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Introduction and History

Holden Village makes its home in the buildings of a former copper mining town in a remote, isolated valley in the Cascade Mountains of Washington state. From its first days as a Lutheran center for the renewal of faith and life, it has followed an ancient rhythm of daily work and prayer. Every evening the whole community—whether 60 persons in the middle of February or 350 in mid-July—gathers for worship. On Sunday evenings they celebrate holy communion. On weeknights the prayer is simpler and shorter, varying according to the liturgical season, the day of the week, or the calendar of festivals, both those universally celebrated and those locally invented.

The community of volunteers that served at Holden during the winter of 1995–1996 included several persons who had visited either the Taizé community in France or the Iona community in Scotland, or who had led “Taizé-like” prayer in other places. They were eager to share the quiet, meditative prayer that they had come to cherish. They designed a service that included scripture readings, a reflection from Brother Roger of Taizé, silence, simple



songs and chants in a variety of languages sung repeatedly, and an opportunity to kneel near a large cross, light a candle, and pray.

That evening's prayer, like cool, fresh water rising from ancient depths, satisfied a thirst, a largely unnamed longing within the community. Schoolchildren, teenagers, young adults, and elders alike voiced their hope that they would pray



together in this way again. They did. During Advent, the community gathered every Friday evening for “prayer around the cross,” as they came to call it, following the practice of Taizé, and since then the sun has set on only a handful of Fridays that the community at Holden has not done the same.

Many people who have been to Holden Village have shared this practice of praying around the cross with their own congregations and other faith communities, large and small, on retreats, at synod and churchwide assemblies, in ecumenical gatherings, at colleges, seminaries, and youth gatherings, among small groups, and in house churches. Some have taken the essentials—reading scripture, singing songs, keeping silence, and lighting candles and praying at the cross—and created their own liturgies. Others have replicated or adapted liturgies written at Holden.

This handbook includes a number of liturgies, some written for prayer at Holden Village, some for other places and occasions. It also includes background material, guidelines, resources, and suggestions to aid you in planning, writing, introducing, and leading liturgies in your community of faith.

We do not know how to pray as we ought, Saint Paul reminds us, and this handbook is certainly not a manual on how to get your prayer right. Rather, we offer it trusting that the Spirit helps us in our weakness and intercedes for us, for all the saints, and for the whole creation according to the will of God. May the Spirit, as Jesus promised, flow like rivers of living water from the hearts of all who thirst for life in God.

Susan Briehl and Tom Witt
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