



 NCCL
Accompaniment
in Faith

PRACTICES + SKILLS FOR CATECHISTS & EDUCATORS

Video Guide

Praying with Children
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Praying with Children

Ideas from the Video Presentation

What if the most transformative thing you could give a child has nothing to do with curriculum, content, or classroom management? What if it was simply this: teaching them how to be with God?

Prayer is not a program. It is not a box to check or a minute to fill before the lesson begins. Being in relationship with God is the whole point. And praying is a central part of nurturing that relationship. Praying together, with children, one practice at a time. We begin where every prayer begins. With a breath.

Prayer Activity 1. Praying with a Breath

The simplest prayer begins with the air already in your lungs.

Five Finger Breathing

One hand open, one finger tracing slowly up and over each finger -- breathing in on the way up, breathing out on the way down. By the time you reach the last finger, something has shifted. The room is quieter. So are they. And so are you.

Breath Prayer

Inhale: 'Be still...' Exhale: '...and know that I am God.' That's it. That's the whole prayer. And somehow, it's enough.

Prayer Activity 2. Praying in Silence

What if the most powerful thing you could offer a child is simply... quiet?

In silence we have inner conversations with God: No prompts. No words spoken aloud. Just an invitation: Talk to Jesus like a friend sitting right next to you. Then listen. Children are more capable of this than we imagine -- and often, they surprise us completely.

Silence offers us the gift of nothing: Tell children that sometimes prayer has no words at all. That sitting quietly in God's presence — without asking for anything, without saying anything — is itself a prayer.

- Light a candle.
- Set a timer for two minutes.
- Sit together in the quiet.
- Afterward, simply ask: What did you notice? The answers are always worth hearing

Prayer Activity 3. Praying with Body and Movement

Children pray with their whole selves. We just have to let them.

Tension and Release

We prepare our bodies for prayer. Clench your fists. Hold it. Now let go. Feel that? That release is the body saying I'm ready. It's a small thing that opens a very big door.

Whole Body Blessing

What if we named and blessed our body parts, and invited children to echo each blessing? Blessings on our hands, blessing on our feet, blessings on our eyes. Each part of the body is named, blessed, and

prayed over. Children discover that they are not just bringing their minds to God -- they are bringing all of themselves.

Four Corners Lectio

After hearing the scripture, children don't just sit with it -- they move toward it. Each corner of the room holds a different character from the story. Which one feels like you today? The body knows things the mind hasn't said yet.

Prayer Activity 4. Praying with Scripture

Scripture isn't something that happened a long time ago. It's happening right now, in this room, with these children.

Echo Prayer

A leader reads a simple line of scripture. The children echo it back. The echoing continues through the passage back and forth, like a conversation that has been going on for centuries -- and now includes them.

Lectio Divina

Lectio is a simple process in which a scripture passage is read three times aloud with a pause in between for participants to name a phrase or two of what they heard. We slowly read a scripture passage. We listen for an image. Then we read it again and listen for a word. Then we sit with God and wonder why that word found us. The same passage, read by a hundred children, will land in a hundred different hearts.. That's the living Word.

Pass-the-Paper Lectio

We can also pray lectio divina collaboratively. Instead of speaking the words after each reading of the scripture, the participants are invited to write a word on a page, then pass the page on for a few others to add words. Words are written and passed along after each reading until the page belongs to everyone. A prayer that no single person could have prayed alone.

Whisper Lectio

Imagine reading Psalm 23, the Lord is my Shepherd, line by line, stopping after each. After each line, each student, all at the same time, whispers aloud the word that seems most important for them from that line. The room fills with quiet sound -- everyone whispering something different, something true, at the same time.

Letter from God

An envelope. A stamp. A letter addressed to participants from God, read aloud. And then their name, spoken by the leader as God's own voice: 'You are precious in my sight, and I love you.' Watch what happens to a child's face when they hear their name said that way.

