System .....	6
Our Body’s Reaction to Stress .....	7
Chronic Stress.....	7
Health & Well-being .....	7
<b>Antidote to Stress</b> .....	<b>8</b>
God’s Design: The Relaxation Response .....	8
The Physiological Effects of the Relaxation Response .....	8
Remembered Wellness .....	9
The Faith Factor .....	9
The Faith Factor & God Wellness .....	9
<b>The Tools</b> .....	<b>10</b>
Our Horizon .....	10
Ancient Christian Practices vs. Contemporary non faith-based Practices.....	10
Mind/Body Medicine .....	11
<b>Relaxation Techniques</b> .....	<b>11</b>

The Relaxation Response .....	12
Relaxation Response Technique .....	12
Breathing.....	13
Relaxed Breathing.....	13
A Mini Destressor.....	13
Visualization Techniques.....	14
Quieting Reflex.....	14
A mini Visualization .....	14
Neuro-Musculo-Skeletal Techniques .....	16
Muscle Relaxation Technique .....	16
Progressive Relaxation Training Technique .....	16
Mindfulness.....	17
Focused Attention.....	17
Tips on how to reduce stress throughout the day .....	17
<b>Methods of Praying .....</b>	<b>18</b>
8 Methods of Praying.....	18
Ancient Methods .....	18
Prayer of the Heart.....	18
Lectio Divina.....	19
Ignatian Prayer Methods .....	25
The 5 Step Structure Method.....	25
Meditation.....	26
Imaginative Meditation .....	27
Prayer of the Interior Senses .....	28
Contemplation.....	29
Prayer of Silent Love.....	29
Contemplative Word Methods .....	31
Centering Prayer - Contemplative Outreach.....	31
Christian Meditation - World Christian Movement .....	31
The Word Based Method of Both .....	31
Notes on Word Based Methods .....	31
Prayers and Mind Body Medicine .....	32
Selective Scriptures for Imaginative Meditation .....	33

Information.....	36
Tips on Well-ness Whole Care .....	36
Photos .....	36
About the author.....	37

Health Through the Way God Designed Our Body  
Dr. Karen Shields Wright, MS, DM

---

## Setting the Groundwork

### Introduction

I would like to thank the team members and all who have participated in this conference for the opportunity to present to you today. What I have come to experience in my career and practice as a health care provider, spiritual director, patient advocate and role of chaplain is that God has ways of health and healing available for all, and it is free already built into us.

I am very much honored to share this with you, my favorite people - the clergy - for you are on the front lines, the first responders of the soul, a most needed and important and place to be. We are humbled to help you, as you have helped us through continuing your vocational call.



*Church of the Holy Sepulcher*

### What you will come away with

- A faith based definition of health
- More knowledge about how God designed our body
- The self-healing mechanisms He implanted within us
- New tools to reduce stress

### We will review

- The methods of prayer in the Christian tradition used throughout the centuries that assist in our interior life with God, and how they also activate the Relaxation Response thus reducing the effects of stress on our health

# Definition of Health

## Two Universal Definitions of Health

### World Health Organization

"Health is a state of **complete** physical, mental, and social **well-being** and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." [WHO]

*Do you know anyone who fits this definition?*

### Saint Pope John Paul II

"Health is a **dynamic tension** towards physical, mental, social, and spiritual **harmony**, and not only the absence of illness, which **gives** man the ability to **fulfill the mission** which has been entrusted to him, **according to the state of life** in which he finds himself." [St. John Paul II]

*How true does this explanation describe health?*

## A comparison of these two definitions of health

- WHO left out spiritual aspect of the human person. St. John Paul II has the model of the human person with a spiritual component.
- "Dynamic tension...harmony" - implies a relational balance [if one is weak physically, yet one can be strong spiritually].
- "Towards"- implies that a 'complete well-being' in each area may not be realistic or achievable; and we, as human persons, are in a continuing state of 'being' [growing, learning] and one that has been given a mission in life [we do have a purpose].
- St. John Paul II placed the role of health in the perspective, as an aspect of the human person, but not one's ultimate fulfillment or one's ultimate goal or purpose in life to achieve.

From God's eyes we can have a healthy cancer patient when we are in harmony... for one is continuing to move towards God... for our mission in life is to get to heaven and our purpose is to love God with our 'whole heart, mind and soul, and love one another as we love ourselves as He loves us.

*You as clergy are the physicians of the soul - healthy souls have happy hearts*

# Stress is a lived experience

---

## Definition of Stress

Stress is a lived experience.

We are **bio-psycho-social-spiritual beings** who experience stress in multi ways. Stress is our body's responses to a stressor that stimulates the nervous, endocrine, and immune systems having short or long-term negative health effects - long term effects are harmful to our bodies and minds, and possibly affects our souls' life.

Stress as a term came into the health conversation in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The term was introduced by Hans Selye, an endocrinologist who studied the responses of an organism to stressors.

## What are Stressors

Stressors are events. Examples are:

- Environmental – weather, loud sounds, pollution, too much lightness or darkness
- Daily stress - traffic jams, losing one's wallet
- Life change– birth, marriage, death, divorcee, job loss, moving
- Work place – long hours, high demands
- Chemical – alcohol, drugs, tobacco, malnutrition
- Social – poverty, family demands
- Spiritual – sin, lack of a prayer life, a distance from God, the dark night of the soul

Biological [physical], psychological, social or spiritual stressors will create a wide range of physical responses [stress] in our bodies causing an impact in the homeostasis [the balance] of the body. Our bodies have been designed to survive. Today the daily stressors are different, yet just as real to our bodies. We cannot remove all the stressors from our lives. Stress is inevitable, yet our reactions to the stressors and its effects on our health can be mitigated.

# Our Body & God's Design

## The Nervous System

Our body's nervous system is a complex interconnected networked system that coordinates all of our voluntary and involuntary physiological activities via transmitting signals to all parts of our body. It has two main parts Central and Peripheral. When this system becomes overloaded due to a stressor, we experience stress. Becoming familiar with some of its functions helps us become more aware of the danger signals due to stress that are affecting our health.

