

Making Prayer Quilts

Introduction

Quilts become prayer quilts as a result of the prayers that are tied into them. It is not important how a quilt is made or where it comes from, how large or small it is, how simple or intricately patterned it may be. The emphasis in this ministry is on prayer. In the course of making a prayer quilt, whether or not you know who will receive it, be thinking about why you are making the quilt, and in that way you'll keep the focus on prayer.

At the beginning, not everyone who is interested in directly participating in this ministry will be an experienced quilter. The quilters in your group may want to take the lead in organizing efforts to get those first quilts made. With hundreds of chapters world wide, there may be an established chapter in your area with experienced quilters who would be happy and willing to help you as you get started making those first all-important quilts (go to the Prayers & Squares website to find the other chapters in your area).

There are also numerous resources available to those wanting to learn to quilt – books and magazines, quilt shops, fabric stores, community colleges, adult education, and senior centers. If you are interested and excited about getting involved in this ministry, but have simply not done any quilting and would like to learn, it's important you know there are numerous avenues around to allow you to do so.

There are things we've learned since the beginning of this ministry about making prayer quilts that we would like to share with you, things that will make the quilt making process easier and less time consuming. That is important when a recipient is waiting for the prayers that will be tied into a quilt.

Sewing

With other types of sewing, seams can vary in width - not so with quilting. In all of your sewing on a quilt, it is all-important that you use a 1/4 inch seam throughout. Why? If you are making a quilt that is composed of 12 blocks or squares, that consistent 1/4 inch seam will ensure that all 12 of your blocks will be pretty close to the same size. Obviously, there will be some variation, but the more consistent you are with that 1/4 inch seam; the less variation there will be in the size of your blocks.

Most sewing machines now have a 1/4 inch foot; however, if yours does not have one, it would be a great investment. You could also mark 1/4 inch out to the right of your needle and then mark that point with tape, for that perfect 1/4 inch seam.

Patterns

There are quite a few patterns on the Prayers & Squares website, including a number of easy ones for, not only beginners, but also to simply aid in getting those first quilts made quickly. Your more experienced quilters may wish to demonstrate a very easy pattern, and teach some basic quilting techniques, as a way of getting started on some prayer quilts. Some chapters use fabric panels for a quilt top as a way of getting started quickly.

Material

As a way of getting started and introducing your ministry, chapters have asked for donations of fabric (100% cotton) from the congregation, fabric and quilt shops. Once you have the support of your congregation for this ministry, and the need for fabric is announced, it just seems that the need gets filled. Most geographic locations have discount fabric shops and warehouses that carry 100% cotton good for making quilts. Those same locations usually carry a variety of panels that make good quick quilts when getting started or when an immediate need arises.

In the beginning, select material appropriate for either a man or woman, unless it is known specifically to whom the quilt will be going.

Size

Most chapters make lap size quilts, usually 40-50 inches wide by 50-60 inches long. This is a good personal size and large enough to wrap up in, to cover up with, to feel covered by its warmth. Whatever size you choose; remember that the quilt itself is not the important thing. It is the power of the prayers tied into each knot on the quilt. Remember, it's not about the quilts; it's all about the prayers.

Batting

Batting comes in a variety of colors, sizes, and textures. Four-ounce polyester batting works well in a prayer quilt. It is lightweight, fairly inexpensive, and durable.

Backing

If your quilt top is about 42-44 wide, your selected backing material will usually be wide enough that you won't have to piece it. Wider than that & you'll most likely need to piece the back. On the Prayers & Squares website, there is a wonderful pattern for a cross backing. This backing pattern gives you that wider back by piecing a cross into the quilt back. It's an easy pattern and becomes a visual reminder of the purpose of the quilt.

Layering, pinning, quilting & binding

Iron the quilt top and backing wrinkle-free. If one is available, a large hard-topped table is ideal for this process. Plastic table risers that go under each leg and raise the table 5 or 6 inches make the layering and pinning process a lot easier on your back and neck. It is possible to do this on the floor, just harder on the knees and back.

One method of layering the quilt is to spread out the quilt back, wrong side up. Use masking tape or plastic clips to secure the edges, pulling slightly taut all the way around. Center the batting and then the top (right side up) on top of the backing, checking to make sure the top is square to the backing, and smooth out any wrinkles. You should be able to see a couple inches of batting/backing around the edge of the quilt top. You are then ready to either baste or pin your layers together. Pinning is quicker, especially if you are a beginning quilter. If you decide to pin your layers together, begin at the center of the quilt top, pinning through all layers using safety pins (curved quilters' safety pins work great), spacing pins about 4 to 5 inches apart, smoothing the top as you go. Pin with the grain of the fabric. Remove the masking tape or clips from the backing once the quilt is completely pinned.

An alternate method of layering a quilt is to place the batting down first, then the backing, right side up, and finally the quilt top, right side down. Using a 1/4 inch seam, sew around the perimeter of the quilt leaving an opening of about 10-12 inches. Trim corners, then turn the quilt right side out, smooth out layers, sew opening close with a blind stitch, and continue with the pinning as in the previous method. This method, called pillow casing, is quicker since there is no separate binding.

At this point, you may choose either to do some basic machine quilting, such as stitching in the ditch around the squares and on the border, or you may choose just to use the ties to hold the quilt together. Should you choose to do some quilting, this is the time to do so. If no quilting is to be done, go ahead and put the binding on the quilt before you attach the ties. There are numerous ways to bind a quilt, and books and magazines available to describe how. The more experienced quilters in your chapter are a valuable resource in the piecing, quilting, and binding process.

Once the quilt is layered, pinned, quilted (if you choose to do so) and bound, the only thing left to do is to sew ties into the quilt, and add the fabric label and washing instructions tag, in that order.

Preparing the ties

In preparing to add ties to the prayer quilt, we've found that #5 pearl cotton works great. It is strong enough to hold the quilt together, and heavy enough so that as the recipient touches the tied knots representing prayers, he or she is reminded of just what those knots mean. In deciding on the color of pearl cotton to use, we have found that a contrasting color rather than a blending color allows the ties to be seen more easily, both by those tying the knots and by the recipient.

Cut the pearl cotton in 3 to 5 foot lengths, or longer depending on what is comfortable for you. Thread a sharp needle with an eye large enough for the pearl cotton to go through. Bring both thread ends together and center the needle, so you are using a double thread. Take the stitch through all layers of the quilt. Ideally, the width of each

tie should be no more than ¼ inch, reaching through and catching all layers. Cut the threads of each tie, leaving tails of at least 3 to 4 inches. These long ends make it easier for people to tie. Place ties 4 to 7 inches apart in whatever manner you choose appropriate to the quilt pattern. 80-100 ties are a good number for a lap size quilt. There's a good chance that more than 80-100 people will be tying knots and saying prayers for the recipient of the quilt. That's okay; simply tie another knot on top of an already tied knot. Once the ties are sewn into the quilt, remove the pins, and you are ready to add the label and washing instructions tag to the back of the quilt.

Label & washing instructions tag

Sew a Prayers & Squares fabric label to the back of the prayer quilt. This is an important step because it identifies the quilt as a prayer quilt, and lets everyone who sees it know what it stands for.

Add the washing instructions tag with a safety pin or thread. (Artwork for the tag is provided in this packet.) The quilt is now ready to be tied.