



Making Crosses

This activity is based on Ellen Morris Prewitt's book *Making Crosses: A Creative Connection to God*. Permission granted by author to use excerpts for retreat purposes, June 2020. To learn more about cross making as a spiritual practice, you may wish to purchase the book at https://paracletepress.com/products/making-crosses?_pos=1&_sid=39f6dac37&_ss=r

The following activity invites you into a time of prayerful reflection to find objects that speak to you and to form these objects into a cross.

More than oral or written word, more than our analytical thinking, making crosses is a way of understanding that comes from doing. And doing with our hands. Making crosses locates you in a place of prayer and keeps you there. As you work on your cross, God is right there beside you, making suggestions, leading you into new understandings, showing you things that you didn't know you knew. Because you are working on the most complex symbol of Christianity—the cross—you are attached deeply to God.

There are three simple building blocks for making a cross:

1. Take what the world doesn't value and make it into a work of God.
2. Reject the materialism of this world, in your own small way, by reusing discarded materials and giving them new, godly life.
3. Engage in an activity that takes you directly into communion with God.

Enter into God's presence.

Take a moment to enter into God's presence. Think about a moment or moments when you have experienced God's most profound love...Relive the sense of peace and security and happiness this experience brought to you. Write down the words that best describe how you felt. Set yourself in that place, so that for the time you are making your cross you are speaking to that God, the One who loves you so.

Step 1: Find objects for your cross.

Allow your inspiration to come from God's word: take what the world doesn't value and use it to commune with God, or "So the last will be first, and the first last" (Mt. 20:16). Again: reject the rampant materialism of this world, or "Sell all that you have, give to the poor, then come and follow me" (Lk. 18.22).

For Ellen, the author of *Making Crosses*, crosses cannot be separated from what they symbolize: a rejection of the world's way of valuing. That is why she tries to use only broken, discarded, seemingly worthless objects. It's the very commonness of the cross materials—a plumber's elbow, found string, a broken key chain—that helps the meaning of

the cross itself to come through. The simplicity removes religious pretense and spiritual smugness and points instead to the everyday fact of the Cross.

Try using objects that are unvalued by the world, unnoticed even, to make images of God: “Things which were cast down are being raised up” (BCP 280).

- Find two sticks, which will become the beams for your cross.
- Consider what you will use to hold the beams together.
- Go for a walk: around your home, outside, or both. Collect objects to add to the beams.

Reflect.

Meditate on what it means to you to be a co-creator with God. That is what you will be doing in cross making: creating something new together with God. In what other aspects of life have you felt you were a co-creator with God? Using your prayer thoughts make a list of creation goals that do not include the word perfection. Read your list out loud.

Step 2: Assemble your items.

Assemble all of your collected items. Spread them in front of you. Gently place each object in your hand. Meditate on what this item means to you, what that item might mean. Let God come close to you in prayer. Your cross might be quite representational, or the pieces can be put together in a decorative way that shouts, “Hallelujah!” Give it a little bit of time. Let the Holy Spirit work with you and the objects.

Step 3: Adorn your cross.

Begin to put together your cross, starting with the crossbeams. There is no set way to make a cross, so use the items you have gathered, affixing them with glue, string, or whatever you might have on hand.

Think about other “physical” ways have you worshiped God—in dance, drawing, making clay objects? How was that experience different for you than traditional cerebral worship? How does working on your cross feel different to you? What would you like to get out of such a physical prayer experience?

Step 4: Tell the story of your cross.

Do this silently or aloud, or write your story on paper. First identify what has gone into your cross: where the sticks came from, what adornments you used, the origin of your materials. Tell what each object means to you, what it symbolizes. If there is any double meaning in your symbols, explain it. Give your cross a title.

Ask yourself: What will you do with your cross? With whom will you share its story?

Andean Despachos

From a Peruvian tradition brought down from high in the Andean mountains, A despacho, which literally means "dispatch", is a ceremonial offering of our intentions and prayers. It is a powerful and lovely way to "dispatch" our prayers into the world. You can create a despacho or prayer packet to reflect any prayerful intention, such as healing prayers for someone, prayers for rain, or prayers for safe travels. Items are collected that represent your intentions such as a picture of a person you are praying for, leaves, soil, other elements of nature, or any items that symbolize something you relate to your intention. You can write your wishes or prayer on a piece of paper to include in your despachos if you'd like.

The despacho can be either buried (for slow, steady results), burned (for quicker transformation), or fed to the running waters ceremonially within a reasonable amount of time after it is prepared (please be considerate of the environment). When the despacho is placed into a fire, participants generally do not look towards the flames until after the offering has been burnt. This symbolizes non-attachment to the outcome and release of all claim to that which has been given away.



Note: you may find it helpful to Google images of "Andean Despachos"

How to create your own despacho:

Begin by preparing yourself mentally to become completely present and intentional. You may wish to light a candle or say a prayer.

