

Open Your Meetings With Grace

3 Ways to Launch Effective, Compassionate Meetings

When we arrive at a meeting, too often we're focused on the task and not the people sitting next to us. Pausing to check in invites us to respect each other as individuals. By being self-aware and empathetic, we recognize God's presence in the meeting and in each other.

This set of three healthy meeting-starters was created by ELCA Wellness Manager Tammy Devine. At your next meeting, give one of them a try.

- *Forgiven & Sent* engages our bodies in prayer
- *Quieting Body & Mind* guides us to be present
- *Name Your State* helps us share our state of mind

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Forgiven & Sent

Created by Barbara Debski, Portico Regional Representative,
and Tammy Devine, ELCA Wellness Manager

Say: This prayer practice invites us to engage our bodies in prayer, to let go of our baggage and turn to God. Feel free to stand or remain seated.

Gathered into one, let us pray with open bodies, minds, and spirits.

- Breathing in God's goodness, we take a deep breath while saying God's name in Hebrew, "Yahweh." Whisper "Yah" as you breathe in, and "weh" as you breathe out. Keep your own breath slow, smooth, and deep. We'll repeat this 5 times. (Breathe 5 times.)
Now say after me: Everything that has breath, praise the Lord.
- All too often, we come before you with our own ideas. Let us open our hearts and hands as we discern God's will. Folding fingers together, turn your palms away from your body and extend your arms overhead. Hold this gentle stretch. *Now say after me: Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand.*
- We pause to confess our brokenness. Breathe in God's goodness and breathe out all that separates you from God's love. (Pause.) Bending over, with head down, wrap your arms around yourself (like a tight hug), and feel God's love and grace. (Pause.) Breathe in God's grace. *Now say after me: Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*
- We remember that through Christ's death on the cross, our sins are cast away. Stretching your arms out wide, form a cruciform, with palms up, gently pivot from left to right. (Pause.) Christ our Redeemer absolves you of your sins. (Pause.) Take a deep breath of thanksgiving for God's great love and forgiveness. *Now say after me: As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our sin.*
- Now let us quiet our thoughts and listen to God's call. Standing or sitting tall, bring your chin to the center of your chest. Pause and listen. Now, bring your left ear to your left shoulder, and listen for the voice of the world's lonely and poor. (Pause.) Bring your right ear to your right shoulder, and listen for the voice of the sick and oppressed. (Pause.) *Now say after me: Let anyone who has ears listen.*
- We lift up our hearts as well as our hands to God. Extending arms overhead, looking up, alternately reach upward with each arm. *Now say after me: To you, Lord, I lift my soul.*
- As we end, may we live centered, strong, and grounded in the grace and goodness of Yahweh. Standing or sitting straight and tall, arms relaxed at your side, take a deep breath and give thanks. *Now say after me: The Lord is my rock and my fortress. The Lord is good. Amen!*



Open Your Meetings With Grace

Quieting Body & Mind

Created by Tammy Devine, ELCA Wellness Manager

Say: Often, we find ourselves rushing, minds filled with to-do lists, bodies out of breath — a closed spirit. This guided relaxation exercise helps us release pent-up negative emotions. By removing the clutter, we allow space to recognize the Spirit alive within us and better share our gifts today.

To enter into the present, let us breathe in God's goodness and exhale all that is keeping us from being present. We'll repeat this 5 times. (Breathe 5 times.)

Now, sit straight in your chair, feet on the floor, hands open on your lap. Lower your gaze or close your eyes. Scan your body for tension, stress, pain.

- Breathe deeply ... wiggle each toe ... relax the muscles of your feet; give thanks for their support.
- Move each ankle in a circle ... breathe into any aches, where you feel tightness.
- Continue up your calves ... to your knees ... and thighs.
(Pause)
- Continue your way into your trunk ... give thanks for the organs that aid in digestion; the lungs and heart that keep oxygen flowing ... breathe into areas of tension, pain, or tightness.
(Pause)
- Now bring your attention to your shoulders ... upper arms ... elbows ... forearms.
- Slowly move into your hands and down to your fingers ... touch each finger to your thumb, then stretch out your hands.
(Pause)
- Now turn to the bottom of your spine and slowly move up your back, one vertebra at a time ... breathe into places of tension, pain, or tightness.
- Move up your neck, slowly, to the top of your head ... relax your forehead, move your eyes from left to right, up and down, relax your jaws. Bring right ear to right shoulder, chin to chest, left ear to left shoulder.
(Pause)
- Inhale and exhale deeply 5 times.
- Closing Prayer: Gracious God, with quieted bodies, minds, and spirit, may we more fully sense your direction for our time together. Lead and bless us in our serving. Amen.
- Bring your hands to your face like a warm cloth, and gently massage your face.
- Slowly open your eyes and come back to the room.



Open Your Meetings With Grace

Name Your State

Adapted with permission from a Center for Emotional Intelligence and Human Relations Skills activity

Say: This exercise invites us to take and share our emotional temperature. In this way, we're able to respond to each other during the meeting with more understanding and grace.

Please review the emoticons below and choose the one that best represents how you currently feel. If you like, briefly explain your choice. Here's a real-life example from a Portico employee: "I feel *scattered*; I'm wrapping up three different projects at the same time." If your emotion isn't represented below, feel free to name a different one.

When everyone has shared, close with the prayer offered below, then start your meeting.



Happy



Generous



Sassy



Excited



Optimistic



Calm



Angry



Grumpy



Ill



Anxious



Sad



Sleepy



Focused



Curious



Surprised



Confident



Energetic



Ready



Lethargic



Bored



Rushed



Overwhelmed



Frustrated



Scattered

Closing prayer: O Lord, you know us inside and out. Whatever we are feeling today, may we be gracious with one another and with ourselves. Focus our hearts and minds on you as we gather. In Jesus' name, Amen.