## Central Nervous System

The Central nervous system consists of the brain and spinal cord that play a crucial role in the psycho-biological sensory system. The interconnectivity of our body is designed for control and regulation, yet when a stressor becomes overwhelming it creates a cascade effect, thereby affecting every part of our body.

The mind plays a critical role our perception of and response to stress. This is important to note – one's perception of a situation is a critical factor in how one's body automatically responds to a stressor.

## Parts of the Central Nervous System

- **Hypothalamus** This section governs our automatic responses; it maintains the body's status quo system-wide. It links the nervous system to the endocrine system. [When the nervous system is overloaded it affects all our hormones].
- **Pituitary gland** lies just under the hypothalamus. It secretes hormones that regulate i.e. growth, BP, breast milk, thyroid, our metabolism, temperature, pain relief, etc. During a stress response for example it releases *adrenocorticotrophic* hormone to stimulate the adrenal glands.
- **Adrenal glands** sit on top of our kidneys– one of its hormones is *cortisol* that is released during a stress response, which suppresses the body's immune system. [Notice how when one is stressed their overall health is affected].
- **Amygdala** plays a role in memory, decision making, processes our emotions and modulates our stress responses. We will experience different levels of anxiety or fear depending how much of it is being stimulated.



- **Hippocampus** plays a role in memory formation; it connects with the hypothalamus and amygdala. It modulates our response by enhancing it or suppressing memory. Chronic stress damages this part of the brain leading to a vicious cycle. In Alzheimer's disease this is one of the first regions to suffer.
- **Prefrontal cortex** is the front part of our brain that regulates cognitive processing such as problem solving, planning, and attention. This part of our brain becomes impaired during a stress response. [Notice how when one is exhibiting stress one is less effective].

*The stress response suppresses our ability to think clearly, fight off infections, remember, increases our feelings of anxiety and fear, affecting the body's entire system.*

## The Brain's Function

There is no simple explanation of how our brains function. However, what scientists have discovered is that it consists of over 100 billion neurons – nerve cells, and there are messages transmitted from one neuron to another neuron across connecting junctions called synapses.

Each nerve cell has between 1000 – 500,000 synapses having about 100 trillion connections at any given time. Within these synapses are chemical neurotransmitters that express a particular message. [The most familiar to us is the neurotransmitter **adrenaline**, which we experience in the **fight-or-flight response** when under stress.] Even with the trillions of messages, your brain retains and recalls all these transmissions as a **memory** by a nerve cell activation.

The brain responds to 3 sources of stimuli:

- The outside environment
- The inside environment of our body, which is a bottom-up stimuli
- The brain itself, which is a top-down stimuli – *what you think affects you*

Stimuli from any of these three sources will then be matched to other similar nerve cell activations in the past, thereby reactivating a memory. This nerve cell activation then recreates a similar or the original physical sensation associated with that memory.

Major, repetitive or ongoing stressors create lasting memories that can be harmful unless we either reduce the stressor or intentionally 'reformat' our thinking to readjust our body's responses. Involuntary recurrent memories called *flashbacks* are when a person 'relives' the experience as if happening in real time, thus one experiences stress.

Eliciting the Relaxation Response helps reduce the effects of stress by reducing the 'bottom-up and 'top-down' stimuli [resting our body and minds]. Prayer even more so.

## Neural Flexibility

Fortunately for us, our minds and brains are not so fixed. Our genetic predisposition has the capacity for changing our brains called **neuroplasticity**. We have the ability to change our attitudes, which changes the brain, thereby affecting how our body automatically reacts. This plasticity [or adaptability] was observed by scientists using magnetic resonance.

*That is why forgiveness is important, for it reduces the stress affect of, not just on our souls, but also on our health.*

## Peripheral Nervous System

The Peripheral Nervous System is part of the nervous system that exists outside the brain and spinal cord. It connects the Central Nervous system to the organs and limbs, serving as a communication relay system. It has two main parts.

1. **Somatic Nervous System** – is the voluntary conscious part that innervates our Muscles & Skin. It has two pathways:

- Sensory (Afferent) - this relays sensations from muscles and skin to the brain
- Motor (Efferent) - this sends signals from brain to muscles and skin

2. **Automatic Nervous System** –has 3 parts each with the two pathways Sensory and Motor as in the Somatic Nervous System, is it involuntary and unconscious, it innervates our organs, also is called Visceral Nervous System

- **Enteric Nervous System** – it is in the GI system only and works independently from the other systems
- **Sympathetic Nervous System** – known for its *Flight or Fight* mechanism, it operates through the Thoracic and Lumbar nerves
- **Parasympathetic Nervous System** – known for *Rest & Digest* activation, it operates through the Cranial and Sacrum nerves

Sympathetic Nervous System and Parasympathetic Nervous System are complementary in nature; when one is activated the other 'takes a back seat'.

## Our Body's Reaction to Stress

The Sympathetic Nervous System is the quick response mobilizing system in which when it acknowledges a stressor it will activate its 'flight and fight' mechanism:

- Dilates the pupils
- Inhibits salivation – *dry mouth*
- Dilates the bronchioles to receive more oxygen
- Accelerates the heart
- Increases blood flow to the extremities and lungs
- Inhibits digestion
- Stimulates the release by liver of glucose for energy – *high blood sugar*
- Activates the hormones of adrenals to be ready to take action

## Chronic Stress

Chronic stress is one of the main reasons for diseases such as High blood pressure. Stress produces a decline in our thought processes. We need to maintain homeostasis for the brain needs to continuously form new neural connections, to reorganize its pathways, and to fix the damage caused by injury and disease.

## Health & Well-being

Reducing the effects of stress using relaxation response methods for health reasons is critical. Utilizing techniques that operate how our body is designed should become part of our daily health routine.

For we are temples of the Holy Spirit and are called to be good stewards needing to take the responsibility for what we are given. They can be easily integrated into our preparation for prayer.

Well-being is a general term for the condition of an individual or group as seen used in health care or in economics that looks to evaluate the quality of life, measuring it subjectively and objectively. Assessing cognitive or affective well-being is represented negatively by anxiety or positively by calmness, or an overall state of 'contentment' or a given 'sense of peace'.

