Centering Prayer

I. Purposes of this session:
   A. To experience Centering Prayer
   B. To share what we experience with each other.
   C. To practice leading one of the prayer practices

II. Suggested Procedure
   A. Opening - (5-10-minutes)
      1. Light the candle to symbolize God’s presence, God’s desire for us to come to him in
         prayer, and the Spirit’s work in our hearts as we seek God.
      2. Explain the process - You will use Centering Prayer, a prayer of quieting the mind
         and inner silence and simple presence before God, and then share about that experience.
      3. Introduce Centering Prayer. This form of prayer can create discomfort for people
         who have had little or no experience cultivating interior silence, so it is important to set a tone of
         comfort and safety and gentleness in the space.  You may consider bringing soft, meditative
         instrumental music to play very softly in the room if you happen to that available.  Or you may
         wish to bring some object to enhance your center table - a larger, softer cloth to drape over the
         table, a cross, icon, picture, etc.
   B. Begin with a short conversation about “silence”
      Where/when have they experienced silence and what was that experience like for them?
      Encourage them to think also about their level of comfort with silence in general (do they always
      have music on, etc.), and experience of ‘interior silence’ - when their mind is “quiet”- and how
      they respond to that kind of silence.  Have them share together about their experiences.
   C. Explain Centering Prayer as an opportunity to enter into an open, gentle, quiet space
      where God is present - a quiet, open space and time.  They relax their bodies with slow, steady,
      deep breaths; they calm their minds by slowly repeating a simple word that they choose.  The
      prayer is simply to “be present” to God, not to talk to God - just be present with - and allow God
      to be present to us.  The prayer word is to help keep our minds quiet.  They may stop repeating
      the word at some time - but if they become aware of thoughts interrupting the silence, gently let
      those thoughts float away like a leaf on a river and by saying their chosen word again to calm
      their minds and return to silent openness to God.
   C. Ask them to each choose a prayer word - a simple word or phrase that they can use
      silently to bring them back to the presence of God; a gentle word that doesn’t take much effort to
      say, that is soothing, that brings them into God’s presence:  God, Jesus, Abba, Father, Holy,
      Spirit, Love, etc.   Give them a minute or so to settle on a word.
   D. Explain the process you will use for the prayer time: You will begin the prayer with
      “Let us pray” and then they will pray silently for 15-20 minutes (you judge based on the group’s
      time constraints).  Tell them you will be the timekeeper and you will end the prayer time by
      saying “Amen.” During the time of prayer, as they become aware of their thoughts, they can
      release the thoughts by speaking the prayer word and returning to silence.  Unlike praying with a
      mantra, which is repeated continuously during the prayer time, Centering Prayer makes use of a
      prayer word only as a way of drawing ones attention back to the presence of God when other
      thoughts are present.
E. Invite them to sit with their back straight, head up (like there is a silver thread hanging straight down from the tip of their head through the center of their body); feet flat on the floor; hands relaxed on their thighs, with their eyes closed and begin to breath slowly and deeply.

F. Begin the prayer time with “Let us pray.”
F. End the prayer time by saying, “Amen.”
G. Allow a short time of silence
H. Gently invite observations, reflections, questions or comments about the prayer or the prayer experience.