Ignatian Contemplation

We can use an Ignatian contemplation style to invite participants to use their imagination to engage with a scripture passage. For example, the "Storm at Sea." We invite participants to close their eyes and experience the scripture passage with all of their senses. We invite them to feel the cold water. To hear the wind. To see Jesus' face. Scripture becomes a place children can actually go, and meet someone who is glad they came.

Prayer Activity 5. Praying with Imagination

Children understand friendship. And they are ready—more than we know—to discover that God is the truest friend they have.

Imagination-Based Friendship Prayer

Remember the moment someone looked at you with love. Really looked. Now imagine God doing the same -- with a giant, happy smile, just for you. Then listen: What is one thing you love about the way you made me? This is not a small prayer. This is the beginning of a lifelong conversation.

Daily Examen

Gratitude. Honest reflection. Sorrow. Hope. A simple rhythm for the end of any day that helps children notice God's fingerprints in ordinary moments -- and want to look for them again tomorrow.

Dinner Table Prayer

Set a place for Jesus. A plate. A glass. Maybe a candle. Before the meal ask: If Jesus were sitting right here tonight, what would you want to tell him? The question has a way of changing everything about dinner.

Prayer Activity 6. Praying through Writing and Journaling

For the children who feel things deeply but find them hard to say out loud—here is a prayer that belongs to them.

Texting with God

A back-and-forth conversation on paper. No rules. Emojis welcome. Just honest words going one direction and the quiet sense of something coming back.

Symbols in Writing Prayer

Give each child a large paper heart. In the center, they write what they are seeking from God. Along the edges, they write what gets in the way of opening fully to God's love. Participants are invited to either place their heart in the prayer space or a safe place to remind them of God's love for them. Their prayer is held. They are not alone.

Journal as Prayer

Not a reflection. Not an assignment. A continuing conversation with God, on the page, from the heart, whatever surfaces. Spelling doesn't matter. What matters is that they keep talking.

Prayer Activity 7. Praying Together with the Familiar

The prayers we already know are not walls around God. They are windows.

Circle Prayer

Two circles, moving toward each other. The Lord's Prayer, line by line -- but this time, pausing to ask: What does this phrase mean for someone in the world tonight? Ancient words, alive again.

Familiar Prayer with Mindful Attention

The Hail Mary or Our Father, prayed slowly. One word at a time. As if for the first time. Because for someone in the room, it might be.

Prayers of the Faithful

One voice at a time, bringing what is real -- needs, hopes, worries, names -- before God. The whole community answering together. The same thing that happens at every Mass, made visible and felt.

Prayer Activity 8. Praying with Visuals

Sometimes the eyes lead the heart to places words cannot reach. Children are natural observers. Give them something beautiful to look at, and they will find their way to God.

Sacred Images

Choose one image for your prayer space: an icon, a painting, a stained glass detail, a photograph of creation. Invite children to simply look, without rushing to explain or analyze. After a moment of quiet, ask: What do you notice? What might God be saying through this image? Sacred art has been a doorway to God for centuries. As a catechist, you are simply helping children find the handle.

Icons

Icons are not decorations. They are windows into the holy. Introduce an icon slowly. Trace with the children what they see: the colors, the faces, the gestures, the light. Let them wonder aloud before you offer any explanation. Then settle into stillness and invite them to gaze quietly. Children often respond with a reverence that surprises everyone in the room, including themselves.

Visio Divina with Art

Apply the three-movement structure of Lectio Divina to a piece of art. Look once: What is the overall feeling or story? Look again: What one detail catches your attention? Look a third time: Let that detail become a quiet conversation with God. A single painting, looked at slowly and prayerfully, can open the same doors as a Gospel passage.

Nature as Image

A candle flame. A smooth stone. A bowl of water. A bare branch. Place one at the center of your prayer space before the children arrive. Invite them to look in silence, then ask: What does this remind you of? What might God be saying through something so simple? Let the object be the teacher, and let yourself be surprised.

Prayer Activity 9. Blessings

To bless someone is to tell them the truth about themselves. Children are hungry for this.

Communal Blessing

Turn to the person next to you. Say their name. 'You are full of grace.' Watch what that does to a room.

