

**MANCHESTER DIOCESE
BISHOP'S CERTIFICATE IN CHILDREN'S MINISTRY
LEVEL 1**

SESSION 5: CHILDREN AND PRAYER

AIM FOR THIS SESSION:

To encourage participants to think about the variety of different ways that people can pray.

AT THE END OF THE SESSION PARTICIPANTS WILL BE ABLE TO:

- appreciate that there are lots of different ways to pray and that they don't all involve words;
- see that prayer is something that is active and participatory;
- understand that different people may prefer different prayer 'styles'.

OPENING PRAYER(S)

In view of the subject of the session, you might want to try something imaginative.

100 WAYS TO SAY 'I LOVE YOU'

- Ask participants to imagine that two people who love each other are separated on Valentine's Day for some reason. Ask people to suggest different ways the two could communicate their love to each other on that special day. After a few examples, ask people to think of ways that don't rely on words.
- Split the group into threes and give each three a picture to look at. (Any pictures will do). Ask them to discuss what their picture makes them think about and if it seems to tell some kind of story.
- Ask everyone to close their eyes and hold out their hands. Tell them you are going to give everyone a piece of something with a definite texture to it and they should handle it with eyes closed. Tell them to open their eyes and tell their group of three how handling the object made them feel. (NB everyone doesn't need a different material, but there should be a variety in each group. The following might be suitable: sandpaper, sponge, towelling, polished stone). **NB** ask if anyone has any touch allergies before you start.
- Ask everyone to close their eyes and listen to three different sounds (eg a rattle, a whistle, grains of rice falling on a drum). Invite people to call out any pictures that come into their minds as they are listening.

- Point out that in the last three exercises three senses (sight, touch and hearing) have communicated with the participants in some way. We have two other senses – taste and smell. Ask for suggestions as to how these can be used to communicate. For example, from the Valentine’s Day discussion, the sweet taste of chocolates or sweet smell of flowers can communicate the sweetness of love.
- Point out that if prayer is a way of communicating and expressing ourselves then all of the senses can be involved as well as words – and sometimes instead of them. Remember the old phrase, ‘a picture paints a thousand words’. Sometimes experience using the senses can ‘speak volumes’.
- **NB** if any of your leaders have impaired senses you will need to think about how to adapt some of the activities in this session. And if you work with children who have sense impairment, you will need to adapt any multi-sensory ideas you use with them.

SPIRITUALITY PRAYER STATIONS

A ‘prayer station’ is an area where the materials and instructions for a prayer activity have been set out. Before the session begins, set up the four ‘stations’ each on a table in its own space in the room. There should be enough space round each station for a small group to gather and do the activity. You might want to put two or three chairs near each table. Arrange each station carefully, using a cloth for the table – the way the stations look will help people ‘get in the mood’. Each station should be labelled with the name of the spirituality and each should have a sheet giving clear instructions. **NB** This activity needs a quiet environment!

The stations are:

- **Benedictine Spirituality** – There should be a supply of A5 sheets of paper (one per participant) each having the words of the Lord’s Prayer (the version you use with your children) printed on it, and enough space for an illustration. There should be a supply of felt tips. The instructions are: ‘Take a sheet. Read the prayer through until one part of it seems to grab your attention. Underline that part of the prayer. Now do a picture in the space on your sheet to show what that part of the prayer means to you just now.’
- **Franciscan Spirituality** – Have enough apples to be able to cut them into segments so that there will be one per person. When the ‘Spirituality Prayer Stations’ activity begins, cut the apples into the required number of segments, digging out the pips as you do so. Arrange the segments on a plate and scatter the pips among them. The instructions are: ‘Take a piece of apple and eat it slowly so that

you appreciate all the sensations of taste and texture. As you are doing this, hold a pip in your hand and think about the tree hidden in the pip, the apples that tree might produce, the pips in each of those new apples, the trees inside each of those new pips. Think about how many trees you are holding in your hand. Share your feelings with God in some way.' Put some paper and felt-tips on the table and remind people they can draw or write if they wish.