# Antidote to Stress

## God's Design: The Relaxation Response

There are different stress reducing techniques that elicit a Relaxation Response with the goal of increasing one's health potential. Moreover there are different meditative and contemplative prayer practices that also have a health benefit by-product of producing the physical relaxation response.

The Relaxation Response elicits signals to the nervous system producing physiological changes that ultimately produces a sense of well-being. It assists in regulating the body's homeostasis.

## The Physiological Effects of the Relaxation Response

When using relaxation techniques or the different prayerful methods your body responds uniquely different to daytime rest and to sleep, yet similar. The Relaxation Response stimulates a lowering of the 'flight and fight' mechanism produced by the Sympathetic Nervous System while it stimulates the Parasympathetic Nervous System that turns on the 'rest' mechanisms. Some of the physical changes are:

- Increase in salivation
- Reduction in heart rate
- Normalized rate of breathing
- Increase digestion
- Reduction in muscle tension\*
- Increase in sexual function
- Increase in alpha brain waves\*\*

Note: There is a metabolic downshifting by 10-17% during the Relaxation Response within the first 3 minutes, yet during sleep it takes 4-5 hours to obtain an average of 8%. In addition, there has been shown a marked decrease in blood lactate levels, a substance produced by contracting or tense\* muscles. Increased blood lactate levels has been associated with the feelings of anxiety. Alpha waves\*\* are found in the 'meditative' states are not found in sleep, and have been reported to be associated with a sense of well-being.

## Remembered Wellness

Remembered Wellness is a term used in place of the 'placebo effect' because of the pejorative connotations associated with the latter. Scientists call this our body's natural built-in healing ability; some even see it is based upon our desire for health, as if to 'remember', thereby creating a change in our neurophysiology.

Can our body translate our beliefs into what brings about emotional, psychological, and physical wellness? This is the mechanism researchers believe is involved in the healing phenomenon – our desire or belief stimulates positive physiological changes.

## The Faith Factor

Research has also shown that when one relies on their faith-based beliefs in order to elicit the Relaxation Response during a 'meditative practice', one will have an increased health benefit. In addition, one will have a greater sense of well-being, which could explain the reported increased sense of a 'spirituality'.

Herbert Benson, MD at Harvard concluded that these faith-beliefs help stimulate the Remembered Wellness - that is the cause of such unexplained healings. Benson concluded that we humans are genetically designed for spiritual beliefs. He believes that we have the ability to harness the power of our religious convictions to enhance the effects of the Relaxation Response in order to achieve the fullest use of the Remembered Wellness mechanism.

## The Faith Factor & God Wellness

Those in Mind/Body research were surprised to find most people - 80% chose a religious word or phrase to elicit their Relaxation Response when using a relaxation technique to achieve Remembered Wellness. Benson reported 25% of those who did choose a faith-based word had fewer illnesses and symptoms than those who did not use a faith-based word or phrase as their focusing element. Of those who did, they reported:

- A presence of an energy or force, a power they called God, something beyond themselves, and that this presence felt close to them.

This was a common experience for patients in which scientists believed provided the stimulus for the physical manifestations that wellness researches called a *God wellness*. We can find in the writings of both Jewish and Christian mystics this same experience was felt during contemplative prayers.

# The Tools

## Our Horizon

All that is presented today is intended to be directed towards our horizon Our Lord. These techniques and methods should have as one's ultimate purpose to deepen our relationship with Jesus Christ. For health is a byproduct of healing, and healing is what comes from only one ultimate source our Creator.

These relaxation techniques are just that - techniques for enhancing our body's self-regulation homeostatic mechanism for health benefits. While the prayer methods presented here can have as their by-product positive secondary health benefits, in addition to affecting one's spiritual health. These types of devotional methods have been used by the western or eastern fathers and mothers of the Church and for centuries by mystics and saints, and are here today for us who are humbly seeking to become saints.

## Ancient Christian Practices vs. Contemporary non faith-based Practices

Note: Today we find the term 'meditation' used in multiple venues today. The term has been taken from the Judeo Christian tradition.

We could of easily titled our topic "Spirituality the antidote to Stress" or "Spirituality the way to Health". For there has been much research done by scientists on the effects of one's faith on health. Spirituality as defined here is one's practice of their faith's [religious] beliefs.

The term 'spirituality' is used in some 'Body, Mind & Spirit' wellness programs, as if it implies the spiritual side of the person will be addressed, when in fact many do not. Those who use the term 'Mind/Body Medicine' are clear about the intentions and limits of their techniques for treatments.

## Mind/Body Medicine

The intention and goal of any technique or method needs to be set clear and upfront from the beginning. Mind/Body techniques should be used for health reasons, and can be used to assist one in being more 'settled' to be able to experience more fully God who resides in us.

The health care system has moved from a biomedical model to a bio-psycho-social model and has come around to acknowledging the bio-psycho-social-spiritual model. Faith does play a part in health and wellness, as we all know.

Mind-body therapies can be used as effective adjuncts to conventional treatment for a number of common clinical conditions: headaches, high blood pressure, pain control etc. The therapy techniques such as relaxation methods, cognitive behavioral therapies, imagery, biofeedback and 'meditation' which is the Relaxation Response technique

In some of the methods of preparing for prayer or methods of prayer in this handout you will noticed similarities to what some people teach today in exercise classes.

# Relaxation Techniques

We all react to stress in some way or another. The body has a built in mechanism called Remembered Wellness that is elicited by the Relaxation Response that stimulates the Parasympathetic Nervous System and dampens the Sympathetic Nervous System, thereby reducing the effects of stress on the body.

Though we cannot control all conditions that can cause stress, we can mitigate our responses by using a variety of tools –mind/body techniques, changing our perceptions and even certain methods of prayer that stimulate the Relaxation Response.

The mind/body techniques here have as its end goal relaxation.

