

St Mary's Catholic Primary School



Prayer and Liturgy

Guidelines on Nurturing Prayer and Liturgy in a Catholic Primary School

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Prayer

“Prayer is the encounter of God’s thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for God” [Catechism of the Catholic Church 2560]

“Prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.” [Therese of Lisieux]

At the heart of the Christian faith is the belief in a God who communicates with people. God calls every human person into a loving relationship and as with every relationship, our relationship with God can only grow through communication. Prayer is the way in which we engage in communication with God. Christians believe that prayer is essential to human fulfilment for it is only in God that we can discover ourselves, our meaning and our purpose.

“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You” [St. Augustine]

Prayer consists of:

listening - being attentive to the voice of God in every moment of life.

speaking - expressing our heart’s deepest longings and desires to the One who knows and understands us better than we know and understand ourselves.

reflecting - thinking about our relationship with God. Pondering on the actions of God in history and in the unfolding mystery of our lives.

resting – simply being consciously in the presence of God, knowing that we are loved.

One of the Early Fathers of the Church described prayer as *“... the raising of one’s mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God.”* These words of St John Damascene have become a classical definition of prayer and they point to the reason why, in a Catholic school, we begin and end each session of the day in prayer. Prayer can have a variety of forms and styles and express different things. The Catechism of the Catholic Church identifies the following forms of prayer:

- Blessing and Adoration – the prayer which blesses God for the goodness which has been shown to humankind
- Petition – the prayer which asks for forgiveness and which calls for the establishment of the Kingdom of God
- Intercession – consists in asking on behalf of another
- Thanksgiving – acknowledging the gifts which God has given
- Praise – the prayer which praises God simply because God is

[CCC 2623 –2649]

Liturgy

The liturgy is the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows

[This is the Liturgy 10]

“Liturgy” literally means, “work of the people”, and points to the fact that something else is going on beyond prayer. It is the formalising of worship at the heart of which is symbol and action. Liturgy makes explicit the celebration deriving from and highlighting every instance of worship, which occurs in our daily lives. To liturgical celebration therefore should be brought all human symbols of expression - art, dance, poetry, music, gesture, stillness [see *Children’s Directory for Masses*]

The *‘Liturgy of the Word with Children. Guidelines’* [1996 The Bishop’s Conference of England and Wales] lists the **General Principles of Liturgy**:

- Liturgy is the praise and worship of God.
- Liturgy is the source and summit of the Church’s life and our lives.
- It is the right and duty of all baptised, both children and adults.
- The function of the liturgy is to build up members of Christ’s body, to strengthen us in preaching Christ.
- Liturgy is action and symbol; it speaks to the whole person, it involves all the senses: sight, touch, sound, taste and smell.
- Participating in liturgy forms our habits because we are ritual people and learn through repetition and copying.
- In liturgy we discover the riches of prayer, through word and gesture, silence and stillness.
- The purpose of adapting liturgy for children is to lead them into full, conscious and active participation in the liturgy of the parish.
- Liturgy with children, as with adults, demands dignity, clarity and simplicity.

[See Appendix 1 for a simple liturgical format]

Prayer and Liturgy

God is present and active in all authentic human experience. We already have a graced life and **worship** is naming and celebrating this reality in the Christian tradition. God is reached through the world and adored within it. Creating a sacred space for worship is to create a space where the unity of God and creation is reverently symbolised and celebrated. Worship and the words and rituals we use should not sever us from the ordinary circumstances of our lives but rather unite us more closely to them.

- Worship remembers and celebrates the marvellous things God works in our lives. It celebrates God’s presence in our lives. Worship should not feel like an interruption from a different world. It is a spontaneous response to life.
- Prayer and Liturgy is concerned with giving glory, honour, praise and thanks to God. It is our loving response, in word and action, to God’s invitation to enter into relationship made possible through the work of Jesus Christ and the witness of the Holy Spirit.
- Worship will be at the very heart of every Catholic school and must reflect something special or separate from ordinary school activities.

Prayer may be an individual experience, or if it is an activity with others may form part of an act of worship.

All liturgies involve the praise, thanksgiving and adoration of God and are, therefore, acts of worship. However, not all worship will be liturgy as it may or may not include symbol and action.

An assembly is any experience of gathering/assembling in school. It may include an act of worship but the difference between worship and assembly must always be clear.

PRINCIPLES

The following key principles have been developed to support school communities when devising or revising policy and practice related to Prayer and Liturgy.

Principle I

Every effort will be made to give children positive experiences, based on sound educational, pastoral and liturgical principles.

One of the most important tasks of Catholic schools is to lead children, through celebrating liturgies, towards an understanding and appreciation of prayer and the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist.

This is no easy task, given that so many children in our schools have little or no experience of celebrating sacraments in their parish communities.