Decide what prayers you wish to 'dispatch', and think about what things to include in your despacho which have meaning to you related to your prayer/intention.

A suggested list of contents, and their meaning is below, however, there really are no rules. Create your prayer packet in a way that is meaningful to you.

Begin your despacho with a piece of paper or fabric large enough to wrap all the contents of your offering. Think of it as a present.

Fold it into thirds one way and then thirds the other way so you have nine squares, then reopen your paper or cloth.

Working within the center square, you will begin to layer the objects. Before placing the objects on the paper or cloth, blow on the object so that the energetic essence of your prayers is within each one. During your assembly of the despacho, you may wish to arrange the items in an esthetically pleasing pattern such as a mandala. You can even lightly sprinkle the despacho with wine, perfume, or some other liquid that is meaningful to you.

Once you have filled the despacho with your prayers, fold the bundle into the shape of a gift; left to right, right to left; then bottom up and top down. Tie it with a cord, ribbon, yarn, strip of cloth or whatever you prefer. You might tuck a sprig of sage, a feather or some other item in the tie for added decoration or to symbolize a final prayer or blessing.

Ingredient suggestions and their representations:

- *Large piece of paper or cloth:* The envelope of dreams in which we “write” our prayers. Blow your prayer intent or intent for reciprocity and balance in to this empty, folded gift.
- *Sugar:* Represents sweetness and love.
- *K'intu:* A ritual grouping of leaves. In Peru, they typically use three coca leaves, but you can use three small leaves from native trees. Bay leaves are often used, so look for leaves about that size.
- *Build the foundation* of the despacho with the K'intus, informing each with your prayer
- *Cover the K'intus* with a little more sugar, representing even more love and sweetness.
- *Rice:* Fertility and abundance, to bring your prayers into fruition.
- *Various grains:* Sustenance.
- *Beans:* For protection, abundance, power places, and the springs that nourish us.
- *Corn:* Sustenance, gift back to the Earth for what we have been given.
- *Raisins:* Spirits of our ancestors, our blood lineage.
- *Animal crackers* for animal spirits, and health.
- *Chocolate:* more sweetness
- *Loose sage or other incense:* To feed the elements of the Earth.
- *Flower petals:* for healing.

When you have placed all your items in the despacho, the corners of the large paper or cloth are then folded over the contents so that they all overlap at the center to form a smaller square. Tie the despacho without flipping it over so that all the prayers are sustained.



Prayer Flags

A Prayer Flag is a colorful, rectangular cloth used to send prayers and best wishes. These flags originated thousands of years ago in Tibet and were used to bless the surrounding countryside. The flags are intended to flutter in the wind so that your prayers are carried and spread far and wide by the wind.

In the packet that was mailed to you, you were provided with a rectangular cloth on which to create a Prayer Flag, if you choose to. The cloth already has a pocket through which you can run a cord, string, or ribbon for hanging your flag.

Making your Prayer Flag

Gather your materials. You can use markers, or paint to create your design on the fabric if you would like. There are many more elaborate but simple ways to decorate your flag that can be found online if you'd prefer. To stabilize the fabric while you're drawing or painting on it, use masking tape to tape the fabric to a piece of cardstock or cardboard. Attaching the fabric to a piece of wood with push pins is another option. If you are stabilizing the fabric on wood, it might be wise to put paper towel between the fabric and wood so paint or marker doesn't bleed through to the wood.

Once you've gathered markers, paint, pencils, other fabrics, etc, take a few moments to prepare yourself for the activity.

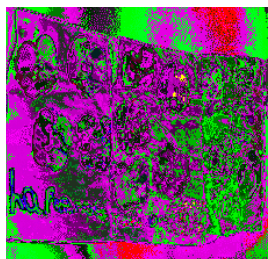
Here are some color symbols:

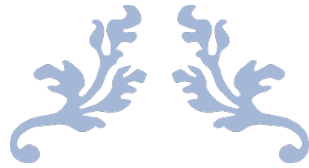
- blue for sky or space
- white for air or wind
- green for water
- yellow for earth

Find a comfortable seated position, and take a few nice, deep breaths to settle into your space.

Consider an intention, a prayer, or a wish that you'd like to manifest. Examples could include something you'd like to see more of in the world, a trait you'd like to strengthen in yourself, an aspect of nature that you admire, or a prayer for a particular person and/or circumstance. Honor your intention and draw or paint or write whatever comes to mind.

Assemble your flag and hang it with Intention. Allow your flag to dry completely before removing the tape or push pins. Run a cord, string or ribbon through the pocket at the top and hang your flag outdoors where the wind can spread your prayer.





ADVENT-THEMED COLORING PROJECT

Do you like the mindfulness and creativity of coloring?
Grab some crayons, markers, or colored pencils and enjoy
bringing color into these drawings for Advent.