# The Relaxation Response

---

## Relaxation Response Technique

The Relaxation Response technique is a simple natural way to elicit our body's positive responses to address the effects of stress. It is a universal technique used today in religious and non-religious ways, as seen in those who do transcendental meditation.

Today the term 'meditation' is used interchangeably with the term Relaxation Response. I often used the term Clinical Meditation for the Relaxation Response to differentiate it for those who use the term 'meditation' and from the Meditation prayer practices in the Christian traditions such as Lectio Divina.

This technique uses a mental focus function as a quieting reflex to elicit the Relaxation Response allowing the body to naturally return to homeostasis. The intention and end goal is for a health benefit. This technique is used in the Centering Prayer and the Christian Meditation methods with a different intention and end goal.

### Technique

- Sit comfortable
- Limit session to 20 minutes
- Pick a focusing element: a word or phrase, number visual image or sound, or just your breath
- Close eyes
- Relax your muscles
- Breathe slowly and naturally
- Repeat the focusing element each time there is an exhalation
- Assume a passive attitude. When a thought intrudes, gently dismiss it and return to the focusing element
- After the session sit quietly for 1 – 2 minutes

### *Helpful Hints*

- Sitting with eyes ½ opened is not suggested for beginners, it will be too distracting.



- Select a word or words that have a meaning for you as a focal point.
- Minds will continue to be active. Our brains are always functioning even during sleep; they do not shut off. Thoughts will enter and minds will wander. Just let your feelings, thoughts, and images drift in and out again, return to your focus. Do not concentrate on your thoughts or try to push them away. Just let them pass. When we have an over loaded stressed life, we can find it hard to concentrate, learn new things, or fall asleep. Even our muscles clench out of habit. The first thing we must acquire is a passive attitude for thoughts. Think of your mind as a calm lake with birds flying over. The lake is your mind, and the birds are your thoughts.

---

## Breathing

---

### Relaxed Breathing

This is diaphragmatic breathing

It is part of a general relaxation and stress management program

- Sit quietly and rest hands on stomach
- Feel your belly lift as you breathe in
- Inhale through nose
- Exhale through mouth

Variations

- Take long breaths on inhalation and exhalation
- Take longer breaths on exhalation
- Take longer breaths on inhalation and shorter breaths on exhalation
  - Smell the flowers/blow out the candle

### A Mini Destressor

Anytime you feel anxious or stressed during the day

- Stop and become aware on your breath

- With your hand on your stomach, take deep breath through your nose, hold it for a count of 4 and let it out slowly for a count of 8
- Do several repeats

## Visualization Techniques

---

### Quieting Reflex

This technique takes less than one minute

- Become aware of a particular stressor
- Inwardly gaze at it
- While gazing at it smile inwardly at it
- Inhaling with an easy natural breath
- Then exhaling an easy natural breath out
- While exhaling let go of your jaw, tongue, facial muscles, and shoulders while you are imagining a warm heavy wave flowing from head to toes.

Eventually this will become a reflex in which you will do it naturally every time you feel stressed, even if it a dozen times a day, if you have too.

### A mini Visualization

This is autosuggestion that stimulates the Parasympathetic nervous system. As if taking a mini-vacation

- Assume a relaxed posture
- Use relaxed natural breathing
- Focus your concentration on each breath then
- Imagine you are in a special place
- Sense that place: such as the breeze, the sounds, etc.
- With each breath take in the sensations such as the air, light, sound

## Neuro-Musculo-Skeletal Techniques

---

### Muscle Relaxation Technique

- Tensing a muscle then letting go of the tension
- Stretching a muscle then letting go of the stretch

Breathe in on tension or stretch, breathe out on release

### Progressive Relaxation Training Technique

1. Sit in comfortable position or lie down
2. Tighten each part and become aware of the tension, then release it
3. After release, then become aware of it relaxing

Do the following muscle groups in the order listed here. Each muscle group should be tensed twice in each session. Helps relieve muscle tension

- Right hand
- Left hand
- Right arm
- Left arm
- Forehead
- Eyes, cheeks, nose
- Neck front
- Neck back
- Neck right
- Neck left
- Chest
- Back
- Shoulders
- Abdomen
- Buttocks
- Right thigh
- Left thigh
- Right calf
- Left calf
- Right foot and toes
- Left foot and toes

# Mindfulness

---

## Focused Attention

Mindfulness is a focusing attention technique in which you become aware of what you are experiencing at the moment - from moment to moment. Here you work with your mind by not allowing it to become fragmented or drift into the past or future. You remain alert to the experience of the present moment by being intentional to what you are sensing.

Technique: To begin you must look to your breath as your focus. As you become fully aware of your breathing you, then focus on particular parts of your body and what the sensations are they sending up to your brain – what do you feel in your body? Next become aware of your emotions. Do not judge them, but just become aware. Now explore the impact they have on your body. This experience will slow you down to be fully involved in one activity at a time.

Mindfulness and Pain: Mindfulness has been shown to alleviate chronic pain. If you have pain, explore the changes in your sensation of pain during mindfulness. It will be possible for you to separate your physical sensations from your emotional reactions, which then reduces the pain. If you can become aware of your anxiety, release it, thereby reducing your perception of pain, thus reducing pain.

## Tips on how to reduce stress throughout the day

- Upon awaking bring your attention to your breathing
- Lie in bed and gently stretch
- Instead of coffee, drink a glass of lemon water and watch the birds instead of the news
- At the traffic light enjoy looking at the sky while you take a few deep breaths
- As you sit down at your desk, stop for a moment and become conscious of your posture and body tightness
- Walk mindfully to where ever you are going
- Stay in the present, it is a gift
- Upon coming home make a consciousness effort to make a transition from work to home
- As you go to sleep let go of the day by lying down and take a mini break and talk with God

# Methods of Praying

Though there are many ways and methods of praying, these in particular shown here are examples in which the relaxation techniques can be incorporated easily as a prep or are implicitly used within the prayer, or where the relaxation response can be more clearly experienced. All prayer brings the body closer to homeostasis. For homeostasis is not just something physical within our body, it is a concept that can be applied to the whole person's experience.

