

Prescription: Take a different prayer-idea
each week and
deepen your relationship with God

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One of the wonderful effects of the deepening of our Catholic lives because of the faith-filled renewal of Vatican II is that we have discovered and rediscovered the rich heritage of prayer forms which we possess. There is more than one way to pray!

As catechetical leaders, working with children, youth, and/or adults, we want to do all we can to lead them to this deepening of their prayer lives.

Listed here are fifty-two ways (there are, of course, many, many more). Why not try a different one each week? Different children (and adults) will lean toward different ways of praying. By providing them with varied and rich experiences of many different ways of praying, we can plant seeds and till the soil so that each person can learn and experience those forms which help them to come closer to God and God's family in this intimate encounter of prayer.

- 1) DOODLE-YOUR-FEELINGS PRAYER: Provide children/youth with paint, magic markers, colored chalk or crayons. Lead them in prayer: "God who loves us, you have given us so many people to love. This is how I feel when I think of my family.... This is how I feel when I remember my friends...." (This type of prayer can be used with varied themes and feelings.)
- 2) SING SUNDAY'S RESPONSORIAL PSALM: The Psalms are powerful prayers of our heritage. Have the refrain of the Sunday Psalm become a mantra for your group throughout the week. Sing it often.
- 3) GENERAL INTERCESSIONS: Have the children/youth model their petitions on the format of those we pray together at liturgy:
 - prayers for the needs of the Church
 - prayers for public authorities and the salvation of the world
 - prayers for those oppressed by any need
 - prayers for the local community
- 4) LITANIES: In the Church's traditional prayers, there are many beautiful litanies. Recent ones have also been written; see the Litany of Mary composed by Pax Christi. Children/youth can also compose their own.
- 5) SIGNING OF THE SENSES: This blessing prayer comes from *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. It would be an ideal prayer when the catechist has invited the parents to join the group for a closing prayer service.
- 6) MUSIC: Sing. Use music for quiet reflective listening. Use as background for meditation. Use during a prayer service; use as the prayer. Put your prayer to music.

- 7) **SCRIPTURAL REFLECTION:** After hearing the Word proclaimed, take time for each person to reflect and then share with others their reflections: What did Jesus want me to hear today in this reading?
- 8) **JOURNALS:** For many children/youth, writing can be a calming, prayerful experience. Provide times for journaling. At times, the catechist can suggest the topic (Write about a time you felt God's forgiveness.); at other times quiet moments can be provided so that children/youth can compose their own prayer thoughts.
- 9) **THE JESUS PRAYER:** This is an ancient Christian contemplative prayer which consists of short phrases from Scripture prayed over and over again in order to quiet down and become more and more aware of God's presence. The most popular phrase is "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."
- 10) **PULL FROM THE PRAYER BAG:** From the prayer bag, invite each child to take out three objects (or pictures or words). Encourage them to write a prayer using all three objects.
- 11) **rites of forgiveness:** Celebrate the gift of God's forgiveness frequently in prayer together. See especially Rite IV of the Revised Rite of Penance, a nonsacramental celebration of penance.
- 12) **LITURGICAL PRAYER:** The format of our liturgical prayers is:
 - greeting (Loving and gracious God...)
 - remembering (as you promised....)
 - request (please teach us...)
 - praise (we pray with confidence because of your goodness...).Invite the children/youth to compose prayers which follow this format.
- 13) **NEWSPAPER PRAYERS (I):** Encourage children/youth to bring articles from the newspaper about people and events which need prayer. (This will broaden their scope of concern beyond themselves.) Include these in your daily prayer.
- 14) **NEWSPAPER PRAYERS (II):** Invite the children/youth to pretend they are a person who is currently in the news. Write a prayer (thanksgiving, praise, sorrow, or petition) which that person might pray.
- 15) **PHOTO PRAYER:** Invite children to bring a photo (or draw a picture) of someone for whom they want to pray. As they hold the picture in their hands, invite them to feel Christ's strength, peace and love surrounding that person. Have them spend a few moments speaking to God about that person.
- 16) **GUIDED SCRIPTURE MEDITATIONS:** These meditations invite the participant to become part of the Scripture story. Many textbooks and other supplementary books contain ideas; such as: *Guided Meditations for Children* and *Guided Meditations for Children II* by Jane Reehorts, BVM.
- 17) **PRAYERS FROM THE CHURCH:** Gather prayers from the Sacramentary. Type one for each person, putting her/his name into the prayer. Have children pull one of the cards from the basket. They will then be a prayer partner and pray the prayer for that child/youth during the

following week.

