

Meeting God Through Prayer

In this unit students explore how prayer is part of people's lives. They explore and experience a variety of ways to communicate with God through prayer. Students create a prayer expo showing what they have discovered about prayer through the unit.

DOCTRINAL FOCUS

In planning to teach this unit the following references from the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church are recommended:

#41 All creatures bear a certain resemblance to God, most especially man, created in the image and likeness of God. The manifold perfections of creatures – their truth, their goodness, their beauty – all reflect the infinite perfection of God. Consequently we can name God by taking his creatures' perfections as our starting point, 'for from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator'.

(See *Compendium #3 How is it possible to know God with only the light of human reason?*)

#2562 Where does prayer come from? Whether prayer is expressed in words or gestures, it is the whole man who prays. But in naming the source of prayer, Scripture speaks sometimes of the soul or the spirit, but most often of the heart (more than a thousand times). According to Scripture, it is the *heart* that prays. If our heart is far from God, the words of prayer are in vain.

(See *Compendium #534 What is prayer?*)

#2726 In the battle of prayer, we must face in ourselves and around us *erroneous notions of prayer*. Some people view prayer as a simple psychological activity, others as an effort of concentration to reach a mental void. Still others reduce prayer to ritual words and postures. Many Christians unconsciously regard prayer as an occupation that is incompatible with all the other things they have to do: they 'don't have the time'. Those who seek God by prayer are quickly discouraged because they do not know that prayer comes also from the Holy Spirit and not from themselves alone.

(See *Compendium #573 Are there objections to prayer?*)

#2569 Prayer is lived in the first place beginning with the realities of *creation*. The first nine chapters of Genesis describe this relationship with God ... In his indefectible covenant with every living creature, God has always called people to prayer.

(See *Compendium #535 Why is there a universal call to prayer?*)

#2598 The drama of prayer is fully revealed to us in the Word who became flesh and dwells among us. To seek to understand his prayer through what his witnesses proclaim to us in the gospel is to approach the holy Lord Jesus as Moses approached the burning bush: first to contemplate him in prayer, then to hear how he teaches us to pray, in order to know how he hears our prayer.

(See *Compendium #544 How does Jesus teach us to pray?*)

SPIRITUAL REFLECTION FOR TEACHERS

People can be drawn into closeness with God through the events of everyday life. These moments become times of deep intimacy and prayer. Consider beautiful

sunsets, moving music, the fragrance of leaves and trees after rain, the birth of a child, watching a child at play, hearing stories of another's suffering. Sometimes these experiences are associated with feelings of closeness to God. When have you felt deep closeness to God? When have you been drawn spontaneously into intimacy and prayer?

Spending time alone with God nurtures our sense of relationship with him, and attunes us to his voice and to the movement of his Holy Spirit in our lives. It develops closeness and intimacy between us and God. There are many ways to pray, and people draw on different forms at different times in their lives. Meditation and contemplation are traditional forms of personal prayer. People draw on forms such as *Lectio Divina* or the Ignatian spiritual exercises. They use mantras, icons and Christian symbols to centre the body and spirit. People also use song, art, movement and poetry as acts of prayer. At other times people draw on traditional forms of prayer such as the Lord's Prayer and the Rosary. When do you spend time alone with God? What forms of prayer do you draw upon? What forms of personal prayer have been handed down to you through your family? What forms of prayer have you learned as an adult?

We also engage in communal prayer. This prayer unites people and brings them as a people into closeness with God. It renews and binds people to each other and to God. Consider the Mass. This is the central communal prayer of the Church. It continually forms and renews people as the Body of Christ. It is the source and summit of Christian life. Also consider the Liturgy of the Word that engages people with the Holy Spirit of God that speaks to us in the Scriptures. What place does communal prayer have in your own life? What place does it have in the life of the school?