## 8 Methods of Praying

1. Prayer of the Heart
2. Lectio Divina
3. Meditation
4. Prayer of the Interior Senses
5. Imaginative Meditation
6. Contemplation – Prayer of Silent Love
7. Contemplative Word
  - a. Centering Prayer – Contemplative Outreach
  - b. Christian Meditation - World Christian Meditation Movement

## Ancient Methods

---

### Prayer of the Heart

Prayer of the Heart or called The Jesus Prayer is an ancient prayer used in the Eastern Christian tradition. Origin is considered from the 5<sup>th</sup> century. It is a means of concentrating on God, a prayer of the Spirit for St. Paul tells us no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit (1Cor 12:30). It is a method of opening the heart and is considered to be the Unceasing Prayer St. Paul speaks about.

People who pray this prayer can synchronize it with their breathing. This is a repetitive formula prayer.

### Variations

Jesus  
Jesus have mercy  
Lord Jesus Have mercy on me  
Lord Jesus, Son of God have mercy on me  
Lord Jesus, Son of God have mercy on me, a sinner

Three levels of this prayer

Oral Prayer – prayer of the lips – external  
Focused Prayer – mind is focused on the words – praying without distraction  
Prayer of the heart – moved from doing to who we are... this is a contemplative gift

### Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is an ancient prayer tradition. It is a scriptural method of prayer. Today we usually connect it today with a Benedictine spirituality. The different methods used today in Meditation and Contemplation are taken from the comprehensive practice of listening with the 'ear of the heart' within Lectio.

Lectio Divina cultivates a contemplative prayer. It is done to gain insights and to enter into a conversation with God. It is different from Bible study. The scholastic form of Lectio Divina was done in a step wise format, while the Monastic form allows for a back and forth movement through all 4 stages based upon the spontaneous prompting of the Holy Spirit.

The Four Stages of Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina consists of reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation.

- Read - Lectio
- Reflect - Meditatio
- Respond - Oratio
- Rest - Contemplatio

There are Four Psychological Functions within the Four Stages

The four stages of Lectio Divina emphasize the four psychological functions of sensing, thinking, feeling, and intuition.

- Lectio - uses the senses to read or hear the word of the Lord

- Meditatio - uses the function of the intellect to reflect upon the scripture - insight
- Oratio - calls for one's feeling /emotions to a personalize dialogue with God
- Contemplatio – uses one's intuition to coalesce the experience and wait upon God

### Lectio Divina - The Method

- Choose a time when you are most alert & rested
- Choose a place that is quiet
- Select a passage of scripture, such as the daily reading, list of healing scriptures enclosed, or just begin in the Gospels

#### *Lectio – Spiritual Reading – you will seek*

In this first step, in which we seek out the divine truths primarily reading scripture. We can also use other Christian writings, Christian art, or God's creation in nature. We slowly savor the text, word-by-word, phrase by phrase. Read the literal meaning to have it clear. Allow any thoughts to enter with feelings or associated memories.

#### *Meditatio – Study and Reflection – you will find*

In this second step, we now let ourselves discover what is being said and how it relates to our salvation and to us. We personalize it. Using the Augustinian method called *transposition*, we try to imagine these words being spoken directly to us. Or we can use another popular reflection the Ignatian method called *projection*. This is where we put ourselves back into the biblical story trying to imagine that we are there. See the list of scriptures of the healings of Jesus.

#### *Oratio – Pray Upon It - you shall call*

During this step when God spoke to us during Oratio, we respond, we listen in our hearts, and react with prayer. We respond by our words, thoughts, desires, feelings, decisions, and/or commitments. We become aware of and let ourselves feel love, joy, and/or gratitude. It is a time for our prayerful response using one or more of the 4 types of prayer – ACTS - to adore God, to ask for forgiveness, to thank Him for his goodness, or to ask for our needs or the needs of others.



## Four types of prayer - ACTS

- Adoration
- Contrition
- Thanksgiving
- Supplication or petition

### *Contemplatio – Resting in the Lord - you shall experience*

This is the stage in which we desire to be lifted up; to desire all of God. We need to give ourselves time to experience His graces, to listen, as we are still and quiet. God is the one who gives us the gift of contemplation experiencing union with Him. If we are so gifted, we come to rest quietly in God as God rests in us. We need to give God time to reveal Himself. Wait on the Lord. Wait for His graces. “ Be still and know that I am God,” Psalm 146: 11.

Note: If we spend ~20 minutes in this prayer method, it elicits the Relaxation Response where we will eventually experience the effects of stress reduction. As we begin reading we can elicit the Remembered Wellness mechanism during the Meditatio and Oratio stages if we focus on a word or phrase. As stated before scientists have discovered that when one uses the ‘Faith Factor’ the health outcomes are significantly improved. If we reach the Contemplatio stage we will naturally obtain the physical effects elicited from the Relaxation Response that is automatically a by-product of the method.

During each stage of Lectio Divina we can experience healings because we are focusing on the presence of God.

## Variations within Lectio Divina from the Christian traditions

### *Ignatian Meditation Prayer - Meditatio*

This prayer method used by most frequently by Ignatius is more ancient than Lectio Divina. This type of prayer form was used by the Israelites to recall an event. One relives an event by immersing oneself into the past event. This is called *recollection*, a symbolic way to make real particular past events. Ignatian prayer method uses this phase of Lectio Divina often. See Meditation and Imaginative Meditation section.

In Ignatian Prayer - The Spiritual Exercises - one projects [projection] the self back into the scene and becomes part of it. For example in trying to imagine a scene, using our sensible imagination. For example, try to image being one of the people coming to Jesus to be healed. You will relive the event in an affective manner. Here you will come to know the scripture more deeply through your feelings. Neurologically we then create a new neurosignature\*.

#### *Augustinian Prayer - Meditatio*

This is the method of prayer that uses also creative imagination and transposition. One tries to imagine [intuit] what are the meanings of the words of the scriptural passage then and how would it apply to a situation of the present. Here we come to discern what is the meaning for us today, what is applicable to us as individuals. What is God trying to tell me? How would He have said it if He directed it only to me? This is also used in the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius.