Example: God, our Creator, may the work and studies of Tim bring him growth in this life and help him extend the Kingdom of Christ in our world. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

- 18) ALPHABET PRAYER: Invite the group to work together on a thanksgiving prayer which names something for each letter of the alphabet. To enhance it, they could also use an adjective beginning with the same letter; e.g.: adventurous aardvarks, boisterous bears, etc.
- 19) ADD-ON PRAYER: The catechist begins the prayer and each child adds a line, such as: "Loving God, we know you care for us and watch over us. We want to tell you our worries, because we know you always help us. My worry is that my grandpa will die. (Each child adds on.) The prayer might come from something they have been studying, so it will be something they have been thinking about.
- 20) REWRITE PRAYERS: Use some of our Scriptural prayers or formal prayers and invite the children to rewrite them in their own words. You might do this with Psalm 23, the Magnificat, or the Our Father.
- 21) PICTURE PRAYING: Show the children a picture (from a magazine, an art piece, a newspaper, etc.) Invite them to reflect on it. What is happening? What might the people be feeling? What does it remind them of in their own lives? What does it tell them about God? Invite them to write a prayer using their thoughts and feelings that were evoked by the picture.
- 22) MEDITATION: This is a favorite prayer form today in which we quiet the body and mind and open our hearts to God's Spirit. There are many ways to help children/youth focus their attention during this quiet prayer. One helpful technique is to suggest that children visualize being with Jesus and invite them to talk with him and/or listen to Jesus' words to them.
- 23) PRAYER WITH GESTURES: It seems that gestures double our prayers -- and our attention to them -- because we are using more of our bodies than just our mouths. This week teach children gestures to each of the prayers you pray together; or invite them to make up their own gestures.
- 24) TURNABOUT PRAYERS: These prayers have two parts: a) thanking God for a blessing God has given, and b) asking God to help us remember and care for people who do not have what we do. Example: Thank you, Lord, for all the great tasting, healthy food we have at our house. When I eat, help me to remember those who don't have all the food they need." Invite the children to pray these prayers this week:
Dear God when I _____
help me to remember _____.
- 25) EUCHARISTIC PRAYERS: The prayers of our liturgy are rich. Use different ones during your meeting time: Gloria; Holy, holy, holy; etc.
- 26) STATIONS OF THE CROSS (I): This traditional prayer form is an important Lenten prayer. Pray the prayer using one of the many booklets available for children or youth.
- 27) STATIONS OF THE CROSS (II): Invite children to write their own prayers and meditations for the Stations of the Cross.

- 28) STATIONS OF THE CROSS (III): Invite the children to write a modern-day version of the Stations. Where are people experiencing suffering today?
- 29) PRAY WITH INCENSE: Remind the children that the sweet smell of incense helps us remember that prayer time is a unique part of our day. The Psalms tell us that our prayers rise like incense to God.
- 30) PRAYER CARDS: Have each child make a card about themselves that is similar to a baseball trading card. Invite them to include on their card something for which they are praying. Devise a way for children to exchange cards so that each has the card of another person. Each child prays especially for the person whose card he/she has.
- 31) BLESSINGS (I): The prayer of blessing has always had a unique place within our tradition. As your group session ends, send your children home with a blessing. You might choose to use holy water or tracing the Sign of the Cross on their foreheads.
- 32) BLESSINGS (II): Before you begin your session together, invite one of the youngsters to pray a prayer of blessing for your time together.
- 33) BLESSINGS (III): Help the children/youth write a blessing prayer for their families. Have them carefully letter and decorate it so that it can be hung in their homes.
- 34) BLESSINGS (IV): During a lesson on reaching out and making a difference in our world (which each lesson should end with), invite the children/youth to bless each other's hands with holy water.
- 35) BLESSINGS (V): At times use oil in your blessings because it is a powerful symbol used in our rituals for strength, healing and comfort.
- 36) CENTERING PRAYER: This is a very ancient prayer form in which we rest in God's presence and attempt to be as quiet and still as can be. Lead the children through a relaxation exercise and invite them to clear their mind. If any thoughts, images, ideas, or concerns come to mind, let them quickly go -- as clouds floating across the sky. Each child might choose a word to focus on (Jesus, peace, etc.) whenever any thought comes to mind.
- 37) PRAYER BOX: Invite the children to make a box for their family dinner table. Inside could be some of our Church's formal prayers, some prayers from various books of prayer, as well as prayers written by the children. In pulling out a different one each evening, families will be using a variety of prayers.
- 38) PRAYERS OF OUR TRADITION: Take time to pray the formal prayers of our faith, but spend time with each one. Pray it slowly. Pray just one line and reflect on it.
- 39) POCKET PRAYER: Prisoners used to sew the words of Psalm 91 to their clothes. This text was believed to be a protection against bullets. Ask the children what prayer they would like to keep in their pockets to protect and guide them throughout the day. Invite them to write it and keep it in their pockets.

