

Tips for Praying with Children

Faith is a living relationship with God that, like any other relationship, requires communication to remain healthy. Another word for this communication with God is *prayer*.

In prayer, children become aware of the presence of God already around and in them. In a special way, prayer invites them to recognize God's presence in every moment. As a leader of prayer with children, you pray with the children, guiding them into a prayerful time and space. You are both a model and a participant.

The only way to learn to pray is by praying. As you invite the children to enter into prayer, here are some specific things to remember.

- Create a sense of sacred space by inviting the children to focus on the presence of God. If possible, move the children to a special prayer center in the room. A small table covered with a cloth the color of the liturgical season can serve as a focal point. On the table, place an open Bible and one or more of the following: a bowl of holy water, a cross, a religious image or statue, a plant or flower, or a candle.
- As part of the preparation for prayer, play reflective instrumental music in the background.
- As the children gather around the prayer center, ask them to find positions in which they are comfortable yet alert.
- Ask the children to breathe slowly by taking in long breaths and letting them out gradually as they relax and become more open to God.
- Begin by leading the children in praying the Sign of the Cross. Speak slowly, deliberately, and reverently.
- When appropriate, involve the children in some bodily action or gestures as a means of reinforcing the experience physically.

- Remember that to lead prayer does not mean to “do” the prayer for the children. Be aware of how you are leading them to participate, whether it be through silence or through speaking or singing.
- Foster a welcoming spirit for the prayer time and space. When inviting children to pray aloud in their own words, remember that God welcomes all of us—whether our words sound solemn or silly. If giggling ensues, calmly remind the children that this is a special time of being with God. Invite them to be still once again and to pay attention to their breathing.
- Be sure to invite the children to spend time in silence with God and to be aware of how God wants to be with each of them in a special way.
- Bring closure to the prayer time by inviting the children to pray the Sign of the Cross.
- With a few gentle words, guide the children to the next activity of the session.