If you are making prayer squares for the Women’s Fall Retreat or any other event, please be in touch with Rev. Gwynn Fuqua at gwynn_fuqua@gmail.com for details on bringing them to the event or mailing them in ahead of time.

Below you will find an invitation by Gwynn on making this beautiful and practical craft. Your prayer square will bless someone in the future – we hear powerful stories about how a simple prayer square touches someone deeply.

We welcome prayer squares of lots of different fabrics and materials. We do ask that you please keep the prayer squares to 3 by 4 inches.
Some practical information on making prayer squares

I usually use worsted (#4) or DK (#3) yarn with size US 4 or US 5 knitting needles. The yarn we use at the Alameda church is Lion Brand 24-7 Cotton. We like it because it comes in 25 colors and it’s made of mercerized cotton, so it has a nice sheen to it. It feels great in your hand, too. I have found some online sources for it because there’s only one store that I know of in the East Bay that carries it, and that store only stocks a handful of the color choices. Besides, the online prices are usually lower. Depending on your needle size and how tightly you knit, you can get 11-15 squares out of one skein of 24-7 Cotton.

The bags that we use to package the squares are 4 inches wide by 5-1/2 inches high. We will gladly accept and use squares that are bigger than that, but we prefer not to have to fold the squares to get them into the bags, so that the whole front of the square can be seen without taking it out of the bag. The size we aim for is approximately 3 inches wide by 4 inches high.

For those of you who usually block their pieces, I leave it up to you. I’ve found that if I knit loosely, then the square will curl more, so lately I’ve been using a size US3 or US4 needle with 24-7 Cotton. With a little reshaping by hand the square will stay flat and hold its shape without blocking. If I do find that I need to block, I just pin the squares to a foam mat, spray them with room temperature water and let them dry.

I use cotton yarn because I don’t know who will end up with any of these squares. If someone sends a square to a soldier who carries it into combat, an acrylic/nylon/other synthetic yarn will melt onto the soldier’s skin under extreme heat. I’ve learned that some soldiers tuck the square into their helmet, so that could be disastrous. Cotton will not melt. I don’t use wool because some people are sensitive to it or just don’t like the feel of it.

Also, I want to lift up the fact that prayer squares don’t have to be knitted or crocheted. Those of you who are primarily quilters can make a “sandwich” out of two pieces of fabric with a piece of flannel in the middle (or batting if you’re so inclined). Stitch a cross or heart or ichthus motif into the middle of it, by hand or machine. Close the edges neatly and you’ve got a prayer square!

You can make prayer squares in multiple ways. The thing to remember is that some anxious person is going to be holding it and twisting it and crushing it, so it needs to be sturdy. Paper will soon disintegrate in sweaty hands, so we recommend against using paper because it’s not going to be usable for very long.

There’s a good article about prayer squares on the Lion Brand website. Check it out: http://www.lionbrand.com/blog/pocket-prayer-shawls-provide-portable-comfort/

Feel free to contact me for more information or if you have questions!

Peace,
Rev. Gwynn
gwynn.fuqua@gmail.com
Knitted Cross Prayer Square

Size US5 or US6 knitting needles (circular or straight, as you prefer)
Worsted yarn (#4/medium weight): 13-15 yards needed for each square
Preferred final measurements: approximately 2-1/2 inches x 3-1/2 inches
Cast on 17 stitches.

Rows 1-4: knit across
Row 5: k2, p13, k2
Row 6 (and all even-numbered rows through 26): knit across
Rows 7, 9, 11, 13, 15: k2, p5, k3, p5, k2
Rows 17, 19, 21: k2, p2, k9, p2, k2
Row 23, 25: k2, p5, k3, p5, k2
Row 27: k2, p13, k2
Rows 28-31: knit across

Bind off. Weave in ends.
Reshape the square as needed, with your fingers or by blocking.
Knitted Heart Prayer Square

Size US5 or US6 knitting needles (circular or straight, as you prefer)
Worsted yarn (#4/medium weight): 13-15 yards needed for each square

Cast on 19 stitches.

Rows 1-4: knit across
Row 5: k2, p15, k2
Row 6 (and all even-numbered rows through 28): knit across
Row 7: k2, p7, k1, p7, k2
Row 9: k2, p6, k3, p6, k2
Row 11: k2, p5, k5, p5, k2
Row 13: k2, p4, k7, p4, k2
Row 15: k2, p3, k9, p3, k2
Row 17: k2, p2, k11, p2, k2
Rows 19, 21, 23: repeat row 17
Row 25: k2, p3, k4, p1, k4, p3, k2
Row 27: k2, p4, k2, p3, k2, p4, k2
Row 29: k2, p15, k2
Rows 30-33: knit across

Bind off. Weave in ends.
Reshape the square as needed, with your fingers or by blocking.
On the making of prayer squares

Excerpts from “Foolish and Powerless”, a sermon preached March 12, 2017 at First Christian Church of Alameda, CA

by Rev. Gwynn Fuqua

It occurred to me on this journey that it is not up to me to determine who gets a prayer square. I get pretty regular feedback from people who have given them out. Sometimes they give away a square that they had been carrying around for their own personal use, because they have discerned that someone needs to have a prayer square right at that moment. So people come back and tell me that they sacrificed their own prayer square for someone else’s benefit. Sometimes a person will misplace their prayer square in a public place and never see it again. In those cases, I trust that someone has picked it up—someone who needs it more than the original owner did. I believe that some prayer squares are meant to change ownership multiple times, providing comfort and encouragement to each person as needed and then being sent on to the next person, until they reach their final destination. I had to let go of the idea that I could control access to the prayer squares.

