



Praying together as a family

As parents, a great gift we can give ourselves and our children, is to pray with them. Praying with your child throughout the day, for example at mealtimes and bedtime is a way of helping your child be aware of God's presence in their daily life. As well as this type of prayer, coming together as a family for communal prayer provides nourishment for the entire family.

When we think of prayer, we often think of it as talking to God. This is one aspect of prayer, but it does not encompass all that is prayer. To open our minds to a broader understanding of prayer, which will enrich our own and our children's prayer life, we can think of prayer as an attentive listening to, and an awareness of, God's presence in our lives.

When we pray as a family with this in mind, it also helps us all explore and nurture our personal relationship with God more deeply.

Family prayer does not need to be structured in any formal way. The approach to prayer as a way of reverently coming into an awareness of God's presence together as a family unit should be the focus.

Prayer with 6-12 year old children

In the atrium, the 6-12 year old children are invited to prepare and lead communal prayer. This is a popular activity and it is common for two or more children to work on this activity together.

At home parents and children can prepare and enjoy family prayer in a similar way. You could include some, or all of the following elements in your family prayer:

- Preparing the prayer space (see Setting up a prayer table in your home)
- Gather and light the candles
- Introductory Greeting and/or Song
- Invitation to Silence - Invite everyone to close their eyes and silently bring God or Jesus to their mind and heart
- A reading from the Bible with time for personal and/or shared reflection
- A verse or two from a psalm or from a chosen prayer card (see Making prayer cards)
- Spontaneous Prayers (prayers of the faithful)
- Traditional Prayer
- Closing Song and/or Dismissal
- Snuff or extinguish the candles



The elements you include should reflect the age and stage of faith development of your children, the unique makeup of your family, and can grow as your family grows.



Prayer with 0-6 year old children

For families with young children, including infants and toddlers who can sit on a parents' lap, it is enough to;

- Prepare the prayer space with the help of your children as they are able
- Gather and light candles - keeping safety in mind
- Invite everyone to close their eyes and silently bring God or Jesus to their mind and heart
- Read the words of the chosen prayer card - then silently reflect on the words for 10-30 seconds. You can increase the time as the children grow and become accustomed to this silent reflection.
- Invite personal prayer response - "Is there something you would like to say to God or thank God for today?" (See below)
- Finish with a song or prayer - a known song about God's love, a chorus of a known and favourite song from church, or a blessing prayer such as Aarons Blessing (Numbers 6:24-26) is a good choice. You might think of others.
- Snuff the candles - If you don't have a candle snuffer, consider purchasing one as the children love to snuff candles. There is something attractive and reverent about snuffing the candles rather than blowing them out.



Some thoughts on the prayer of young children

"Each of us who has experienced the (young) child's prayer knows how capable the child is of spontaneous prayer and how different the child's prayer is from that of the adult, both in form and content. The child's prayer has a special quality of silence and contemplation. For example, even a one-year-old might enter into a long, contemplative silence when experiencing a sunset or the flight of a bird and this can be considered prayer.

"The child's prayer can be very brief, such as "Jesus." "Goodness." "Light." or "Amen." And it is often followed by a long silence. Furthermore, the spontaneous prayer of the youngest child is exclusively a prayer of praise and thanksgiving, rather than a prayer of petition. Thus, we hear: "Thank you for the light!" "Thank you for everything!" "Thank you because I am one of your sheep!" "Jesus is wonderful!" "My body is happy!" ([Listening to God With Children by Gianna Gobbi page 118](#))

As parents, we should honour and nurture the young child's natural capacity for prayer.

During prayer with your children, model prayers of thanksgiving and praise. When doing this, it is important to remember our goal is to help support the child's prayer language, not having the child repeat what we say in prayer.

In fact, praying with our young children can help us as adults to rediscover the beauty and joy that comes with contemplating and enjoying the many gifts God has bestowed on us.

For further information on this, refer to 'Praying with young children.'