It is a form of prayer that looks for future possibilities. Here you read between the lines and look for the meaning. It is a form of prayer filled with anticipation.

#### *Thomastic Prayer - Meditatio*

The popular form of prayer was the only method of prayer recommended by St. Thomas Aquinas; it is a method of thinking in an orderly progression of thought from cause to effect. It is systematic, disciplined, and investigative.

From the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries most of the books on Meditation were written with a rationalistic approach to prayer. The orderly progression of thoughts was within the Meditatio stage in which one would study a topic from every angle. This method is frequently called 'discursive meditation' because it exercises the mind, the will, and the intuition.

#### *Franciscan Prayer - Oratio*

This tradition looks to fully use all the five senses to be open to the presence and voice of the Holy Spirit. It is more of a spontaneous form of prayer, a celebration in the present moment in a free flowing informal communing with God. The word here, which expresses this form of prayer, is freedom. See *Prayer of the Interior Senses*.

## Healing changes during Lectio Divina

### *Lectio*

This reading brings us to a place in which God speaks to us. It is reading about God with our eyes of love. Reading with a gracious thankfulness. It is a pilgrimage of words towards the Mystery. It is a dialogue with the Savior therefore it has reception, self-gift and communion. Lectio is not done to have immediate gratification, no prayer is; it is a slow active and passive process done for joy. It is a daily practice, a time to dialogue with our faithful friend. We read to listen, and listening is for letting go and letting be.

### *Healing during Lectio*

We come to feed our mind and spirit on the food of life - the Word of God. What happens here is that we help restructure the neurosignatures in our brain. We develop new thoughts or a deeper level of understanding. It is almost as we are being washed anew.

### *Meditatio*

Here we come to ruminate to reflect, to remember, to interpret and to allow the Word to penetrate our souls. Here we come to be transformed by the Word. Surrendering ourselves to God's word. When the words speak to your heart and not just echoed in your mind, you have reached the fruit of meditation.

### *Healing during Meditatio*

As we reflect we actually become aware of new thought patterns. It is in listening to the Holy Spirit, we are drawn to specific words or ideas in the texts. The Holy Spirit is giving us the insight into the phrases we read. That is God speaking to us, drawing us towards what needs healing, such as a particular memory. God talks to us by 'highlighting' what we heard, as we allow ourselves to be drawn up towards Him.

### *Oratio*

In this stage of prayer our response is where we will now praise, petition and/or thank God. We come to speak before God. At times even silence can be a response to God for He knows what is in our hearts.

### *Healing during Oratio*

As we become aware of what needs to be changed, we respond. By responding to God by accepting what has been revealed to us during Meditatio our minds are creating new neurosignatures.

*Contemplatio*

Here we come to encounter the Word beyond the words. God has reached out from heaven to touch our hearts to be in union with His.

*Healing during Contemplatio*

To describe being touched by God is a gift beyond what words could describe.

## Ignatian Prayer Methods

---

Taken from the text: *The First Spiritual Exercises* by Rev. Michael Hanson, SJ

Meditation

Imaginative Meditation

Prayer of the Interior Senses

### The 5 Step Structure Method

1. *Preparation:* Either immediately upon waking turn attention to the subject of the sacred reading or thereafter use a quieting relaxation technique to prepare your mind. Then imagine Jesus being there looking at you with His love.
2. *Opening Prayer Request:* Ask for the grace to be able to direct your entire self to God during these moments
3. *Desire:* Ask for any specific desires
4. *The Specific Prayer*
5. *Conversation:* Share your experience and concerns talking with Jesus. Give thanks. Capture the graces recalling them from your memory received or by writing them down to look at them later for reflection. End with the *Our Father*.

## Meditation

*Mediation is an interior understating; it is done for 'felt knowledge', not for a formal study. It is a discursive prayer using primarily the mind. It is mental action. One is always to be open to the movements of the Spirit and may be drawn into a state of contemplation.*

**Preparation:** Immediately upon waking turn attention to the subject of the sacred reading that you will use for the Meditation or thereafter use a quieting relaxation technique to prepare your mind. Then imagine Jesus looking at you with His love, and respond in humility. Take time to read slowly the scripture as a whole.

**Opening Prayer Request:** Ask for the grace to be able to direct your entire self to Christ during these moments

**Desire:** Ask what words Jesus has for you in the readings. Sometimes what we desire God gives and other times it is a wonderful surprise something we never would of thought.

**The Specific Prayer:** Read the text slowly to clearly understand what is taking place in the event, and what Jesus is trying to reveal to you personal; be aware of any interior sensations. Use these 3 interior powers for each phrase or sentence, which the Holy Spirit prompts you with:

- I use my *memory* to bring forth the truths of the faith and to remember them
- I use my *intellect* to go over the subject in more detail for greater understanding to see the truths. I meditate on the truths as they apply to me. [This thinking process is not to study, but to gain awareness ...we create new neurosignatures that will have a positive effect on our physical body.]
- I use my *will* to open my heart to allow God's grace to flow over me and to express my desire for Him. I respond naturally to His communication in conversation sharing my thoughts and desires

**Conversation:** Tell Jesus what you thought, felt; give thanks. You may capture the graces received by writing them down to look at them later for reflection. End with the *Our Father*.

## Imaginative Meditation

*Imaginative Meditation helps us focus on the humanity of Jesus through the use of our imagination to enter into a more personal and deeper relationship with Him.*

**Preparation:** Immediately upon waking turn attention to the subject of the sacred reading that you will use for this Meditation or thereafter use a quieting relaxation technique to prepare your mind. Then imagine Jesus looking at you with His love, and respond in humility. Take time to read slowly the scripture as a whole.

**Opening Prayer Request:** Ask for the grace to be able to direct your entire self to Christ during these moments

**Desire:** Ask for what you desire

**The Specific Prayer:** Using your natural imagination enter the scene of the scripture passage; create a detailed image

- First I create, as if in a movie, in my mind what the scene would look like, the buildings, furniture, and the weather
- Next look I at the people in the scene; what do they look like, what are they wearing
- Then I enter the scene and take my place as a participant, I walk, I sit, I talk

**Conversation:** There talk was Jesus as a friend in which you express your desires and needs; share and just listen. After you may capture the graces received by writing them down to look at them later for reflection.

