
HOW TO PREPARE A PRAYER SERVICE

STOP AND REMEMBER

- ✚ Why is this a good time to celebrate?
- ✚ What have we been doing together?
- ✚ What has happened, what needs to be remembered, who needs our prayers?
- ✚ What shall we celebrate? What shall we pray about?

CONTEXT AND FOCUS OF PRAYER

- ✚ WHO will be present in this prayer?
- ✚ WHAT is the occasion of the prayer?
- ✚ WHERE will the prayer be held?
- ✚ WHEN will the prayer be held?
- ✚ HOW will the space be used for prayer?
- ✚ How will this prayer fit within the larger theme of all prayer – praise and thanksgiving to God
- ✚ What theme will focus the prayer – is it related to a unit of study, to the liturgical season, to peace, love, service etc.

YOU AS LEADER OF PRAYER

- ✚ **BE PREPARED, PLAN EXPERIENCES AHEAD OF TIME**
- ✚ **PRESIDER RATHER THAN TEACHER**, become focal point of sight, sound, gesture, participation. Prayer not performance. Words are powerful – be aware of words used, human inclusive language, images of God. Every prayer needs beginning, middle, end.

GATHER GATHER THE STUDENTS FOR THE CELEBRATION

The first movement of prayer helps those who are gathered to become aware of their relationship with God and with each other. It helps the class to gather and pray together within a particular theme and liturgical season. As the group comes together to pray what set up, decor, class preparation, welcome, call to prayer, processions, actions, gestures, music, singing, proclamations, litanies or other preparations and elements will help this to occur? How will you gather for this prayer today? How will the space and environment invite prayer?

- ✚ **PRAYER TABLE** *front of class or where students can gather around for prayer. Liturgical season coloured cloth, candle, bible, religious elements needed for the prayer. Do not clutter the table, and only put on it what is directly connected to prayer of the day.*
 - *Table can be returned to a corner of the room after prayer and other religious articles can be placed on it. Again, do not clutter, change what is on it regularly and have the liturgical season represented by cloth colour and other symbols.*

✚ **SIGN OF THE CROSS** – all celebrations begin with this

✚ **SOME OPTIONS FOR THIS MOVEMENT**

- Opening song, music
- Opening prayer
- Call to prayer and response
- Processions, gestures, actions
- Proclamations

LISTEN TELL THE STORY

The next movement of the prayer gives the students a chance to hear the scriptures and, if you want, current stories which allow reflection on how God is active and alive in our lives. What scripture reading, current reading, psalm, witness story, storytelling, sharing, music, song, action, drama, reflection will speak about what you want to say about God, the ways of God or the Kingdom of God.

✚ **SCRIPTURE IS ALWAYS PART OF THIS MOVEMENT**

✚ **OTHER READINGS** can be included after scripture is proclaimed

✚ **STORY CAN BE PROCLAIMED** by single reader, group/choral reading, mime with commentary, skit, or other creative ways.

✚ **ALWAYS READ FROM BIBLE AND MENTION WHERE SCRIPTURE IS FROM**

✚ **BEFORE SCRIPTURE READING:** *Reader* - The Lord be with you. *Class* – And also with you.

END OF SCRIPTURE READING: *Reader* - This is the word of the Lord. *Class* – Thanks be to God.

✚ **SOME OPTIONS FOR THIS MOVEMENT**

- Readings, drama, video clips
- Personal stories, witness reflection
- Music, songs, psalms
- Gestures, dance, litanies
- Silence

RESPOND / RITUAL PROVIDE OPPORTUNITY FOR STUDENTS TO RESPOND

The third movement of prayer reminds us that it is not enough to just hear the word of God, we must keep it. How will we respond to our awareness of how God continues to love us unconditionally? This movement of the prayer is how the students are responding to the scripture they have just heard in the Listen movement.

✚ **KEEP AGE APPROPRIATE**

✚ **SYMBOLIC ACTIONS INVOLVE WHOLE PERSONS** – engage as many senses as possible

✚ **IF HANDS, STONES, PAPER ETC. TO BE USED**, make sure to have enough for every student to participate with a few extras in case. When using a bowl of water or other

container, make sure it is large enough for all the children to see. Abundance is a good message to give

SOME OPTIONS FOR THIS MOVEMENT

- Spontaneous, composed, intercessory prayers; familiar such as lord's prayer or one children create
- Gestures, dance, mime, tableau
- Creating something
- Use something like cut-out hands, tree, wreath for children to write on
- Draw, paint
- Anoint, sign with cross, bless with water, etc

SEND FORTH / CLOSING SENDING THE CHILDREN BACK TO THEIR STUDIES

The final movement of prayer sends us forth with a renewed sense of our mission to live the Gospel each and every day. Prayer helps us to focus on the big picture but also on the simple ways that each of us needs to be a disciple to those around us. How do you want to end this time of prayer?

