

Diocesan Education Service



Practical Prayer Ideas for the Classroom



Let the children come to me

Thanks: We need to say thank you to God for the many things which he has given us: the gift of Creation, our families and friends. We can also thank him when he has answered our previous prayers. We might address our prayers to God the Father and Creator, or to Jesus, God the Son for being our guide and showing us how to love, or to God, the Holy Spirit for helping us develop the gift of faith which we have been given.

Praise: In our prayers of praise we express our awe and wonder about God and we acknowledge that much of what he has done for us is beyond our understanding. In these prayers we can express our joy and love for him.

Ask (request): An important part of our prayer life is to pray for the needs of others (prayers of intercession). In these sorts of prayers we often ask for Our Lady and the Saints to intercede for us to God.

We also ask God for the things we need as individuals (prayers of petition). The Church teaches us that before we ask God for something we should start off by asking for forgiveness so saying **Sorry** (showing **Contrition**) is a very important part of our prayer life.



The following activities are a collection of ideas for use in the classroom. They will give you ideas for praying in different ways with children for different purposes. You might use these ideas when you have that special extended time for prayer with your class. It is important that you remember that they form part of that time of prayer with your class and you will also need to include relevant scripture, traditional prayers and some of the rites and rituals of prayer. Liturgy Planner templates are available from your RE Subject Leader.

Remember that people learn best when they are shown how to do something. If one of these activities has worked well for you let a colleague see you use it in class or role-model it as part of a staff meeting. Don't be afraid to adapt and develop these activities. Be creative!

When we pray we can give *praise* to God, give *thanks*, say *sorry* or *ask* for something for ourselves or for others.

Here are some ways to help children to remember the different sorts of prayer.

Teaspoon Prayers -tsp

t = thank you

s = sorry

p = praise



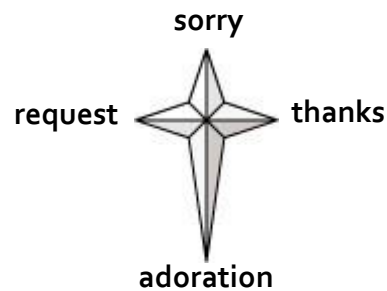
- You will need plastic teaspoons with the letters t, s or p on them. You can either have just one of each or several of each in a pot.
- You might decide to let the children have a lucky dip and select a spoon at random or you might choose what sort of prayer you are going to focus on for that time.
- Model the prayer: Thank you God for a good night's sleep ...Praise God for the beautiful sunshine...God our Father I am sorry for not remembering to talk to you last night.
- If you have enough spoons you could give each child a set of spoons to take home.
- You could place large spoon shapes on the wall. Children could write their prayers on a sticky note (or an adult could) and stick them on the spoon. This sort of spontaneous prayer can happen at any time during the day and be used when the class have gathered together for prayer.
- When using traditional prayers remember to identify to the children what sort of prayer it is e.g. grace before meals "And now we are going to talk to God to say our mealtime thank you prayer."

Envelope Prayers

- You will need three envelopes labelled thanks, praise or sorry. You might even use different coloured envelopes.
- Children can write prayers (at any time) and put them in the relevant envelope. When it is time to pray together you could take out the prayers to read together.
- If you want the prayers to remain private you could hold out the envelope and say "We offer all our prayers here today to the Lord our God."
- As an alternative to envelopes you can use boxes or baskets.
- Use sticky notes or the multi-coloured memo pads.

- You could also physically offer up these prayers at a phase/key stage or whole school assembly where a couple of children process to the front to place the prayers on or around the prayer focus.

Star



- You will need an image of a four-pointed star with an arrow fixed at the centre with a split pin to allow it to turn.
- You or the children point the arrow to the type of prayer you want to focus on that day.

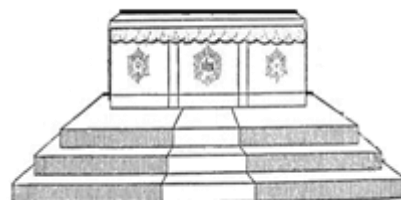
Pasta

Praise
Ask
Sorry
Thank you
Adore

- This is the same sort of idea as above but you can vary it by focusing on a different sort of prayer each day of the week.
- Remember to give the children opportunities to decide what sorts of prayer they want to use.

