

CHAPTER 1

Ways to Pray with Children

Our God is an infinite God and our relationship is expressed in myriad ways. As catechists, we must help children and families express their unique experience of God. So we should be open to new ways of sharing prayer with children. Once children are comfortable with different ways to pray, they will be able to choose those that fit their relationship with God.

In this chapter, you will find a wide variety of ways to pray with children, along with tips for strengthening their prayer experiences. Vary your methods to appeal to different personalities, learning styles, maturity levels, and experiences. Be prepared for unexpected prayer opportunities that arise, such as a sunny afternoon after days of bad weather. And be sure to repeat activities that seem most meaningful to children.

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**PREPARE THE
WAY FOR PRAYER****BACKGROUND**

Before beginning any prayer with children, it's important to remember that transitions are difficult for them and, indeed, for all of us. Prayer is important. We must pause before beginning prayer and direct our attention to God.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Help them learn to shut out distractions by easing them into prayer. Do this by setting the scene for prayer. Avoid rushing into prayer.

Whether you are calling two children to prayer or two hundred, help them focus on the prayer before beginning. Resist the urge to use the opening words of the prayer itself, or the sign of the cross spoken loudly, as a way to quiet children for prayer. Instead, begin with words and phrases such as:

- *We gather together in prayer to remember all that God has done for us.*
- *Now we lift up our hearts and our voices in prayer to our God.*
- *Let's put ourselves in the presence of God, who is always with us.*

This calls prayer forth from the hearts of children and helps them connect with the God who is already present in their lives. Think of it as a prelude to prayer: something that helps children focus.

Try not to wait to pray when the children are getting ready to leave. Rather, make prayer a priority in the group's time together. This shows the children that you consider prayer important, and they should too.

HELP CHILDREN PRAY IN THEIR OWN WORDS

BACKGROUND

Children need to understand that they can bring their cares and concerns to God, who is always listening and who will always love them. They need that certainty in their lives. It is essential to give children experience in praying in their own words.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Often the best ways to help children pray are the simplest: reflecting together on the simple (and not so simple) events of their lives. Explore ways to pray to God in their lives, such as:

- give praise to God for a beautiful day
- thank God for the gift of the stars in the sky
- ask God to help us with a problem
- talk to God when we feel alone or afraid
- say we are sorry to God for what we did wrong
- celebrate when something great happens

Ask the children for their ideas about times they can pray in their own words. In this way we encourage them to talk to God about what is going on in their lives.

USE PRAYER STARTERS

BACKGROUND

Children need lots of practice praying in their own words. Only then will it become easier to share their thoughts with Jesus. In this way children learn to pray for a lifetime.

WITH THE CHILDREN

Give them some gentle nudges throughout their day. One way to do this is by beginning a prayer they can finish in their own words. Use any of the following starters, or make up your own:

- *God, sometimes I feel...*
- *Jesus, help me to be like you in...*
- *Father, help me to know that you...*
- *Holy Spirit, guide my life so that I...*
- *Creator God, I am thankful for...*
- *Lord Jesus Christ, I pray for...*
- *Spirit of love, be with me so I...*

The length of the prayer depends on the child and his or her needs and capabilities. For some children a one-sentence prayer from the heart is great. Older children with more writing experience can use prayer starters to write paragraph prayers.