SOME OPTIONS FOR THIS MOVEMENT

- Spontaneous, composed, familiar, traditional, student created prayers
- Music, song, actions, gestures
- Blessing, commissioning, exchange sign of peace
- Procession

END WITH SIGN OF THE CROSS

COMPONENTS FOR PRAYER IN CLASS

THE LITURGICAL YEAR

- **Decorate rooms in liturgical colours of each season, incorporating into ritual whenever possible.** Can put a piece of inexpensive fabric or coloured napkin under the candle or bible. Class candle can be the liturgical season colour, as should decorative touches.
- **Colours of the seasons:**
 - **RED** – feasts of the Holy Spirit and martyrs; Pentecost
 - WHITE:** - Christmas time and Easter – can also add silver and gold
 - PURPLE & DEEP BLUE** – Advent
 - PINK / ROSE** – Third Sunday in advent
 - DEEP PURPLE** – Lent
 - GREEN** – Ordinary Time – use light green in spring, bright greens for summer and darker greens with brown and rust colours in fall.
- **Follow the liturgical calendar rather than secular one to decorate.**
 - **ADVENT:** We are in Advent until Christmas Eve when our celebration of the season of Christmas begins. Advent wreath, Jesse tree. Slowly build crèche but leave crib empty.

- **CHRISTMAS** During liturgical season of Christmas change purples to white, gold, glitter and tinsel and place Christ child in the manger to celebrate the Incarnation of God. Christmas time continues until the baptism of Jesus.
- **LENT:** Lent needs to be 40 days long Resist decorating with bunnies and such until Lent is over. Maintain penitential tones with ashes, deep purple and gray colours and desert motifs.
- **EASTER:** During Easter season – until Pentecost 50 days of Easter – use symbols of spring: butterflies, flowers, baby animals, eggs, water, candles, new life.
- **ORDINARY TIME:** rest of the year. Do not use Advent, Lent, Christmas, Easter colours or decorations during this time.



FULL CONSCIOUS ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF ALL:

- **Active participation of all is goal:**
prayer aloud, gesture, action, song, procession, prayer patterns as litanies and repeated refrains, blessings, listening, participation in some way in common activity or ritual action. If blessing all bless, if sharing all have opportunity to share or do not do.
- **The students can preside, read, lead song, invite to ritual action, be musicians, lead gestures.** You can be participant. You might begin year with the teacher taking more leadership and gradually move towards student led and planned. Age – appropriate considerations here. Be sure that those involved know what is expected. Give copies of readings, questions well ahead of time. Practice when necessary.
- **Students can be part of the planning** depending on age, class size etc. They can write prayers, choose readings, create banners or other environment pieces.
- **Ritual is repetitive.** Ritual words and gestures work because we know what to expect. Familiarity allows us to go deeper.
- **Begin with simple celebrations,** set environment where prayer can happen. Simplicity is a gift. Try not to put too many things into prayer - beware of clutter.
- Need to **connect prayer experiences with real life** and reality of students
- **Use a variety of different elements** - silence, singing, arts & crafts, prayers, reflection sharing

- **Remember we are bodies as well as spirits.** Use energy of class rather than fight it.
 - **Prayerful positions:** standing, sitting, kneeling, bowing, genuflecting, using hands (upraised hands, hold hands with others, orans position), eyes (closed, focus on symbol or image), moving (dance, procession, move to four directions)
 - **People live in the world of senses** - touch, smell, feel, taste, hear, see, move. Incense burning, senses involved, vigil light among rocks, bowl of scented oil, scented candle, Paschal candle in Easter season, rocks, plants from nature, slides, video clips, pictures, etc.....
 - **Use symbols in ways to involve whole person** – mind, body and spirit. When symbols used for display and not full participation they become minimal. When using symbol (water, oil, light) use enough so that the group can see and participate and to give the understanding of plenty.

INCLUSIVE AND AGE APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE

- **Modify language so that it is age appropriate.** Should be simple enough to understand, allow them to participate and remain open to various adaptations. There are limits to adaptations. Standard liturgical responses are not changed.
- **Human inclusive language:** words we use are formative. Language is a powerful tool of communication. It performs an important role in how one comes to perceive one's self and others. Range of symbols and images used determines scope of religious understanding and practice. The way one is named in a religious community and whether one is named at all, could affect the way one lives the Christian life. When our language is heavily masculine it has an effect on girls and boys as they have to constantly determine whether girls are included in images, symbols, prayers and conversations of our faith. Inclusive ritual language is to ensure that girls are consciously incorporated in prayer and ritual, know that their gender has dignity and value, and they are fully participating members of the Catholic faith. Boys learn this reality as well.
 - **Human inclusive language** should be the only human language used in ritual prayer. Translations with human inclusive language are readily available. Guidelines for inclusive language: Add female reference to exclusive male reference, delete exclusive word, substitute appropriate synonym or find an alternative way of expressing same concept. Ex - Brothers and sisters – children of God – all of humanity Prepare in advance, follow grammar rules.
- **More extensive images of God** - masculine, feminine and non-gendered images of God in our prayer. God is beyond any image, name, symbol that our minds can fathom. Any image only partially reflects God. We need to teach our students that God cannot be confined, that God is as expansive as their imaginations.