- 40) **PRAYER TOUR:** Take a field trip. Stop at different locations to pray for different issues, people and situations; for example:
- local schools: pray for friends, teachers, and administrators
 - police dept.: pray for safety and peacefulness of the neighborhood
 - hospital or convalescent home: pray for the needs of the sick and elderly
 - funeral home: pray for families who are grieving
- 41) **PRAYING WITH AFFIRMATIONS:** These mini-prayers talk about the here and now with a positive approach. Examples of affirmation prayers: “God loves me and helps me.” “Jesus is with me in all I do, helping me find a way to get through.” A prayer like “I said something mean to my mom. I’m sorry, please help me make it up to her, Jesus,” is a good prayer, but it is not an affirmation, because it talks about something already done (the past), and something you hope Jesus will do (in the future). “I am thinking of something nice to do for my mom. Thank you, Jesus,” would be an affirmation.
- 42) **PRAYER FROM AROUND THE WORLD:** Invite the children to learn about and then use some of the prayer customs from other cultures: Muslims stop to pray six times a day. Some Eastern religions put emphasis on body posture and breath control (yoga). Psalm prayers of the Hebrews are chanted.
- 43) **ENTHRONING THE BIBLE:** Begin each session together with an Enthronement of Scripture. Involve everyone in the procession as you move into your meeting place, carrying the Bible. As they reach the table, children can form two lines on either side. The Bible bearer, who is last in procession, reverently places the book in its place while everyone sings a song refrain. At times, children/youth may show reverence for the Scriptures before leaving the table to gather for the session: making the Sign of the Cross on the open Scriptures, by bowing before the Bible, etc.
- 44) **JOURNAL WRITING WITH SCRIPTURE:** Display a short verse from Scripture. Invite the youth to sit in silence and listen as you reverently read (and perhaps reread) the verse. When they are ready, they can begin a letter to Jesus in their journals about their thoughts that spring from this Scripture passage.
- 45) **THANKSGIVING JOURNAL:** Thanksgiving is (or should be) our primary way of prayer. Purchase or make a beautiful journal for the group. Periodically, as a group, brainstorm things for which to say thank you. Have people take turns writing or drawing them in the group journal. You might also want to invite the children to add to the journal at any time.
- 46) **PRAY THE CREED:** The Creed is foundational for who we are as Catholics. Pray one (or both of our Creeds (Nicene and Apostles). Invite the youth to write their own Creed.
- 47) **PRAYER PILGRIMAGE:** Take a walk to a nearby chapel, grotto, outdoor shrine, your parish church, a special prayer room. Suggest to the children/youth a topic for reflection as they walk. Or, pose a faith-sharing question that they could share in groups of two as they walk.
- 48) **COLLECT GRACES:** Grace before meals is a favorite way to pray for most families. Research and compile into a booklet various graces from different cultures, traditions, people, and places. Make a copy of the booklet for each of the families with children in your group.

- 49) ACTS OF FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE: Pray the Church's Acts of Faith, Hope and Love. Invite the children to write their own Acts of Faith, Hope and Love.
- 50) REACHING OUT: Invite your children/youth to participate in your parish's food drive. In addition to earning the money to purchase the canned goods, have them write a prayer of blessing and tape it to each can. (These gifts can be part of the Presentation of Gifts during the liturgy. Liturgical guidelines say that in addition to the gifts of bread and wine, gifts for the poor are the other elements that may be a part of the Presentation of Gifts.)
- 51) PRAYER OF PONDERING: Encourage the children/youth to choose one word, one phrase, or one line of Sunday's Gospel. Give them quiet time to mull it over in their minds and hearts, not analyzing it, but just pondering it.
- 52) PRAY WITH OUR RITUALS: Share the Sign of Peace; renew Baptismal Promises; blessings and anointings, etc.

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