Altar

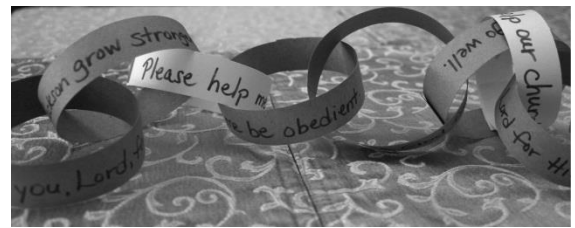
Adore
Love
Thank
Ask
Resolve



- Another variation for changing the focus for prayer each day.

Paper Chain Prayers

- You will need strips of coloured paper and glue or a stapler (you can buy pre-gummed paper strips).
- Get the children to write their prayers on a strip of paper. Try to focus on a specific type of prayer (thanks, praise etc.) or give them something specific to pray for.
- Join the prayers together to make a chain and place them about the prayer area.
- You could build up a chain over a period of time by adding to it gradually.
- Each child could have their own prayer chain which they add to over time.
- You could have different coloured strips to symbolise different types of prayer
- This idea gives children a tangible way to help them understand how our prayers can be joined together as an offering to God.
- With older children you can talk about the work of Blessed John Henry Newman who spoke about us all being links in a chain.



Consequence Prayers

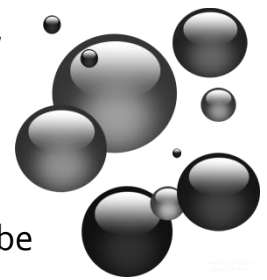
- You will need shopping list type strips of paper, pens/felt tips
- At the top of each list write the focus e.g. Lord, give me courage when...
- Each person in the groups takes it in turn to add to the prayer without seeing what else has been written.
- The first person writes their response. When they have finished they fold the paper down over their writing and then they pass it on to the next person. The next one now writes their response, folds the paper over and passes it on to the next person.
- Once everyone has taken a turn the prayer can be unfolded and read aloud or pinned up in the prayer area.

Counting Blessings

- You will need a piece of paper for each person carrying out this activity (you might let a different child do this each day in turn).
- Give a child the piece of paper. Each time something good happens to them during the day they write it down. Alternatively you might let them record everything on a whiteboard.
- At the end of the day they will have a record of everything which they can then give thanks to God for.
- You could let them draw instead of writing.
- You could put up a large piece of paper where anyone can go and record something good which has happened and then gather round it at the end of the day to offer up thanks to God.

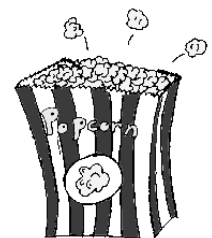
Bubble Prayers

- You will need bubble blowing kits and a dry, not too windy, day.
- Get the children to focus upon someone they wish to pray for.
- As they blow a bubble they can pray for that person 'Jesus be with...', 'God our Father help...', Holy Spirit protect....'.
- The bubble rising into the air is a visual reminder that we offer our prayers up to God.



Popcorn Prayers

- No equipment required
- Popcorn prayers are short prayers which pop up.
- Set the focus for what you are praying about (thanks, help, trust, bless etc. to God/Jesus/Holy Spirit) e.g. 'Jesus, please bless...'
- Say the start of the prayer phrase aloud and wait for the children to complete it. With younger children you may let them physically pop up from the floor with their prayer.
- Don't be afraid of silence...children need time to think and stillness and silence is also an important part of prayer.



Holding Cross

This idea gives the children an understanding of turn taking in prayer.



- You will need a holding cross.
- This works best if the children can be seated in a circle.
- Having set the focus for prayer (e.g. thank you, praise etc.) pass the holding cross to the first child. They may either pray aloud or say a silent prayer before passing the cross on: 'As I hold this cross...'
- You can use other religious objects or ordinary objects e.g. a palm cross (especially if you are focusing on sorry), or a smooth pebble, a beautiful autumn leaf.

Jelly Bean Prayers

This colour of each jellybean reminds the children of part of the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

- You will need some jelly beans (or other coloured sweets) and copies of the prayer below.
- The children can take it in turns to choose a sweet. As they eat it they focus upon the significance of the colour they have chosen.
- There are a few different versions of this prayer about. You might get the children to make up their own.
- The colours can also be used to associate with particular types of prayer such as purple for penance, green for creation etc.



Red is for the blood Jesus shed
Green is for new life ahead
Black is for the sins we've made
White is for the forgiveness he gave
Yellow is for the beautiful sunlight
Orange is for the edge of night
Purple is for his hour of sorrow
Pink is for our new tomorrow

Read All About It

This idea is suitable for older children.

