

Blessing Way Liturgy

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A Blessing Way is a wonderful ritual that weaves prayer and community together as women (and men) prepare to embark upon the wonderful adventure of parenting. I have participated in two Blessing Ways in the last year. The first was in the home of a friend, and women from all areas of her life were present to participate in the celebration. The second was held outside on a wonderful spring day with a group of Presbyterian women from a local congregation. Both ceremonies held elements of festivity and prayerfulness, and even though the two had much in common liturgically, they differed because of the differences in the mothers we were gathered to bless. One was expecting her first child; becoming a mother was going to be a whole new way of life for her. The other was expecting her third child, so prayers and blessings were added for all the family members.

It is a good idea to share what will take place at the Blessing Way with those invited to participate. That way, they will have plenty of time to think about what blessing they would like to bestow upon the mother and the baby. Each woman might also be prepared to share what she loved most about each of her births.

Many participants will ask if they may bring a “shower” gift. Gifts for the mother and child have a place at the Blessing Way, but do not play the central role. Since this is a time to offer nurture to the mother (or mother-to-be), a foot or hand washing or foot massage would be appropriate during the Blessing Way, in addition to services offered after the child’s birth, such as meal preparation or house cleaning. It is also appropriate for those invited to bring candles for the mother, and for the mother to give candles to the participants. When she goes into labor, the mother lights the candles to remind her of Christ’s presence and the prayers surrounding her and her family. Participants may create a phone chain, and as they are informed the woman has gone into labor, they may light their candles. It is also a good idea to ask the sex of the baby (if it is known) so that the gifts that are brought can be appropriate, and the prayers and blessings for the child can be somewhat specific.

During both Blessing Ways in which I participated, food was served as part of a celebration and as a reminder of the nourishment God offers us all. A light meal of vegetable soup and cornbread was also served after the evening Blessing Way, and desserts were in abundance. Decorations included flowers and candles and anything else that seemed appropriate. Again, it is a good idea to ask the one in whose honor this is being held for suggestions.

Following is a brief outline with ideas for creating your own Blessing Way Liturgy. It is a good idea to have one or two people “lead” so that the mother (and other members of her family, if they are present) can fully enjoy this experience.

A Blessing Way Liturgy

(Gather around a table or in a circle, making sure that everyone can see each other.)

Lighting of the Christ Candle

As the candle is lit, the leader says:

We are reminded of Christ's presence among us.

Welcome and Prayer

Welcome to this celebration of new life and the blessings God bestows upon each of us. During our time together, may we all be blessed by the presence of God. Let us pray:

*Loving God, Mother and Father of us all,
we thank you for the ways your presence and grace
have nourished and sustained us throughout our lives.
We praise you for the ways you have strengthened each of us
through the love of others.
With gratitude we thank you for the gift of community.
We gather this day and give thanks especially for _____
and the new life within her.
Pour out upon them and their family
blessing upon blessing.
May they receive during our time together
what they need for the journey ahead.
May each of us be touched by your Holy Spirit
and carry the light of your love with us.
We pray all of this through Jesus the Christ. Amen.*

Introductions

Have participants tell what their relationship is to the mother/family. If it is a smaller group, have them share a story about how the mother has touched their lives in a special way.

Scripture Readings

There are many images of birth and new life in the Bible. Either have participants bring passages to read that they have found meaningful, or begin with the following, ending with Psalm 139.

Genesis 12:1-3

Psalm 71:5-8

Psalm 131

Isaiah 44:2-4

Isaiah 66:12-13

Psalm 139:1-18

Sharing of Stories

Have participants share their own birth stories, telling what they loved most or learned from their experience.

Bestowing of Blessings

There are many ways blessings can be shared for the mother (and family). The blessings can be particularly for the birth of the child, or for the journey ahead. Below are a few ideas to use separately or combine to create a keepsake for the mother, child and family:

- Have enough beads for two necklaces. Participants add their beads to the necklace as they share the blessing they wish to give to the mother and child.
- Provide beautiful note cards or stationery on which participants may write their blessings for the mother, child, and family. Or have participants bring their blessings already written on beautiful paper of their own choosing. Make a collage for the mother, child, and family.
- Pass around a journal in which to write a prayer of blessing and/or advice to the new parents.
- Have two candles in glass holders and two paint pens. As the blessings are shared, think of one or two words to symbolize the blessing and write them on the glass holders.

Prayer Requests

This is a time for the mother to share her own prayer requests:

- Pass around a decorated basket in which the mother has placed note cards she prepared that list such things as a character trait, prayer request, or a “hope.” Each participant picks one card to guide her prayers during the Blessing Way, labor and delivery, and the weeks to come.
- Have the mother, using paint pens, write on votive candleholders a word or two that she would like prayer for. This is especially powerful if the participants have brought candles as gifts for the mother to light when she goes into labor. The participants are asked also to light their candles and pray during labor and delivery.
- As the mother shares her prayer requests, the participants offer to pray for the request specifically during the prayer time.
- As the mother shares her prayer requests, those gathered respond, “Lord, hear our prayer.” A time for those gathered to pray follows in the same format.
- After the mother shares her prayer requests, the community chooses a familiar song tune and together writes a verse or two for the mother. Someone writes it down, and they then sing it together.

Prayer

Gather around the mother who is seated and lay hands on her to pray for God's blessing, protection, and strength for her and the baby. Have someone agree to begin and end the prayer, allowing time for spoken or silent prayers from the gathered community.

Passing the Peace

Everyone greets one another with the peace of Christ.

Response and Benediction

If the mother would like, she may share a few words about what the Blessing Way has meant to her and her family. Afterward, the following benediction can be said:

*May the One who formed you in your mother's womb
Who walks with you daily,
Who guides you and sustains you,
Bless and be with you this day, and always.*

Finish up with the opening of gifts, dinner and/or dessert and socializing.

[Author's note: Many of these ideas came from or were shaped by the ideas shared about Christian Blessing Ways on the website www.mother-care.ca/blessing.htm.]