

Grace Within Welcome Gathering

St. Benedict said, "All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ."

Overview

The *Welcome Gathering* is an opportunity for participants to meet one another (and the facilitators) and to experience the Benedictine value of hospitality. The gathering is hosted by the facilitator team. Additional guests may include prayer partners and other leadership. The team provides a warm, welcoming environment that will be used throughout *Grace Within*. Facilitator team and roles are introduced, along with any guests and their roles with *Grace Within* or *Within Ministries*.

Participants are introduced to the structure and flow of a *Grace Within* session, including prayers, presentations, sharing, and reflection. They receive their copy of *Grace Within: A Personal Journal* and hear how they are to prepare for the first session. Group expectations are introduced using *What to Expect* from the personal journal. The team helps participants begin to feel at ease with the experience of group learning. The gathering is also a time of fellowship and information sharing.

Environmental Preparation

Read page xv in *Facilitating Grace Within* on creating an environment which invites the sacred. The room is set up in the same format as each session:

- Set chairs in a circle around a small table. Cover the table with a plain white or light-colored cloth. This prayer table will be in the center of the group at each session.
- Place a white pillar candle or a Christ candle (a candle with a liturgical symbol on it) on the table. Use the same candle for all the sessions. Use a match to light the candle during the opening ritual.
- Create a prayerful, welcoming mood using soft, reflective instrumental music in the background.
- Consider soft lighting to entice slowing down.

Things to Remember

1. *Grace Within: A Personal Journal*, one per participant.
2. Nametags and markers.
3. Light refreshments for social time following the structured time.
4. Bring a CD containing meditative, instrumental music to be used as the women are gathering and during the rituals.

Invite participants and guests to turn off their phones before the gathering begins.

"I was a stranger and you welcomed me." Matthew 25:35

Timeline – total time 75 minutes

Time	Person	Task / Topic
10	P	Welcome and Overview
10	PL	Opening Prayer
10	GA	Introductions: Facilitator Team & Guests
10	P	Introductions: Participants
10	PL	The Impact of <i>Grace Within</i>
10	Team	Ministry Overview
5	GA	Next Week
10	PL	Closing Prayer
		Discretionary social time and refreshments

PL=Prayer Leader / P=Presenter / GA=Guardian Angel



Facilitating the Welcome Gathering

Welcome and Overview

5 minutes

Presenter



Each team member introduces herself and briefly shares her experience with *Grace Within* (or Ministry of Mothers Sharing, the spiritual process from which *Grace Within* emerged), how she feels, what she received from the experience, and/or how she was enlightened. She can also share her hopes for the participants' experience, as well as her own.

Say: **“Mother Theresa said, “Think globally, and act locally.” *Grace Within* is an empowering journey to your inner self. While that is a strong statement, the spiritual process from which *Grace Within* emerged has a history of well over twenty years and has impacted tens of thousands of women. Through eight sessions—each delving into a different topic—we will discover the beauty of God within us and around us. We will make time to refresh our spirits, share our stories, and realize more fully our sacred call as women. We will uncover new insights, grow in self-awareness, and we may find life-giving connections with others in the group. We are called to grow spiritually, and being here today is an important step.**

Each week builds upon the previous, so being here for every session is vital for you and the group. Each week, we will begin and end with prayer. And so, let us continue now with prayer.”

Opening Prayer

10 minutes

Prayer Leader

**Welcoming Grace Within**

Invite all to remain sitting and to rest their feet flat on the floor with their hands in their laps and their eyes closed. Allow a minute or two to pass while listening to the quiet music, allowing calm to flow through the group. Read *Welcoming Grace Within* slowly (found on page 6 of this document).

When you are done reading, pause for a moment and then invite those present to share, if comfortable, a word or phrase that touched them.

When all are finished, say: **“Loving God, we gather together knowing you are here and present in our midst. Each of us answered “yes” to *Grace Within*. We trust in your guidance, and ask that we be open to one another and the growth that can come from our sharing.”**

Introductions: Team & Guests

10 minutes

Guardian Angel



Using your own words, explain the following key points:

Facilitator team roles:

Presenter: Prepares for and co-facilitates each session.

Guardian Angel: Assists in the preparations and hospitality throughout *Grace Within* and maintains continual contact with the participants.

Prayer Leader: Prepares for and leads the prayer rituals at each session.

Say: **“*Grace Within* is peer-facilitated. What this means is that we are all part of the group, sharing and growing together. We will guide in order to provide time and space for spiritual growth. We will keep the group focused and on topic. We are not counselors, spiritual directors, or teachers. We use an adult learning model and ask you to do what you need to fully participate in the experience. This is not a support group nor a theology class. Rather, it is an opportunity to become aware of the grace-filled person you are and the giftedness you hold within.”**

Introduce prayer partners, if they are present, and any other guests, as well as a brief description of their role in *Grace Within* or Within Ministries. Note that each participant will meet their prayer partner at the final session.