- **Ignatian Spirituality** – Have one large picture on display illustrating a well know Bible story (a story with action and characters, but not too long and complicated). Place around it three or four copies of the text of the story in a clear modern translation. The instructions are: 'Read the Bible story, then sit down by yourself. Get comfortable and relaxed. Close your eyes and picture the story happening. Imagine yourself in the scene and try to be really 'there' in your imagination by thinking about what you would hear and smell and feel as well as what you would see. Imagine that you go up to one of the characters, or they come up to you and that you exchange a few words. When the story is over, find some way of 'fading it out' in you imagination. Slowly open your eyes, and readjust to being back in the room.'
- **Celtic Spirituality** – arrange a number of everyday items on the table. Next to each, place a card with two or three open-ended questions to get people thinking. For example, beside a pile of loose change you could have the questions 'Where has this been? Where is it going? What can it do?' The instructions are: 'Look at one or more of the items. Use the questions to get you thinking – or make up your own questions. Ask yourself how God is involved in the things you are thinking about. Share your thoughts with God in some way.' Put some paper and felt-tips on the table and remind people they can draw or write if they wish.
- To begin the activity, explain that there are a number of different 'spiritualities' in the Christian tradition and that the handout they will get at the end will give some details they can look at later. Each of the four 'stations' will give an example of a different kind of spirituality. Ask the participants to visit each station and do the activity on it. They should work alone and in silence and try not to 'overcrowd' by having more than four people at a station. Tell them there will be about twenty minutes to complete the four stations, and that when they have tried all four they should come and sit quietly in the group circle again.

- When twenty minutes is up, or when everyone has returned to the circle, whichever is earlier, ask for some feedback: does anyone want to say anything about their experiences? Which did people prefer? Were there any that people couldn't get into? After a brief sample of views, point out that just as people have different 'learning styles' (see session 4) so they have different styles of spirituality, and a variety of kinds of prayer activity will help a variety of people have the opportunity to get involved.

WHAT SHALL WE TALK ABOUT?

- Point out that children can often get the idea that praying is just about saying 'please' to God. When we pray we can talk to God about lots of things. Sometimes we might just chat without any 'agenda'. Other times it's good to say 'thank you', and 'sorry' to God, or simply to say 'you're great!'
- Divide into four groups. Give each group a different type of prayer subject to work on: **Please, Thank you, Sorry, You're Great**. Ask each group to come up with a way of doing their prayer subject that uses something they've learned from the session. Stress that they should make up a prayer **activity**, using as few words as possible. Give a **maximum** time of ten minutes for this.
- Bring everyone back together and ask each group to explain **briefly** what their prayer activity would be. This gives you a chance to see what new ideas have come out of the session.

CLOSING PRAYER(S)

You might want to do something active that people can join in with.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- a collection of pictures (one picture between three)
- some sounds to listen to
- a selection of materials that feel different (one per person)
- 4 x coloured cloths, one for each prayer station
- 4 x instruction sheets, one for each prayer station
- a set of 'Lord's Prayer sheets' (one per person)
- some paper and three packets of felt-tip pens
- enough apples for everyone to have one segment each
- a plate and a sharp knife
- a large picture from a Bible story (a story with action and characters but not too complicated)
- 4 copies of the text of the Bible story in the picture (from a modern translation)
- a collection of 'every-day items'
- a card with open-ended questions for each 'every-day item'
- a set of session handouts (one per person)

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HANDOUT

SESSION 5: CHILDREN AND PRAYER

Sometimes, when we introduce different ways of praying with children – especially if we try and use them with the children in a church service – we are accused of ignoring tradition and bringing in new ‘gimmicks’. But often the exact opposite is true. As you will see from the following notes, the spiritualities we have been looking at in this session are in fact very old. If we use them with our children, we are not giving them ‘gimmicks’ – we are actually giving them an experience of some very traditional Christian methods!