It also occurred to me that I have no idea what the political views are of the people who receive the squares. I’m sure that some of the squares are in the possession of people whose views are the opposite of mine, and who might not want me living next door to them. I don’t know who they are, and they don’t know who I am.

So I came to realize that not only is the making of the prayer square a kind of spiritual practice—along the lines of bible study or prayer or fasting or stewardship—but the releasing of the prayer square is also a spiritual practice. By releasing the square I have made, I surrender my illusion of control and agree with God’s inevitable blessing of that unknown person somewhere in the world, whom God has designated to receive that prayer square.

Knitting, crocheting, quilting, sewing and other crafts are often seen as “women’s work”. Many people who enjoy these activities have been told at one time or another, “I wish I had time to waste like that.” Or they’ve been asked, “Why don’t you just go buy a sweater/scarf/hat?” People who would say such things have apparently never had the pleasure of making something beautiful or useful with their own two hands.

I believe that part of the reason that some people consider crafting a waste of time is that most people don’t make any money from doing crafts. Most people aren’t even trying to make money from it; they’re doing it for the sheer joy of it. Conventional wisdom asks, if you aren’t making any money off of it, why do it? That’s how some people think.

Here’s your history lesson for the day:

Before the 1600s there were knitting guilds in Europe, which were basically trade unions. Knitting was a skilled trade and it was done by men. A young man became an apprentice to a master knitter, and then moved up in the ranks to...
journeyman, eventually becoming a master knitter himself. The guilds had a monopoly on all the knitting trade.

In the late 1500s, the first knitting machine was invented and there went the hand-knitting industry. It was no longer profitable to knit by hand because the knitter could not compete cost-wise with a machine. Pretty soon after that, knitting became an unpaid pastime of women. It was taught by women to women and so passed down through the generations. There was no money in hand-knitting anymore, so the men stopped doing it and let the women have it.

Here’s your math lesson for the day:

There is a mathematical concept which was discovered in the early 1800s, known as the hyperbolic plane. Don’t question me too hard on what it is or why it’s significant. In the geometry that we learned in high school, a plane is perfectly flat. In hyperbolic geometry, a plane has curves that go up and down like ruffles. As a hyperbolic plane gets bigger, its curves sprout more curves. You can catch glimpses of the hyperbolic plane in the coral reef and in the types of lettuce that have curly edges. I do know that some concepts that you and I learned in geometry class do not apply in hyperbolic geometry, such as certain properties of parallel lines and straight lines. The thing I want you to know is that this concept cannot be described by an equation. You know how scientists are. They need to be able to write an idea down accurately so that they can go back and refer to it later. They couldn’t do that with the hyperbolic plane, so they pretty much stopped talking about it at all. Until about 20 years ago, it was also widely accepted that the hyperbolic plane could not be represented by a physical model made by humans.

Enter a mathematician from Latvia, a woman named Daina Taimina. She is a professor, now retired from Cornell University, who figured out how to crochet models of the hyperbolic plane. (This cannot be done using knitting because too many stitches would have to be on the needles at one time. It only works with crochet.) Dr. Taimina’s models are on display in the Smithsonian collection of American Mathematical Models.

In case you’re interested, or somebody asks you a trivia question about it, there are a lot of websites having to do with the connection between mathematics and fiber arts. Just google “math knitting” or “math crochet” and see how many results you get. There are at least six mathematical concepts that are demonstrated very clearly in knitting or crochet. There is a married couple in England—math teachers—who make afghans that demonstrate math concepts in such a way that people who previously could not grasp a concept can now understand it when it is depicted in the form of knitting or crochet, with bright, contrasting colors.

So, next time you’re knitting or crocheting, and somebody asks you, “What are you doing?” you can truthfully say, “I’m studying applied mathematics.”

*What’s your point, Rev. Gwynn?*

My point is that these activities that have been scorned, belittled and relegated to the lowly status of women’s work can be used to make beautiful and useful
everyday things as well as to illustrate lofty and complex ideas in math and science that cannot be illustrated any other way.

Take a look at 1 Corinthians 1:27-28. The New Living Translation puts it this way:

27Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful.

28God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important.

So when you look at a prayer square and realize that it’s just a length of string looped together to look pretty, know that God is in the intention of the heart of the person that made it. Know that God can use this little piece of nothing at all, to bring down strongholds. Know that God can use this foolish and powerless thing to humble the wise and the powerful.

We know that God can take our tiny offerings and multiply them. Remember the loaves and fishes? We know that God can do marvelous things with our small but sincere efforts. Remember the widow who put two coins into the temple treasury? Her gift was valued far above the larger gift of a rich person because it was everything she had. God looks at the spirit and the intention of our offering and honors it—supercharges it—by adding God’s own power to it.

Don’t be deceived. The time that you spend creating art or music or beautiful things to wear or to decorate your home or to give away is never wasted.

Remember this: beautiful, handmade things may appear to be foolish and powerless, but they move hearts. If you can move hearts, you can change the world with God’s help.