End with the *Our Father*

## Prayer of the Interior Senses

*Prayer of the 5 Interior Senses is one in which we come to experience a sense of wholeness, in a loving attention of our whole self towards all Christ has for us. As if the Words of Life come more truly to life within us. This prayer method has some of the aspects of the mindfulness technique, yet we create and become aware of only what is within our mind, versus becoming aware of the stimuli from our bodies. Our body will react as if it has really happened.*

**Preparation:** Immediately upon waking turn your attention to the gifts of your 5 senses, or thereafter use a quieting relaxation technique to prepare your mind to turn your attention to the gifts of your 5 senses. Then imagine Jesus who became fully human, who fully embodied those senses, is now looking at you in love, as you respond in humility.

**Opening Prayer Request:** Ask for the grace to be able to direct your entire self to Christ during these moments

**Desire:** Ask for Jesus to open your 5 senses: eyes, ears, touch, smell and taste.

**The Specific Prayer:** After reading the selected text slowly you enter the scene through your imagination. There you became aware of all aspects of the scene by imagining sensing it through your 5 senses.

- Here I became aware of the life of Christ, the mystery before me, and all that I sense of His creation.
- I **see** the persons, and what is going in the event in scripture verses I read
- I **hear** what the people are saying, the volume and tone of their voices, the noise of the street
- I **feel** the objects around me – the soil under my feet, the breeze, the clothes I am wearing, the sun
- I **taste** the fish they are cooking at the sea of Galilee, the wine at the wedding of Cana
- I **smell** the sea air, the spring flowers, the dead corpse of Lazarus

**Conversation:** In conversing with Jesus express your joy, any sorrows or concerns. Share your experience with Jesus. Give thanks. Capture the graces by recalling them for your memory at a later time, or by writing them down for later for reflection. End with the *Our Father*



# Contemplation

---

## Prayer of Silent Love

- Contemplative Prayer is also called the Prayer of Silent Love; it is a prayer of our entire selves desiring to be in union with the Trinity. It is what we do.
- Contemplation is an infused prayer, a gift from God of His grace in which we are lifted up into a state to experience the mystical union. It is what God does to us.

Contemplation has been called a Mystical prayer. We may or may not be given the gift and yet sitting and awaiting in His presence is enough of a gift.

We can just begin Contemplative Prayer by just sitting in silence or through other types of prayer. It is a natural movement from head to heart after Meditation or Lectio. From recollection to quiet. Or through the use of a prayer word in the Centering Prayer or the World Christian Meditation methods.

In this prayer of silent love, one needs to detach from material anxieties and one's ego in this time of solitude. It is a giving of ourselves over completely to God, allowing ourselves to fall into His presence. It is there we come to empty ourselves in which we could experience our true self in God.

### *History of Contemplation*

The history of contemplation method of praying began with the Eastern Fathers and Mothers. Origen wrote of distinct stages in prayer, the kataphatic way in which one used words and images in prayer [Oratio]. While Gregory of Nyssa used the way of negation, the apophatic way in which one simply stays in the silent presence of God [Contemplatio].

The tradition developed definitions of the three stages to describe one's spiritual progress: purgative, illuminative, and unitive. Contemplation prayers is done and gifted in the illuminative and unitive stages. Contemporary definitions of contemplation still hold awareness as the crucial element in entering into this type of prayer. Merton found this unity experience not only in the monastery, but also on a street corner. He, like Ignatius, believed the purpose of contemplation was to bring one to action. Yet because it is a gift from God, it can occur at any stage, anywhere.

## Ignatian Contemplative Prayer Method

**Preparation:** Immediately upon waking turn attention to God, the Holy Trinity, or thereafter use a quieting relaxation technique to prepare your entire attention to God, the Holy Trinity. Then imagine God looking at you in love, and respond in humility.

**Opening Prayer Request:** Ask for the grace to be able to direct your entire self to God during these moments

**Desire:** To enter into the Divine mystery and the love relationship of the Trinity

**Body Preparation:** Sit alert, clam, taking natural breathes, eye closed. Breathing in and out normally, you can gently pray a word – i.e. Abba, Father, Lord Jesus, Jesus, Come Lord to begin.

**Prayer Method:** Rest in the presence of God in an open way, surrendering in silence, wordless, imageless, yet still desiring. When distracted simply return to God by using the your breath. For one's breath is breathing in the breath of God. Return back to the loving presence of God to await His gift of union.

**Conclusion:** End with the *Our Father* praying it quietly within.

## Contemplative Word Methods

---

### Centering Prayer - Contemplative Outreach

Centering Prayer is a contemplative method designed to facilitate the development of one's prayer life by preparing one's faculties [mind and body] to be open and responsive in the Spirit. It is not done for an end in itself, but for the fruits it will bear: humility, self-knowledge, inner freedom, compassion, & charity. Here one takes and has the time to let go of upsetting emotions. Centering Prayer uses a prayer word to be present at the beginning, as one sits in rest. There is no returning back to the prayer word. This is an 'attentive stillness' prayer. It is a receptive prayer. It prepares us to receive the gift of Contemplation when the gift would be given.

### Christian Meditation - World Christian Movement

Christian Meditation is a state of contemplative rest as in Centering Prayer, in which we are resting within God's love that is at the center of our being. We use a word or phrase to help us center our mind so we can sit in the presence of God without disruptions. The Christian Meditation of the World Christian Movement repeats a prayer word in a slow and rhythmic manner - *Maranatha* – Aramaic for *Come Lord*. It allows for movement from the head to the heart.

### The Word Based Method of Both

1. Choose a sacred word.
2. Sit with eyes closed. Silently introduce the sacred word.
3. Avoid analyzing your experience or expectation. Do not aim at a certain goal such as having no thoughts, or try to make your mind a blank.
4. At the end, remain in silence for a minute with your eyes closed, to give yourself time to readjust.