Benedictine Spirituality

This spirituality gets its name from St Benedict of Nursia. He lived from about 480 to about 550 AD and is thought of as the founder of western monasticism. Life in a monastery is very much about living together as a *community* of Christians, and Benedictine spirituality is about seeing ourselves as members of a faith community. One of the ways we show we belong to a community is by sharing the same prayers and the same structures for our worship – this is what the word ‘common’ means in *The Book of Common Prayer* and our new books of *Common Worship*. Doing ‘Benedictine’ spirituality with our children will mean getting them used to the structure of Anglican worship, and also helping them work with some key texts like The Lord's Prayer. The challenge is to explore some old and traditional material with the children in new and creative ways!

Franciscan Spirituality

This spirituality is inspired by St Francis of Assisi (1181-1226). The following lines from a famous poem of his (often called the ‘Canticle of the Sun’) give an idea of the spirituality named after him:

*Be praised by all your creatures, Lord,
To you all praise belongs!*

*By brother sun who brings the day
And gives us warmth and light;
He gains his strength from you, O Lord,
Your praise is his delight.*

(Translation in *Stories from the Christian World*, David Self (1988), London: Macdonald)

Franciscan spirituality takes its inspiration from the natural world. It sees the creator God in all of creation, and praises him by celebrating all that he has made.

Ignatian Spirituality

St Ignatius Loyola (1491 to 1556) gives his name to this spirituality. He was the founder of the Society of Jesus (who have become known as the Jesuits). He wrote a manual called *Spiritual Exercises* which used imaginative methods to help people enter into the events and scenes of the Bible stories. The sort of imaginative 'visualisations' that he was suggesting have become popular in recent years and can seem a very modern, experimental approach to using the Bible in prayer and meditation. But as you can see from his dates, they are over 400 years old!

Celtic Spirituality

Celtic spirituality is sometimes seen as a fanciful, romantic longing for earlier times – times of mists and mystery – but nothing could be further from the truth. Celtic Christians were very down to earth and their spirituality was drawn from the everyday things and activities of their times. An authentic Celtic prayer in the 21st century should not be a meditation on kindling an ancient cottage fire, but should be about one of the everyday activities of our own times. A good example would be these thoughts on a telephone conversation:

I have just hung up; why did he telephone?

I don't know ... Oh! I get it ...

I talked a lot and listened very little.

Forgive me, Lord, it was a monologue and not a dialogue ...

(Prayers of Life, Michel Quoist (1963), Dublin: Gill & Macmillan)

FURTHER READING

Steve Dixon (2004). *Let Us Pray: Creative and participatory ways of praying with children*. Manchester: Manchester Diocesan Board of Education.

This resource is available as a download from the children's section of the Diocesan Website: www.manchester.anglican.org

John Pritchard (2002). *How to Pray: A practical handbook*. London: SPCK.

Sue Wallace (2000). *Multi-sensory Prayer*. Bletchley: Scripture Union.

These books can be borrowed from the Resources Centre at Church House, 90 Deansgate, Manchester M3 2GH (Please ring to ensure it is in stock before visiting the Centre!)

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever.
Amen.**



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BENEDICTINE SPIRITUALITY

Take a sheet.

Read the prayer through until one part of it seems to grab your attention.

Underline that part of the prayer.

Now do a picture in the space on your sheet to show what that part of the prayer means to you just now.

FRANCISCAN SPIRITUALITY

Take a piece of apple and eat it slowly so that you appreciate all the sensations of taste and texture.

As you are doing this, hold a pip in your hand and think about the tree hidden in the pip, the apples that tree might produce, the pips in each of those new apples, the trees inside each of those new pips.

Think about how many trees you are holding in your hand. Share your feelings with God in some way.

IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY

Read the Bible story, then sit down by yourself. Get comfortable and relaxed. Close your eyes and picture the story happening.

Imagine yourself in the scene and try to be really 'there' in your imagination by thinking about what you would hear and smell and feel as well as what you would see.

Imagine that you go up to one of the characters, or they come up to you and that you exchange a few words.

When the story is over, find some way of 'fading it out' in your imagination. Slowly open your eyes, and readjust to being back in the room.

CELTIC SPIRITUALITY

Look at one or more of the items.

Use the questions to get you thinking –
or make up your own questions.

Ask yourself how God is involved in the
things you are thinking about.

Share your thoughts with God in some
way.