- You will need newspapers and highlighter pens
- Before the time for prayer give the children a newspaper.
- In groups, pairs or individually let them find examples of stories which can be their focus for prayer.
- You could give them different highlighter colours for different types of prayer e.g. green for good news, orange for those who are sick, yellow for those in need etc.
- When it is time for prayer let the children use the examples they have found.
- The children could also cut out the news items and offer them up into the prayer space within your classroom.

Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

This is a way of getting children to reflect on WWW (what went well) and EBI (even better if) in their own lives.

- You will need three pieces of paper (or one piece of paper with three columns) labelled Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow.
- This can be done as a shared activity or individually.
- You could get the children to suggest questions to go on each page/column
e.g. In what ways did you show Jesus' love?
These questions should prompt others to reflect on their words and actions, on everything they have said and shouldn't have, or didn't say when they should.
- Once there are enough prompts allow the children time to reflect on each column. They may decide to pray aloud or silently. As each prompt is prayed about it can be ticked off.

Past, Present, Future

Do the same as above but use these more general headings. The time can be as little as the previous day or longer: a week, month year.



Prayer of the Hand

- No equipment required
- This helps give children a structure to prompt them as to who they should pray for.
- Start the prayer by getting the children to look closely at their hand and then starting with the thumb give focus on each digit in turn.
- You could let the children make a copy of their own handprint to take home with a summary of who they can pray for.
- Using their own handprint the children could write who they are praying for on each digit.
- You can let them choose which finger/s they are going to use to pray with.

Look at the finger that's the biggest. Pray for people in authority, people who have to rule and guide others. Pray for Our Holy Father the Pope and all religious leaders in the world.

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Star Prayers

This idea has an element of surprise to it!

- You will need star shaped paper (ordinary photocopying paper works fine) and a shallow tray or dish of water (a plastic drawer works well or a water tray from EYFS), pencils.
- If you wish in the centre of the star you may have already written what is to be the focus for the prayers e.g. We thank you God for...
- Let the children write an intention on each point of the star. If working in groups they can take it in turns to write on a different point.
- As each prayer is written fold over each point at the base where it meets the centre of the star (if you are using a five pointed star when folded it will look like a pentagon).

- Gather the children together so that the tray of water is at the centre and can be seen.
- In turn the children place their stars upon the surface of the water (the stars will unfold to reveal their prayers).
- Explain to the children that if they allow God in to their lives he will shine out from them.

Choosing a prayer

This idea uses the paper-folding technique used to make a fortune teller. Whilst this name is not appropriate (but then neither is the more revolting American one of cootie catcher!) it can be used to focus on different types of prayer.

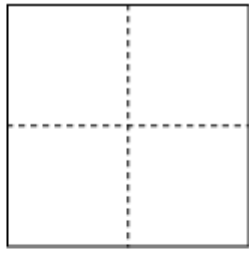
- You will need 1 piece of squared paper per child.
- Follow the diagrams below to make it up (or go on YouTube)
- On the eight inner points the children could write different prayer prompts e.g. Give thanks to God for...Pray for the sick etc.
- Alternatively, older children could write short scripture quotations as inspirations.

Prayer Dice:

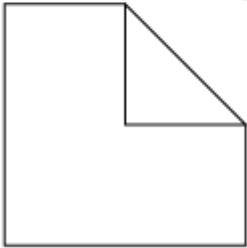
- You can do the same sort of thing using the net for a cube. The children can write their own prayers or scripture quotes. They may have different cubes for different types of prayer e.g. grace before/after meals.