### Notes on Word Based Methods

Centering Prayer only uses the word in the beginning

Christian Meditation repeats the word throughout

Faith-based Relaxation Response uses a word to bring one's mind back from its drifting

In all 3 - thoughts that arise are distractions and each recommends practice twice a day 20m

## Prayers and Mind Body Medicine

---

Today we teach mind/body techniques for health reasons because of what we have seen through evidence-based benefits. They are extremely important to use and be aware of.

The spiritual nature of the human person can be put back into the health equation for a Christian and up front as it has been for thousands of years. Health and healing is a byproduct of our prayer life.

Each of these prayers have different methods in which we are implicitly using, and all or parts of what has been classified into different types of mind/body techniques.

Prayers	Mind/Body Technique
Jesus Prayer	Quieting Reflex
Lectio, Meditation & Imaginative Meditation	Mini Visualization
Prayer of the 5 Senses	Mindfulness
Contemplative Prayer (Silence or Word Methods)	Relaxation Response Technique
Contemplation	None

## Selective Scriptures for Imaginative Meditation

---

### Scriptures for Imagination Meditation

	<i>Matt</i>	<i>Mark</i>	<i>Luke</i>	<i>John</i>
<i>Jesus' Teachings - Healing through the Christian way of life</i>				
Sermon on the Mount	5.1-12		6.20-26	
Teaching about anger	5.21 -24	11.25	12.57-59	
Teaching about reconciliation	5.38- 4			
Love your enemies	5.44-48		6. 27-28,32-36	
The light of the body	6.22-23		11. 34-36	
Dependence upon God	6.25-34		12. 22-23	
Answers to prayers	7.7-11		11. 9-13	
Golden rule	7.12		6. 31	
Encouragement to pray	7.7-11		11.9-13	16.24,14.13-14,15.7
Teaching on humility			14.7-14	
Greatest in the kingdom	18.1-5			
Forgiveness	18.15		17.3-4	

	<i>Matt</i>	<i>Mark</i>	<i>Luke</i>	<i>John</i>
<i>The Healing Ministry of Jesus</i>				
Healing of the demoniac		1.23-28	4.33- 37	
The cleansing of a leper	8.1-4	1.40-45	5.12-16	
Healing of a centurion's servant	8.5- 15	2.1, 7.30	7.1-10,13.28-29	4.46-54
The widow's son			7.11-17	
Curing Peter's mother-in-law	8.14-15	1.29-31	4.3-39	
The sick healed at evening	8.16-17	1.32-34	4.40-41	
Healing of the possessed	8. 28-34	51-20	8.26-39	
Healing of paralytic	9. 1-8	2.1-12	5.17-26	5.1-9
Healing of the official's daughter	9.18- 26	5.21-43	8.40-56	
Healing the woman with hemorrhage	9. 20-22	5.21-43	8.40-56	
Healing of 2 blind men	9. 27-31	10.46-52	18.35-43	
Healing of a mute person	9. 32-33	3.22	11.14-15	7.20,10.20,8.48,52
Healing of man with the withered hand	12. 9-14	3.1-6	6. 6-11	
Healings by the sea	12.15-16	3.7-12	6.17-19, 4.41	
Healing of the man born blind		4.12, 8.17-18		9.1-41,12.37-40
Do not be afraid	14. 22-33	6.45-52		6.16-21
Healings at Gennesaret	14. 34-36	6.53-56		6.22-25
Healings of deaf mute and others	15.29-31	7.31-37		
Healing of the blind at Bethsaida			8.22.26	
Healing of a boy with a demon	17. 14-21	9.14-29	9.37-43	14.9
Healing of the cripple woman			13.10-17	

	<i>Matt</i>	<i>Mark</i>	<i>Luke</i>	<i>John</i>
Healing of the man with dropsy			14.1-6	
Cleansing of the 10 lepers			17.11-19	
Healing of the blind men	20.29-34,9.27-31	10.46-52	18.35-43	
 <i>Healing through Jesus' Farewell Discourses</i>				
Let your hearts not be troubled				14.1-14
The promise of the Holy Spirit				14.15-26
Abide in my love				15.1-10
Our joy complete through love				15.11-17
Sorrow turned to joy				16.16-22
Intercessory prayer				17.1-26

# Information

## Tips on Well-ness Whole Care

- Breathe in God's breath
- Eat foods close to how God created them
- Walk under God's sky
- Smell God's flowers and ocean
- Hug God's children
- Listen to His birds

## Photos

Taken Nov 2012 on Pilgrimage to the Holy Land  
Ancient Olive Tree in the Garden of Gethsemane



### About the author

Dr. Karen Shields Wright is a Wellness Expert and Spiritual Director practicing in Greenwich CT. She is a licensed chiropractic physician who has treated over 4000 patients using natural integrative treatments.

Her private practice has been primarily dedicate to caring for the spiritual well-being of a wide range of God's people - clergy, patients with chronic or life threatening illnesses, and homeless single mothers, in addition to treating the physical side for those who want to stay as healthy as possible naturally.

She received her masters in spirituality and grad certificate in spiritual direction from Fordham University, with additional graduate study in adult formation in their PhD programs. As a graduate of New York Chiropractic College she has continuing education in such institutions as New York Medical College in administration, and Harvard Medical in complementary and alternative medicine.

Wright has been chaplain for a homeless shelter, and now a per diem chaplain for Greenwich Hospital. She is member of the Order of Malta, a Catholic lay/religious organization, and is a Eucharistic Minister.

For one example of her presentations, she was a guest speaker for the Catholic Medical Association Annual Educational Conference in Santa Barbara titled "Mission, Justice, and Medicine." Her topic was "What is Basic Health Care?" She has given retreats "In Sickness and in Health" teaching prayerful methods for health and healing.

For information on Dr. Wright's presentations, retreats individualize spiritual direction or developing a faith based well-care program call 203-629-2727.

Dr. Karen Shields Wright  
106 Hunting Ridge Road  
Greenwich CT 06831  
drkarensields@gmail.com  
203-629-2727