MUSIC AS PRAYER AND IN RITUAL:

- **Music in prayer and ritual is an aid to help us prayer.** Speaks to us in midst of life experiences and helps us find meaning. Can help students put into words things they cannot say themselves. Gives texture to prayer.
- **Music becomes liturgical when it is appropriated as an expression of faith.** Contemporary secular music is good resource and we also need to hear scripture in songs hear traditional hymns and hear the name of Jesus spoken. **Use mix of old and new songs** – teach new songs but not too many all at once. Make words available on sheets or songbooks.

Traditional hymns, popular hymns sung in the parish on Sunday. For younger children, music which they can learn from heart and then sing without sheets is advisable.

- **Some questions to ask:** does it say what we want to sing? Will it help the group to pray and to praise God in this season and in this time? Is the song singable by the group of people present (Voice range)? Does the song fit the prayer situation? Does it help all to participate? Is it good theology – what we believe?
- **Short texts, refrains** lend themselves to internalisation and repetition. Repetition, especially with young children is a way of learning.
- **Not advisable to interrupt prayer to teach music used.** Children have ability to imitate and so can learn as they go along. For younger children, simple refrains or songs; echoing method – song sung one line at a time with the children repeating each line. Because they are such good imitators, important that initial presentation of music set correct tempo and mood. Even better if teach ahead of time so they know the music and words when it comes time to pray.
- **Using music in prayer:**
 - Use **refrain from popular song** as response to psalm verse
 - At prayer, **alternate verses of one song** with readings, reflection or shared prayer
 - Use several **snippets of current songs** to create a musical collage on how much God loves us.

SILENCE

- **Silence** is canvas on which we paint our songs and words. Punctuates and gives meaning to all we do. Silence is not merely absence of sound – a deep hush, appropriate response to mystery. Silences have to be anticipated and established. Incorporate after scripture readings.
- **Incorporate times of silence** in prayer Children & teens are capable of deep reflection – silence can be observed. Build into schedule – a few seconds, a minute, several minutes.

GESTURE, MOVEMENT, DANCE IN PRAYER:

- **Movement, gesture and procession are the natural companions of song.** A few simple movements or gestures can say worlds to children and engage them body, mind and soul in prayer. Gestures and movement call for active involvement and participation of all.
- **Provide a vocabulary of movement and gestures** from which they can create own dance.
- **Be aware of those in our midst who are physically challenged** – sensitivity to this is important. Never force anyone to take part. Encourage participation and give freedom. Be aware of people sensitive to being touched and provide alternatives.
- **Some gestures;** bow as a sign of reverence; use gesture of triple cross before gospel is read; have students kneel for blessings; Raising of hands for alleluia; hand clapping in rhythmic songs, swaying to gentler songs; hand holding in songs that speak of communal gatherings, lift arms in prayer; kiss of peace or handshake; For scripture reading – have a procession of all the children with a sung alleluia or refrain. Move with book held high, while singing a joyful acclamation.
- **Posture is important.** Children can stand for reading of scripture, especially if taken from the gospels.

SCRIPTURE IN PRAYER:

