

Sacred Circle Prayer Beads



Sacred: Worthy of being held with reverence
Circle: A symbol of centering, completion, and the feminine

Before beginning any bead project, I say a prayer to the Creator: *"May what I create with my hands, eyes, and spirit be a blessing to the world."* The beaded prayer shawl is the answer to that prayer. It has a name, given because I have a living relationship with its beads, its sacred circles. I love them, respect them, and care for them in all of the journeys that it takes to create them into prayer shawls. I buy them, carefully selecting each one, thinking of their relationship with others. I carry them all the way from Africa and other places in the world. I pray and dance and sing and bond with them, my friends and traveling kindred spirits. Just as I pray with them, *they also pray with me.* They are works of beauty, worthy of a name that provides the good orderly direction (the "god") of the prayer shawl. Their names give me an intention, a way to honor God's voice through me. That's what makes them *sacred circles.*

There are several characteristics of the Sacred Circles prayer shawls. Each shawl has anchor beads, in the tradition of spiritual prayer beads or rosaries. I consider and use clusters of beads that echo the work that I believe the shawl is for, what it asks us to remember. For example, a shawl might have anchor beads in multiples of 7, the number of perfection or 5, the number of love, or 11, a master number that is associated with intuition and deep reflection. The beads and the name anchor this shawl -- and hopefully provide an anchor for you as well.

After the anchor beads are chosen, I carefully chose various types of beads that might aid in prayer and meditation, guided by the name of the prayer shawl. For example if your desire is to meditate or pray to heal envy (as was a part of my first shawl, "Ode to Oshun"), there is a brass Akan bead in the shawl that I can hold in my hands, one that represents an African proverb and my prayer to "walk without jealousy or envy." If you seek clarity and purpose, you might pray with the faceted quartz bead in the shawl "Perfect Harmony: In the Spirit of Kwanzaa." Colors are blended and used in the spirit of the piece to also aid in healing practice. Natural stones, gems, glass, clay, and handmade beads are most often used because they carry the spirit of the art, the artist, and the earth. And in the tradition of many quilt artists, there is a "mistake" bead, intentionally selected and placed in the shawl to remind us all that mistakes are often our most powerful guides on this earthly journey: They are purposeful and intentional, just like the mistake bead is in the piece. They are divinely ordered.

While the beads can be worn as a shawl or a lareat, they are strongly intended to be a companion in prayer: They are portable, reminding us to pray wherever we are. And while each prayer shawl starts with my intentions for the piece, my hope is that you will create your own intentions. These prayer shawls are designed to affirm beauty, peace, love, and the blessings of the Creator... **May what you pray with your hands, eyes, and spirit be a blessing to the world!**

Cynthia

Cynthia B. Dillard

Full Circle African Arts/Sacred Circle Beads