

CLOSING PRAYER AND SENDING FORTH

(The leader explains that for the closing prayer he or she will lead the community in a guided meditation. Members should be seated close enough to each other for everyone to be able to reach another's hand. Before beginning, he/she invites members to set aside anything that they have in their hands. Members are then invited to sit erect, with their feet flat on the floor. Members are asked to rest their hands on their lap, palms up, but not touching one another. When all are ready, the leader begins as follows.)

I invite you, first of all, to close your eyes. As you do, you become aware of the air at your fingertips, between your fingers, on the palm of your hand. Experience the fullness, strength and maturity of your hands. Think of your hands; think of the most unforgettable hands you have known – the hands of your father, your mother, your grandparents. Remember the oldest hands that have rested in your hands. Think of the hands of a new born child – of the incredible beauty, perfection, delicacy in the hands of a child. Your hands were once the same size. *(Pause)*

Think of all the learning your hands have done and how many activities they have mastered, the things that they have made. Our hands were not made just for ourselves but for others. How often were they given to help another? Remember all the kinds of work they have done, the tiredness and aching they have known, the cold and the heat, the soreness and the bruises. Remember the tears they have wiped away, your own or another's, the blood they have bled, the healing they have experienced. How much hurt, anger and even violence they have expressed, and how much gentleness, tenderness and love they have shown. *(Pause)*

There is a mystery that we discover in the hand of a woman or a man that we love. There are the hands of a doctor, a nurse, an artist, a conductor, a priest, a construction worker, a gardener, a carpenter, a teacher, hands that you can never forget. *(Pause)*

How often have your hands been folded in prayer, both as a sign of their powerlessness and of their power? Recall some of those special times. *(Pause)*

Now raise a hand slowly and gently place it over your heart. Press more firmly until your hand picks up the beat of your heart, that most mysterious of

all human sounds, one's own heartbeat, a rhythm learned in the womb from the heartbeat of one's own mother. Press more firmly for a moment. Then release your hand and hold it just a fraction from your clothing. Experience the warmth between your hand and your heart. Now lower your hand to your lap carefully as if it were carrying your heart: it does. When you extend your hand to another, it's not just bone and skin, it is your heart. A handshake is a real heart transplant. *(Pause)*

Now without opening your eyes, extend your hand and find another hand. Hold this hand for just a minute and try to express your gratitude for this hand stretched out in the dark and then bring your own hand back to your lap. Experience the presence of that hand lingering upon your own hand. The afterglow will fade, but the print is there forever. *(Pause)*

Whose hand was that? It could have been any hand; it could have been Jesus' hand. It was.

Jesus' hands/my hands when we hold the hands of someone who is ill. Jesus' hands/my hands when we greet the stranger with a welcome handshake. Jesus' hands/my hands when we work in love for one another. Jesus' hands/my hands when we reach out to give and to receive. Jesus has no other hands but ours. *(Extended pause)*

Adapted from: Edward J. Farrell, *Surprised by the Spirit*.
Dimension Books, 1973, p. 123 -125

(After an extended pause, the leader invites members to open their eyes as they are ready, and to move their arms and legs. Members stand, and extending their hands, pray the Lord's Prayer.

Members join in singing the MusicQuest selection, "Your Hands O Lord, in Days of Old". See p. 105 for lyrics. The session concludes with the exchange of a sign of peace.)