- **Tell bible stories as stories** with dramatic pauses and gestures; watch vocal tone, quality, pace and expression. Be familiar with the story so it can be told as such.
- **Make scripture readily accessible to all** – provide bibles for use.
- **Go beyond familiar passages** – introduce other passages, books, stories, persons.
- **Be conscious of inclusive language** and introducing both men and women in scripture stories
- **Do small activities with scripture** – love letter from God, bible searches
- **Dramatize scripture stories** – act out miracles from gospels or great stories from Hebrew scripture. Shadow play, be part of picture. Entire class can provide actions for story all at once – seeds in the parable of the seed; interview a character from scripture
- **Create scripture art** – posters, buttons, bookmarks, banners, bumper stickers, holy cards, pictures, mobiles, flannel board stories; comic strip of story, murals of creation, Jesus' miracles, Jesus' last days
- **Correlate scripture with other stories** – The Velveteen Rabbit, The Giving Tree, The Gift of the Magi
- **Play songs** that are musical arrangements of scripture or reflections on scriptural verses. Invite them to turn songs into prayers by meditating on words.
- **Post one line scripture prayers** – I Sam 3:9 Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.'
- **Write several different scriptural passages** separately on cards and scatter on prayer table. Allow them to choose passage they would like to read during time of prayer. Could also ask them to share a few thoughts about this passage.
- **Visual reminders** – write short scripture verse on rock, banner, card and display as reminder
- **Rewrite scripture prayers**, Rewrite scripture story – put in contemporary context (parables, psalms, commandments, proverbs, beatitudes)
- **Discuss scripture for insight**; groups of five, ask question such as Why is Ruth a model of faithful love? If Jesus were in class today, what do you think he would say?
- **Find passages** found in different versions of Bible. Voices echo same passage.
- Ask students to take some quiet time to **answer Jesus question – Who do you say that I am?** Have them share responses. Luke 9:18 – 20
- John 19:31 – 37 Use passage about piercing of Jesus' side **in penance service** – show scene from Jesus of Nazareth film in which Jesus is crucified. Allow time for silence and reflection aloud. Ask them to compose closing prayers.
- **Memorise** verses from scripture: Keep me safe, O God, you are my hope; Jesus is our light; The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want; O come, o come, Emmanuel;
- **Slide meditation** on passage from scripture with music to accompany scriptural passages that are centered on a theme such as love, hope.
- **Write several different scriptural passages on large cards.** Scatter cards in prayer space – allow them to choose passage they would like to share with the group today.
- Give each a bible and **encourage them to choose the passage that most relates to their life now**, In shared prayer time, offer option to read aloud a few verses and share meaning with others.
- Give access to **variety of arts and crafts supplies** and allow them time to illustrate scriptural passage in medium they are most comfortable with

- Give each student a **prayer journal** as a gift at the beginning of Lent. Prepare journals by writing scriptural passage on several pages throughout. Invite them to write in own scripture verses and personal prayers.
- Find **article in newspaper that has a parallel with a scripture verse or story**. Read both and reflect about them in group.
- Refer to **parable with several characters**, invite them to pray as the character they most relate to.
- Invite them to **add themselves to a scriptural passage** – what would you have done, how would you have responded, what would you ask of Jesus

Storytelling

- **Storytelling** – you tell stories from children’s books, books of saints and heroes, or stories from compilations. They tell their own story as well.
- **When telling own story**, be genuine and speak from the heart Use stories that fit the life experiences of students Find anecdotes to tell Collect stories Tell story rather than read the story Try different ways of telling story – mime, props, music
- **Use plenty of descriptions** to make characters and scenes pop into listeners’ imagination

Liturgical drama

- **Interpreting proclamation** – one person vocally presenting, interpreting and proclaiming scripture. It is evocative and demands a response.
- **Group interpretative proclamations** involve a number of people taking the different parts of a piece of scripture, generally from gospels. Can have parts for whole group as well. One could use a short contemporary play as well.
- **Choral reading** – have groups of students recite a part of a psalm or story. For psalm reading divide into 2, 3 4 or 5 parts
- **Mime or pantomime** – a story is told without words by means of bodily and facial movements. One can use mime with or without background music. Another type of mime employs a narrative text. One person narrates the story while several others mime the parts. One can take a scripture passage and then contemporising meaning for today. Read scripture passage, then mimes come in and begin action of mime – no words but meaning clear. Maybe white face and black clothing. Spin – off mimes: take theme, message and contemporary meaning for group.
- **Scenario or story dramatisation** involves acting out a short scenario by different characters. Take Good Samaritan and bring up to date. Also a story can be used.

STEPS TO PREPARING GROUP PRAYER / RITUAL

STEP ONE: GATHER RESOURCES

- Word resources: bibles, books of poetry, reflections, other books of services
- Music resources: hymnals, tapes & CD's, boombox, instruments
- Environment resources: candles, cloths, other things to decorate
- Planning resources: people, worksheets, pens, etc.

STEP TWO: DEVELOP A PLANNING TEAM

- Choose a planning leader
- Choose a presider for the prayer
- Pray as a team for guidance

STEP THREE: CONTEXT AND FOCUS OF PRAYER

- **WHO** will be present for this prayer?
- **WHAT** is the occasion of prayer?
- **WHERE** will the prayer be held?
- **WHEN** will the prayer be held? (Time and liturgical season)
- What theme will be the focus of the prayer

STEP FOUR: BRAINSTORM AND CHOOSE PRAYER ELEMENTS AND DEVELOP MOVEMENTS

- words & readings – scripture, stories, personal witness
- music & song
- actions and gestures
- environment & décor
- gather
- listen
- respond
- send forth
- ensure full active participation

STEP FIVE: PRAY THE PRAYER SERVICE, EVALUATE