

Sensitive Prayer Given in a Public Setting

And the disciples asked Jesus – *Teach us how to pray!* Prayer is a very personal and sensitive area. How you pray on your own, of course, is your own business – but what should you do when asked to pray in public -- specifically when you are asked to pray in a Kiwanis meeting -- How then should you pray?

This question has been directed to me as the chairperson of the Spiritual and Human Values Committee of the Cal-Nev-Ha District. Please understand that I speak for myself, and what I am about to share is my own opinion and does not reflect an official position of the District nor of Kiwanis International. I have now been a member of Kiwanis for 36 years and served in many capacities including club secretary, president and Lt. Governor and over the years the face of Kiwanis and indeed the whole state, has changed dramatically. There are now present many more faith traditions; and our society has become more secular in its outlook -- and for this reason, people's response to club prayer has become an area of concern for many members. How can a person stay faithful to his or her faith tradition and still be sensitive to the faith and feelings of others?

Personally, I would like to have all members from different faith traditions have a chance to lead in prayer. Lead in prayer the way they usually pray. For me, prayer is always a special time to look to God and to thank our creator for all the blessings I enjoy and to seek guidance and strength for the day. I am a Christian pastor and I have strong feelings about my beliefs, my understanding of God and my relationship to Him. Just in those few words I have already expressed a lot about my faith and not everyone would agree with what I just said. However, I didn't join Kiwanis to be around people who all look at life the way I do – I joined Kiwanis so I could make friends and learn how to understand and work with people who see life differently than I do! My life is enriched by being in contact with other people – from different backgrounds and worldviews but with a common vision that we all share together – and *that is to change our world, one child and one community at a time!*

Many times in the club, the same member is asked to pray at all or most of the meetings, and thus that member assumes the role of a chaplain. Being that the club does not have multiple chaplains representing all the faiths then this individual needs to try and find common ground with all members as he or she is praying to God for them. When I pray in my church I pray in the name of Jesus – for that is my belief, however when I pray in my club I avoid prayers that would be distinctive to my faith, but common to the needs of all. I do not use my prayer to preach at the members – but to seek God's blessing and direction for our club. The members know where I stand and if they want to ask me about my faith, I would be happy to share with them. But I do not use club time to preach at the members any more than I would like another member to use this time to

sell me his insurance, etc. I do business with several of the members of my club and some of the members have decided to come to my church. That is just the natural exchange and networking that takes place in our clubs. But Kiwanis is not about getting business, but about working together to serve our community. We pray because we acknowledge the importance of the spiritual part of our lives, but – Kiwanis is not a church. Each church has its own prayer traditions – ways to reach out to and hear from God. It is not the place for Kiwanis to establish a “Prayer Statement or Guideline,” but we do want to take time to honor our understanding of faith as important in the life of each Kiwanian.

Some individuals may just want to call for a moment of silence, for each member to seek God in their own way. Others choose to have an inspirational moment -- speaking to our understanding of the value of human life. [Kiwanis International has booklets of readings and simple prayers.] What ever you do should be done with respect and dignity in reflection of the first Object of Kiwanis. For this reason, we as members of Kiwanis make a choice to not seek to be offended, nor to offend – but to learn to understand and respect all our members. Let your church, ward, synagogue, temple or mosque teach you to pray and in Kiwanis we will seek to find common ground and reach out together to serve our community. Do not let prayer divide you, but to bring you to the common ground of our humanity and then, let God sort the rest out. Here is an example of a prayer that I think would be appropriate – Thanks to AA.

The Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world
as it is, not as I would have it;
Trusting that He will make all things right
if I surrender to His Will;
That I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with Him
Forever in the next.
Amen.