For this reason suggestions on how we can implement this principle can be found in *A Model Policy for Prayer and Liturgy* produced by the diocese:

We endorse the belief that Prayer and Liturgy takes into account the religious and educational needs of all who share in it:

- those who form part of the worshipping community in church
- those for whom school may be their first and only experience of church
- those from other Christian traditions – or none
- those from other faith backgrounds.

It will be an educational activity or experience to which all can contribute and from which all can gain.

Worship in this school is more than just a legal requirement. It is an integral part of school life and central to the Catholic tradition.

Principle II

Acts of Worship will prepare children for the liturgical life of the Church.

The school has great scope and opportunity through its daily act of worship to provide the steps needed in preparing children for the liturgical life of the church. Celebrations of various kinds which help children to understand some of the elements of liturgy (such as greeting, silence, community praise, especially in song) have a great part to play in their liturgical formation. They are part and parcel of school acts of worship. Such experiences help children's spiritual development and may eventually lead them to a desire to celebrate Mass and the sacraments beyond the community of the school.

Principle III

Acts of Worship will take into account, as far as possible, the age, aptitudes and backgrounds of the children.

Children are best introduced to prayer and liturgy in a developmental, step by step approach. Asking children to pray in a way they are not capable of, or in a manner beyond their years, can inhibit and sometimes damage development in this area. For liturgy to be effective we need to take into account the age, aptitudes and backgrounds of the children. Guidance on this can again be found in the model policy.

In order to do this, celebrations will:

- be kept small wherever possible or appropriate to help to personalise the experience;
- be short and appropriately paced (children's attention span lasts in any one activity for an average of one minute per year of life i.e., 5-6 mins. For Key Stage 1 and 7-10 mins. For Key Stage 2);
- be simple, including a range of experiences offered in a variety of groupings and in a variety of settings. *[Model Policy, page 2]*

Principle IV

Eucharistic celebrations will highlight a special occasion and will normally be celebrated with those children whose faith development has reached an appropriate stage.

When preparing these celebrations reference will be made to "*The Welcome Table. Planning Masses with Children*" which contains the complete text of the Church's '*Directory for Masses with Children*' as a basis for our practice.

Principle V

Acts of Prayer and Liturgy will usually follow the basic structure of Christian worship.

The same general principles will apply to planning a Eucharistic celebration as to other acts of school worship and opportunities for children to participate will be maximised.

The principles expressed here lead us to conclude that in school the 'Liturgy of the Word' rather than the Eucharist will be the norm. Practical guidance is to be found in the model policy.

In planning the celebration of the Eucharist with a school group sensitivity needs to be given to the number of children who come from other Christian Churches, other faith traditions, or from no particular faith background at all. The Eucharist is the central liturgical act of a Catholic faith community, so if there is a large proportion of people who are unable to participate fully in such a celebration it would be appropriate to think through how frequently and in what manner such celebrations should take place.

At Key Stage 1 worship includes:

- short, simple liturgies and prayer times
- occasional liturgies reflecting the Introductory Rites of the Mass and/or the Liturgy of the Word
- the occasional celebration of sacramental liturgies
- a range of types of prayer
- a range of styles of celebration
- opportunities for pupils to take an active part in worship

At Key Stage 2 worship includes:

- short, simple liturgies and prayer times
- occasional liturgies reflecting the Introductory Rites of the Mass and/or the Liturgy of the Word; or the Eucharistic Prayer; and/or the Communion Rite
- the occasional celebration of sacramental liturgies
- a range of types of prayer
- a range of styles of celebration
- opportunities for pupils to take an active part in worship
- opportunities for pupils to take leadership roles in worship

Appendix 1

Prayer Experiences

Pupils are introduced to a variety of forms and styles of prayer, which are developed in ways which are appropriate to their age and stage of development.

Type:	Example:
Praying the psalms	<i>'I thank you for the wonder of my being'</i> [Psalm 139]
Traditional prayers	<i>Glory be to the Father, Our Father, Hail Mary</i>
Repetitive prayer [mantra]	<i>'Jesus, I love you', repeated several times, slowly</i>
Meditation	<i>Scripture reflection with use of imagination</i>
Bodily prayer	<i>raising hands in praise, bowing, dancing, genuflecting</i>
Prayer of the heart	<i>stillness to listen to God: 'Be still and know that I am God.'</i>
Contemplation	<i>looking at trees, a sunset, an icon etc.</i>
Gestures	<i>the sign of the cross, the sign of peace</i>
Hymns	<i>traditional and modern hymns</i>

Music	<i>listening to quiet, reflective music</i>
Litanies	<i>For all creation: Thanks be to God</i>
Processions	<i>Gospel procession with sung 'alleluia'</i>
Prayer services and liturgies	<i>formal and spontaneous prayer using holy water, candles, incense and other symbols</i>
Celebrations	<i>prayer, song, sharing food and drink, celebrating work done</i>