Basket Prayer

An empty basket or bowl, passed from hand to hand. Each child holds it, speaks to God, and passes it on. By the time it returns to the leader, it is full.

Sending Blessing

Every experience ends with a blessing spoken over one another by name. Not a goodbye. A sending.

***You don't have to be perfect at leading prayer. You just have to show up. God does the rest.
And God is very, very good at God's part.***

Praying with Children - Checklist

Prayer is not a program or a box to check — it is the whole point of being in relationship with God. Use this checklist to plan how you will help children pray, choosing from a wide range of prayer experiences.

1. Praying with a Breath

- ☐ Have I planned a breath-based prayer practice (Five Finger Breathing or a simple Breath Prayer)?
- ☐ Have I allowed enough quiet time for the room — and the children — to actually settle?

2. Praying in Silence

- ☐ Have I offered children an invitation to simply talk to Jesus like a friend, without prompts?
- ☐ Have I planned a period of true wordless silence (candle, timer, quiet together)?
- ☐ Do I have a simple follow-up question ready (“What did you notice?”) rather than rushing to explain the silence?

3. Praying with Body and Movement

- ☐ Have I included a physical practice to prepare the body for prayer (e.g., Tension and Release)?
- ☐ Have I considered a Whole Body Blessing, naming and blessing specific body parts?
- ☐ Have I considered a Four Corners Lectio activity where children move toward a character in the story?

4. Praying with Scripture

- ☐ Echo Prayer — children echo back lines of Scripture
- ☐ Lectio Divina — reading a passage three times, listening for an image, then a word
- ☐ Pass-the-Paper Lectio — children collaboratively write words in response to the reading
- ☐ Whisper Lectio — children whisper the most important word from each line simultaneously
- ☐ Letter from God — reading a letter aloud that names God's love for each child by name
- ☐ Ignatian Contemplation — inviting children to imaginatively enter a Scripture scene with their senses

5. Praying with Imagination

- ☐ Have I planned an Imagination-Based Friendship Prayer inviting children to imagine God's loving gaze?
- ☐ Have I considered a Daily Examen rhythm (gratitude, reflection, sorrow, hope)?
- ☐ Have I considered a Dinner Table Prayer activity, setting a place for Jesus?

6. Praying through Writing and Journaling

- ☐ Have I offered a written prayer option for children who process best in writing (Texting with God, journaling)?
- ☐ Have I considered the Symbols in Writing Prayer (paper heart activity)?
- ☐ Have I made clear that spelling/neatness doesn't matter — only honest conversation with God does?

7. Praying Together with the Familiar

- ☐ Have I planned a way to pray a familiar prayer (Our Father, Hail Mary) slowly and with mindful attention?
- ☐ Have I considered a Circle Prayer or connecting a familiar prayer's phrases to real-world needs?
- ☐ Have I planned space for Prayers of the Faithful — real names, needs, and hopes brought before God?

8. Praying with Visuals

- ☐ Have I chosen a sacred image, icon, or object for the prayer space (icon, painting, stained glass, nature object)?
- ☐ Have I planned time for children to simply look before I explain or analyze the image?
- ☐ Have I planned a wondering question afterward (“What do you notice? What might God be saying?”)?
- ☐ If using art, have I structured it using the three movements of Visio Divina (overall feeling, one detail, quiet conversation with God)?

9. Blessings

- ☐ Have I planned a blessing to close the session (Communal Blessing, Basket Prayer, or Sending Blessing)?
- ☐ Does this blessing speak the truth about who each child is, calling them by name?

Quick Prayer Planning Table

Use this table to plan which prayer practice(s) you'll use this session.

Prayer Category	Practice I'll Use	Materials Needed
Opening (breath/silence/body)		
Scripture-based prayer		
Imagination/writing (if used)		
Familiar prayer		
Visual/sacred image (if used)		
Closing blessing		

Reminder

***You don't have to be perfect at leading prayer. You just have to show up. God does the rest.
And God is very, very good at God's part.***