LINKS WITH STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES

Students are developing a growing understanding of prayer as an important experience that builds relationship or communion with God. They have been immersed in various prayer experiences at school, in the parish and in the family. They have also had times of feeling close to God – times of personal prayer. *What do students associate with prayer? During which prayer experiences do they feel closest to God? What are their preferred ways of praying? Does the classroom offer students experiences of contemplative and meditative prayer in its many forms, traditional prayer and communal prayer? Or does the classroom favour one form over another? How might this influence how students conceptualise prayer?*

Students have learned about God the Creator, the Holy Spirit and the Son. They have prayed to each Person of the Trinity in liturgy and worship. *How do students image God? How do they image the Trinity? When do they feel close to the Creator, to the Holy Spirit, to Christ?*

Students' understanding of community and cooperative relationships is shaped by family, school and local community. *How can students explore the mystery of the Trinity in relation to their understanding of community and cooperative relationships?*

EXPLANATION OF SCRIPTURE

Lk 6: 12

Jesus Christ Goes Out To the Mountain To Pray

One of the themes of Luke's Gospel is 'prayer'. Here is only one instance where Jesus withdrew to pray, and as the gospel continues we see him do this over and over. Luke demonstrates how important it is to pray and to spend some quiet time with God. Before

appointing the twelve apostles Jesus spent a night on a mountain in prayer. This activity underscores the importance of the impending decision.

Lk 10: 38–42 Martha and Mary

The journey of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem provides the context for the encounter between Martha and Jesus Christ. Martha offered Jesus hospitality by welcoming him into her home. Here Jesus was among friends. Mary's relationship with Jesus Christ was straightforward: sitting at his feet and soaking up every word. It is one sign of a disciple. Her relationship with Jesus, one of disciple and rabbi, was a statement about the manner in which Jesus Christ welcomed women. This may be viewed as challenging to a society in which women were denied many opportunities. Meanwhile her sister bustled around as a conscientious host. Perhaps she was caught up in the role that culture and tradition had assigned to women. This story reminds us of what is most important: *listening to Jesus Christ and allowing his message of love to permeate our lives*. Jesus Christ did not accept the solution of Martha, but chided her for being distracted. The double naming, 'Martha, Martha', by Jesus is reminiscent of 'Abraham! Abraham!' (Gen 21: 1), 'Moses! Moses!' (Ex 3: 4), 'Saul! Saul!' (Acts 9: 24). In each of these instances the double naming of an individual is symbolic of their call. So it is appropriate to interpret Jesus Christ's naming 'Martha, Martha' as a call into discipleship. Martha was being called out of a traditional role and into new possibilities. This fits Luke's portrait of Jesus Christ as transforming the world. Jesus Christ ushers in a new way of being.

POSSIBILITIES FOR PRAYER AND WORSHIP

Meditative and Contemplative Prayer

- Guided Meditation: Lead the class in an 'awareness' meditation. The awareness begins with an awareness of the stillness of the body. The awareness extends to the sounds in the room and beyond the room, then awareness of the breathing/heartbeat. Finally, allow time for the awareness of the presence of God's Holy Spirit in our midst.
- Centring Prayer: After establishing stillness and a simple breathing exercise, guide the students to choose a sacred word, e.g. 'God', 'Jesus', 'peace', 'Abba' ... This word becomes a kind of 'mantra' for prayer. Help the students to understand that if they are distracted during this time of prayer they can simply and gently return to the sacred word.
- Praying with an icon: Set up a large icon of Jesus Christ, i.e. from the Russian or Greek tradition, in the prayer space. Invite the students to focus on the image (particularly the eyes) in silence. Allow time for the students to pray the 'Jesus' Prayer, or simply the name of Jesus.

Communal Prayer

- Liturgy of the Word: Prepare a class Liturgy of the Word around Lk 10: 38–42, Martha and Mary. Choose appropriate hymns, responses and prayers to accompany the gospel. Include a gospel procession. The students may wish to include symbols (to represent Martha and Mary) in their reflection upon the gospel.
- Liturgy of the Hours: Pray a simple version of the Liturgy of the Hours, and establish it as a pattern of prayer for each day of this unit. *Daily Prayer Under the Southern*

Cross (Elizabeth McMahon Jeep, Sr Margaret Smith SGS) is an excellent resource for this purpose.