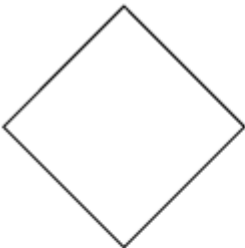
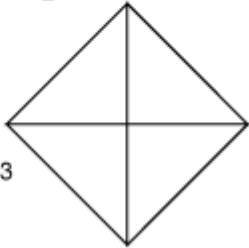
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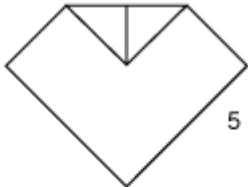
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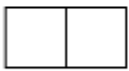
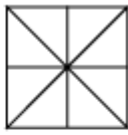
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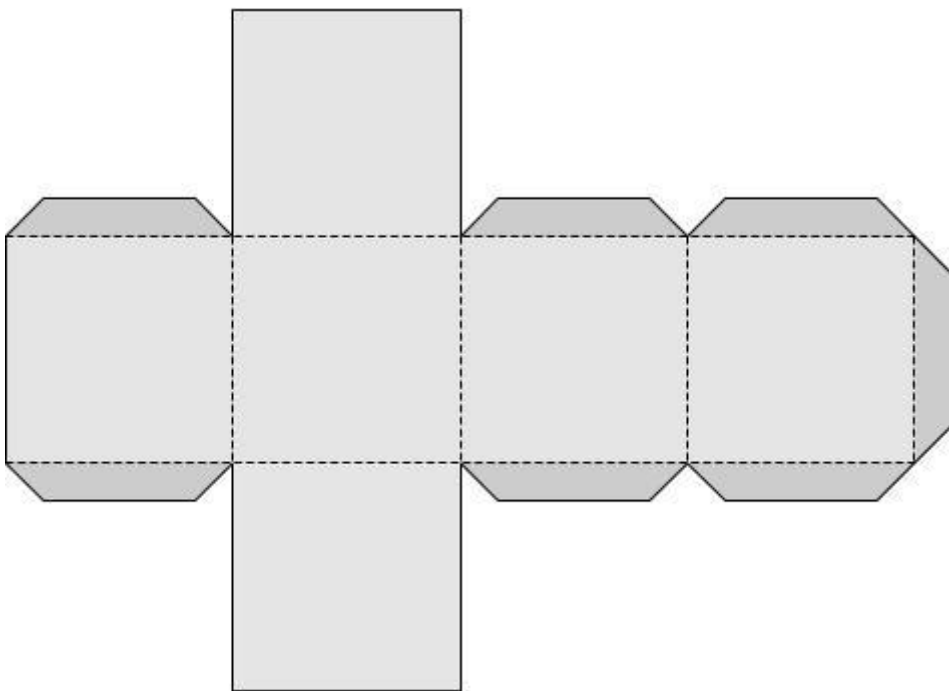
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Sorry/Contrition

Below are some ideas to help children develop an understanding that God forgives our sins. These are all very practical ideas that help us realise that once forgiven the slate is washed clean. However, whilst you might use these ideas in class or as part of a Penitential Service they are not the means by which we receive absolution (forgiveness for our sins). *This can only be achieved by going to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation.* It is important that this is made clear to the children.

Sorry Stones

- You will need large, smooth pebbles and chalk, a bucket of water.
- Early on in the day get the children to think about the times they have said or done unkind things, when they haven't behaved in the way Jesus asks us to.
- Let the children write on the pebble (either the word sorry or the thing that they are sorry about).
- In turn let the children place the stone into the bucket (they are placing their sin in Jesus' hands).
- Have some quiet time and then finish with a sorry prayer and or hymn.
- Carry on with the rest of your day leaving the bucket where it is.
- At the end of the day gather the children around you. You may want to read them a story where Jesus shows forgiveness.
- Let the children take out their stone: it is now clean. Explain to the children that when we ask for God's forgiveness (through the Sacrament) he washes away all that we have said sorry for.
- The clean stones could be placed around the prayer focus or at the foot of a cross/crucifix

Stones

This idea helps children understand that it is important to move on from their failings.

- You will need a small pebble (something that the child can hold in the palm of their hand) for each child. A cross or crucifix either lying flat on the ground or leaning against a table (this is for the latter part of the prayer).
- At the start of the session (this could be before any lesson) give each child a pebble to hold. Explain to them that they can't put it down and must hold on to it until you say otherwise. Carry on with whatever activity/lesson you are doing.

- Once this is over get the children to talk to you about the difficulties of carrying the object around. Explain to them that this is like what we sometimes do with our sins. Although we have had them forgiven we can't let them go and we dwell on them thus not allowing ourselves to move forward. We have to place our trust in Jesus and thank him for his forgiveness.
- Spend some time in quiet reflection. When each child is ready let them place their pebble around the cross or at its foot (rather like a small cairn).

Paper

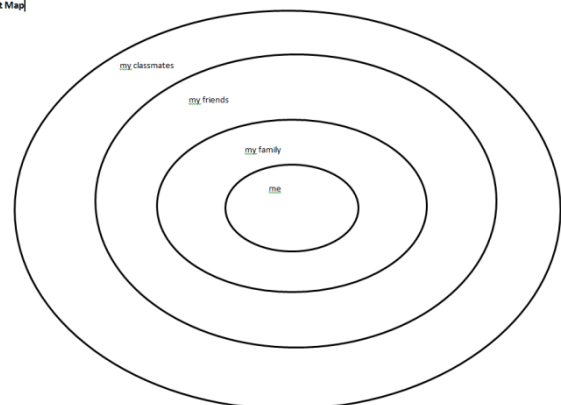
- You will need small pieces of paper, pencils and erasers
- An alternative to the Sorry Stones is to get the children to write in pencil what they are sorry for and to fold it up.
- During the prayer service let them place their paper around the cross. Once it is all over they can retrieve their paper and rub out what they have written.
- Alternatively they can place their bits of paper in a waste paper basket. Another alternative (following a thorough risk assessment) is to burn the bits of paper.

