

# Mission Together

## How to pray with children – a brief guide



### INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

Pope Francis recently explained to children that prayer is like **“speaking with a friend: in prayer one opens one’s heart.”** Mission Together places great emphasis on prayer, encouraging children to see prayer as a way to deepen our friendship with God and others.

### TEACH US TO PRAY

Our relationship with God is like any other, it requires regular communication. Prayer is the means by which we communicate with God. Just like other forms of communication - speaking, writing, reading - prayer is something we learn and develop. Even Jesus’ disciples had to learn to pray!

***One time Jesus was praying in a place. When he finished, one of his followers said to him, “John taught his followers how to pray. Lord, please teach us how to pray, too.” Luke 11:1***

With this in mind it is good to remember that to lead prayer does not mean to “do” the prayer for the children. As with all learning, one guides, involves and encourages.

### SETTING THE SCENE

Before beginning prayer do your best to distinguish between ‘prayer time’ and ‘class time’ by creating a sense of the sacred. If possible create a prayer space in the room.

- Provide a focus for prayer. Cover a small table with a cloth, preferably the colour of the liturgical season (Purple for Advent and Lent, white for feast days, red for a martyrs’ commemoration and for Pentecost, green for ordinary time).
- On the table place one or more of the following: a candle, a Bible, a cross, a religious image or artefact, flowers or a plant.
- Invite children to sit quietly and still.
- Explain that our loving God is present everywhere and at all times, but we feel God’s closeness and peace most especially when we pray.
- Ask the children to find positions in which they are comfortable yet alert.
- Encourage them to breathe slowly by taking in long breaths and letting them out gradually.
- In the background introduce some reflective music.

This preparation for prayer can develop a child’s appreciation of stillness and silence, a means by which we open ourselves to God and learn the value of personal reflection.

Mission Together is the children’s branch of Missio, the Pope’s charity for world mission.

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## PRAYING TOGETHER

- Lead the children in praying **the Sign of the Cross**. Say the words and do the actions slowly, deliberately, and reverently. The physical gesture of the Sign of the Cross grounds us and is a reminder that we bring our whole self to God when we pray, body and soul.
- If possible introduce other physical actions and gestures eg lighting a candle, sign of peace, hymns with actions. These help to engage and involve children too.
- It is helpful to set **a theme** for your prayer time. This makes it easier to find suitable scripture, reflections and hymns. Advent and Lent provide themes in themselves and the **Mission Together** website has downloadable resources for these and other liturgical feasts that include accompanying scripture and prayers.
- Outside of these liturgical seasons there are lots of themes from which to draw inspiration eg friendship, listening, gratitude. Online search engines provide scriptures to accompany such themes. Experiment with a general search, like 'What does the Bible say about **gratitude**.' The same rule applies when looking for hymns and prayers on a theme. Please note, these search engines will generally only offer adult translations of the Bible. It is strongly advisable to look for a children's translation of the text. To do this, copy the Bible reference eg Luke 1:46 – 55 and paste into biblegateway.com – requesting a translation from the International Children's Bible. Alternatively invest in a good children's Bible and source your scripture in this way.
- Involve the children as much as possible by asking them to sing, play music, read scripture and prayers. Mission Together have many Liturgical Prayers (Collective Acts of Worship), designed for maximum pupil participation.
- Pope Francis' quotation that '*In prayer one opens one's heart*', reminds us of the importance of providing children with the opportunity to pray aloud in their own words. If you do this, guide the children by providing an introduction and example e.g. '*Today in our prayer time we have been thinking about gratitude. Now let's tell God about the things we are grateful for. Dear God, today I am grateful for.*' In addition to impromptu prayer, children could prepare prayers in advance, using our downloadable resource '*Writing My Own Prayer*' as a guide.
- Bring your time to a conclusion with a prayer everybody can say together such as the *Our Father*, the *Hail Mary*, or the *Mission Together Prayer*. For these and other prayers, download our *Prayers for Children* resource.
- Remember to close with the **Sign of the Cross**.