- Participate in a parish celebration of the Eucharist. Involve the class in the preparation of readings, music and processions, etc.

Traditional Prayers

- In groups, students prepare a class celebration of one of the Church's traditional forms of prayer. These include litanies, the Rosary, The Angelus, aspirations, the 'Jesus' Prayer, the Stations of the Cross (see also 'Our Prayers', *KWL*, 2nd edn, Year 4, Chapter 18, pp. 150–155). The students will prepare all resources needed, and lead the class in the prayer.

Related Chapters – *KWL*, 2nd edn, Year 4: Chapter 16, Growing In Friendship With God.

Faith concepts: communication, prayer, relationship.

Seeking understanding:

How is prayer a part of people’s lives?

How is prayer a part of your life?

Understandings:

People experience God through creation, Scripture, prayer and through people.

When people spend time alone with God their friendship with God grows.

There are many forms of prayer – personal, traditional and communal.

Scripture Text: Lk 6: 12 Jesus Christ went out in the hills to pray; Lk 10: 38–42 Mary and Martha.

Unit specific learning:

Students will learn about	Students will learn to	Students will undertake to
<i>Knowledge and Understanding</i>	<i>Reasoning & Responding</i>	<i>Personal & Communal Engagement</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The place of prayer in recognising and building a relationship with God.• The actions and teachings of Jesus Christ about prayer.• Ways in which Jesus Christ prayed.• Types of prayers: traditional, formal, informal, praise, thanksgiving, petition, sorrow, meditation, contemplation.• Ways in which people in the past and present Church pray.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reflect upon and consider the importance of prayer in their own lives.• Make connections between their own experiences of God and prayer and the prayer lives of others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participate in a variety of prayer experiences.• Raise the awareness of the richness of prayer in the Catholic tradition through an expo.

PHASES OF STUDENT INQUIRY

Additional Reading for Teachers	Orientation to Inquiry <i>What do students already know, think or feel in relation to the topic? What are students' questions about the topic? What experiences and reflections can we offer students to become engaged with the topic?</i>	Assessment: for learning, as learning, of learning
<p>Prayer is communion with God. It is opening ourselves in love to God. Prayer is expressed both in speaking and listening. Body, mind and heart are all involved in the practice of prayer. Prayer to God can take place in any place at any time. God is always listening, and we can always listen to God.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rocket Writing Using 'Think – Pair – Share' strategy children respond to a variety of sentence starters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Prayer is ... – People pray by ... – I can pray these prayers ... – People pray because ... – The places people pray are ... – People pray when ... 	<p>Assessment for Learning This task will indicate students' prior knowledge, experience and perceptions of prayer.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Journal Individually children respond to inquiry questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How is prayer a part of people's lives? – How is prayer a part of my life? Share responses in small groups. 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brainstorm On a chart build a treasury of prayer words such as silence, praise, listening, asking, etc. These words can be drawn from the first two tasks. • Picture Story Book 	

	<p>Use children’s literature to explore the place of communication in relationships. Relate this to prayer by asking the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What is communication? – How do we communicate with God? – Why do we communicate with God? – What is a ‘friendship’? – How do we build up a friendship with God? <p>Students share their work with the class. They could do this by using a concept map. Emphasise the link between communication, relationship (or friendship) and God.</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared Prayer Experiences Lead the class in an awareness meditation. This begins with an awareness of the stillness of the body, an awareness of the breathing and the heartbeat. Finally, allow time for the awareness of the presence of God’s Holy Spirit in our midst. Set up a religious icon, painting or image and invite the students to focus on this. Use classical music to create the atmosphere. Allow adequate time for students to enter into silent personal prayer. • Shared Experience 	