Prayer Circles

This idea helps children to be more aware of the different people they can pray for. Similar to a Target Map a number of concentric circles can be used.

- You will need Prayer Circle labelled from the inside going out: our class, our school, our parish, our town, our country, other countries (use the titles you think are more appropriate for their age. You can vary it by starting with themselves, then family, friends etc.).
- If using a laminated sheet you could let the children write on the examples of who/what they're praying for or they could write on sticky notes.
- You could build this up over the week including a different circle each day.

Target Map



Map Prayers

Another way of getting children to remember to pray for others around the world is to use a map or globe of the world. These are easily accessible on the interactive whiteboard.

Feely Bag

This is a way of getting children to talk about their relationship with God.

- You will need a bag (an old style drawstring PE bag will do) and a range of fabrics and textiles of different textures (paper, tissue paper, sandpaper, foil, voile, velvet etc).
- Let the children dip their hand into the bag and select the texture which best sums up their relationship with God that day.

Prayer Offerings

This is another way of leaving a space for children to post their prayers as when the need arises.

- Create a cross using cylinders of brightly coloured card (or paint the inside tube from a roll of kitchen towels).
- Leave pencils, pens, paper so that children can write their prayers and then post into one of the holes.
- An alternative is to use a wooden cross, made from offcuts, with some pre-drilled holes in which children can roll up and post their prayer intentions.



Praise Washing Line

- You will need a washing line, pegs, paper shapes, pencils
- Put up your washing line somewhere in the classroom where it can be seen.
- Give the children shaped paper to write their prayers of praise to God.
- Hang the prayers on the line and encourage the children to read their own prayer and those of others.
- You could do this with other types of prayer.



Shine for Jesus

This idea illustrates how we can all shine out for Jesus and is suitable for older children. (Before carrying this out make sure that you have carried out the necessary risk assessments).

- You will need a large cross (wood would be best) covered with tin foil, votive candles (tea light) and holders. It is best done in a darkened room.
- As each child makes their prayer about how they are going to be a light for others or about how they want to thank Jesus for being their light, whether aloud or silently, they place a lit votive candle upon the cross.



Mexican Wave Prayer

- You will need a big enough space so that at the end the children can stand or sit on chairs in a circle and some prayer starters e.g. We praise you God because you are..., We thank you Jesus for....Holy Spirit, help us to...
- Divide the class up into groups of three or four and get them to think of an ending for each prayer.
- Bring the class together. Read out the first part of the prayer and then as a group shout out their answer in turn. As they do this so they raise their arms in Mexican Wave style. The prayer should go round the circle three times before everyone together calls out Amen!



Resources

Prayer Spaces in Schools www.prayerspacesinschools.com/

This website is provided by 24-7 Prayer an organisation which 'is an international, interdenominational movement of prayer, mission and justice working in more than half the nations on earth.' It has plenty of ideas and resources for developing both the physical and spiritual place of prayer within schools.

Worship Together www.worshiptogether.com

This website provides a range of Christian music including words and guitar chords. Matt Maher comes recommended.

GodTube www.godtube.com

A website which offers plenty of Christian music to use as well as video clips. You do need to watch these all the way through to make sure that the message is the one you want to convey.

Big Fat Toothbrush www.bigfattoothbrush.com

A Christian blog with ideas for creative prayer. You can also find this on UK Pinterest (see below)

Pinterest www.uk.pinterest.com

Loads of ideas particularly for prayer stations.

Some Ideas for Creative Prayer downloadable document from

www.bristol.anglican.org/i/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Creative_Prayer_ideas.pdf

Ultimate Creative Prayer (Judith Merrell) A sample of ideas is available as a download. The whole book can be purchased from a number of places.

www.scriptureunion.org.uk/Uploads/Documents/Ultimate%20creative%20prayer%209781844273676.pdf

Multi-Sensory...Prayer, Seasons, Parables, Scripture, Church, Message

This is a series of books published by Scripture Union which offers a range of creative activities you can use in a variety of settings.

Ripple Children's Ministry www.rippleconnor.org.uk/cms/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/10-Creative-Prayer-Ideas-for-childrens-groups.pdf

A short downloadable document of creative prayer ideas

Most of these resources are provided by Christians Organisations, Groups and individuals. You must always check the suitability of the activities/music/film clips for use in a Catholic school.