Introductions: Participants

10 minutes

Presenter



Let’s get to know each other. Turn to the person on your right and tell her about yourself. You can share whatever you feel comfortable: your name, how long you have been part of the community, your family, what brought you to *Grace Within*. Each of you will have 3 minutes to talk and 3 minutes to listen. We will then introduce each other to the whole group.

Use a bell or soft chime to say when 3 minutes are up and again when it is time to return to the large group. Invite each pair to introduce each other. When all are finished, thank everyone for being here and welcome them to this experience of *Grace Within*.

The Impact of *Grace Within*

10 minutes

Prayer Leader



Share the impact of *Grace Within*, using the following key points:

- *Grace Within* emerged from a spiritual process with a history of over twenty years.
- *Grace Within* is published and supported by Within Ministries, a nonprofit organization founded by women deeply impacted by the spiritual growth process and passionate about keeping it available for all women to experience.
- The founders of Within Ministries are all former national leaders of the ministry from which the foundational structure of *Grace Within* emerged. It is through that history with the ministry that they felt empowered to create Within Ministries and have it be the organization it is today. They are supportive of you as women and the experience you will have through *Grace Within* in the coming weeks. These founders and board members “practice what they preach,” and you are held in prayer.

If your community experienced the spiritual process as Ministry of Mothers Sharing or MOMS, invite a past participant or leader to share how she was impacted.

If your community is new to the spiritual process, read a few quotes from *Grace Within* participants:

“Each session brings new light and focus on the presence of God in my life.”

“Taking time with Grace Within is the best gift I could have given myself.”

“Grace Within made me feel grounded and helped me reconnect with my core values.”

Ministry Overview

10 minutes

Team

Review *Letter/Email of Welcome* and highlight key information.

Hand out personal journals and introduce the following concepts:

- The journal has eight topics. We will cover one per week.
- Set aside time each week to read and answer the reflection questions.
- Each of our lives is unique. *Grace Within* is about personal growth, and that sometimes happens best through sharing with others. Confidentiality is emphasized.
- Attendance is important. If something happens and you are not able to be at a session, please let us know. And know that you will be missed.

Invite all to open to page 6 of *Grace Within: A Personal Journal* and take turns reading both the bolded concept and the description that follows in *What to Expect*. Mention the *Group Sharing Principles* on pages 7-9, and that these will be discussed in more depth at the first session, as they are guiding principles throughout *Grace Within*.

Ministry Overview

Continued
Team

Highlight page 4 in the journal, briefly introducing Benedictine values, Theotokos, and Called & Gifted as the foundation of *Grace Within*.

Share how prayer is an essential component of the ministry and will be familiar to many and perhaps unfamiliar to some. Three ways in which *Grace Within* participants are supported in prayer:

- Rituals during each gathering.
- Prayer partners (talk briefly about their role if you have not already).
- We will draw names and pray for each other between sessions.

The eighth session is a special celebration. Save the date!

Date of Celebration of New Beginnings _____.

Ask if anyone has questions.

Preparation for First Session

5 minutes

Guardian Angel

**Introduction and Session 1: Self-Esteem and Self-Acceptance**

Stress the importance of coming to each session prepared as a way of gaining the most from the experience. Preparation is reading, reflection questions, and participation.

Invite participants to read pages 1-24 in the journal and answer the questions. Remind them to bring their journals each week.

Share the plan for snack (provided, signup sheet to take turns). Close by saying the facilitator team will be here for a few minutes after the gathering to answer any other questions as needed.

Closing Prayer

10 minutes

Prayer Leader

**Welcoming Grace Within reprise**

Invite everyone to stand around the prayer table. Play soft reflective music.

Say: **“Prayer is an intimate experience. You are always welcome to share your personal prayer silently or out loud. I will begin, and we will go around the circle. You can pray aloud or say “pass.” To begin, close your eyes and listen. As I read, reflect on how you are feeling as you anticipate the coming weeks and our time together.”**

Read *Welcoming Grace Within* again, slowly and prayerfully.

Allow for a quiet moment, and then invite participants to share, reminding them they can pray aloud or say “pass.” Begin by sharing in one or two words what you are feeling. Go around the circle. When all are finished, say, **“Amen.”**

Thank everyone for coming, and note you will see them at the first session.

Social Time

Allow for a brief period of social time and refreshments.

Welcoming Grace Within

By Jean Glaraton

Grace Within

What can that possibly mean?

I look around the room and find myself wondering
Why am I here? What is my story? Who am I?
I know I'm to trust and let answers come
But what if some do not?

Loving God, I place myself in Your hands
And ask to be open
To the beauty in this room
The possibility of new friendship
The sacred in the daily
The grace in the mundane
The joy in the ordinary moments

Yes, I see the possibilities
I trust that You have chosen well
And that this is where I am meant to be
With all my feelings, with all my questions

I will remember to breathe
I will remember to trust
I will remember that this matters

Loving God, be with me as I embark on this journey
I join with each and all women gathered here today

I look around the room and find myself wondering
Why am I here? What is my story? Who am I?
I will trust and let answers come
and know that some may not

I answered yes, I'm not sure why
I want to know, I want to grow
I seek the Grace Within