	Join the local parishioners in a weekday Mass. Establish new classroom prayer rituals.	
Additional Reading for Teachers	<p>Development</p> <p><i>What experiences and religious texts will provide new learning for students? What skills will students need in order to work with these resources? What strategies and tools will enable students to think and reflect on these experiences and texts? How will students process their thinking and learning?</i></p>	Assessment: for learning, as learning, of learning
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning About Prayer: Multiple Intelligences Using the Multiple Intelligences Approach immerse the students in a variety of prayers and praying, e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Verbal Linguistic: View a website about prayer; – Logical Mathematical: Survey and graph well-known and loved prayers in your extended family and family friends; – Bodily Kinesthetic: Choreograph a dance or movement to prayer; – Musical: Create or find music that supports you to pray alone; – Visual Spatial: Find an icon, image or symbol to bring to class prayer; use clay or paint to explore art as a form of personal prayer; view the rich text version of traditional prayers on the REsource website; – Interpersonal: Pair up with a 	

	<p>friend to learn to recite a traditional prayer;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Intrapersonal: In your journal write a letter to God about your day or your feelings and ideas about an important experience. 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guest Speaker Invite a parishioner to share with the children their prayer experiences. Invite the parish priest or religious to share with the children their daily prayer rituals. 	
<p>Learning to pray with the Scriptures, especially the gospels, is very important so that we can appreciate that they are not simply sacred stories that happened a long time ago, but are the living word of God for us. When praying with Scripture we should learn to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • put ourselves into the reading • listen for what God is saying to us in the reading • consider how we will respond. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scripture Exploration Students read Lk 10: 38–42 and record phrases that speak to them. Students consider the following open-ended questions: I wonder: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – how Mary felt? – how Martha felt? – what Jesus was doing? – what the ‘need for only one thing’ is? – what my reaction would be to what Jesus said? – how I am like Mary? How I am like Martha? <p>Allow time for these responses to be shared.</p> <p>Reread the passage as a class. Encourage students to use their senses to visualise the whole scene.</p>	<p>Assessment as Learning These tasks will demonstrate students’ ability to comprehend Scripture and to identify with biblical characters.</p>

	<p>Have students respond to the questions below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – When am I like Mary? – When am I like Martha? – Which character do I prefer? Why? 	
<p>Traditional prayers are the common prayers of the Christian tradition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the <i>Our Father</i>, taught by Jesus Christ himself • the <i>Hail Mary</i> • the doxology <i>Glory Be</i> and other prayers in common use like the <i>Rosary</i>, the <i>Magnificat</i>, the <i>Benedictus</i>, grace before meals, and various prayers of the saints, and others that are often memorised. <p>Formal prayer is any prayer that has a prepared form. The Liturgy of the Church is the best example, but any prayer that has a definite structure, e.g. Assembly prayer, Anzac Day prayer, Blessing the Advent Wreath, is formal prayer.</p> <p>Informal prayer is the lifting of the mind and heart to God which happens spontaneously, either alone or in a group setting. It may be with or without words.</p> <p>Meditation is attending to God with one's whole self in a prayerful way using Scripture, nature, art, or music to focus the prayer.</p> <p>Contemplation is the quietening of body, mind and heart to concentrate on the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classification and Sorting Activity Give students a variety of prayers which they sort and classify using some of the following headings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Traditional Prayers – Formal and Informal Prayers – Praise, Thanksgiving, Petition and Sorrow – Meditation – Contemplation <p>Groups share their findings. Create class definitions and prayer examples for each of the headings used for the activity.</p> • Experiencing Prayer: Picture Prayers Using a variety of pictures, images and newspaper cuttings, the students create a prayer in response to what they see, think and feel. 	

<p>presence of God everywhere, especially in the heart of our hearts.</p>		
<p>The Psalms are a collection of 150 songs of the people of Israel contained in the book of Psalms in the Old Testament. They express every kind of emotion before God: praise, triumph, anger, grief, love, confidence, jealousy and rage. The psalms show us how to be honest in prayer, and how opening our hearts allows the God who loves us to respond. The psalms are an important part of the Liturgy of the Church.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing Prayer Through the Creative Arts Explore hymns and psalms through dance, drama, multimedia or visual arts. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Create dance movement which expresses the sentiments of the hymn e.g. 'The Deer's Cry', which is based on St Patrick's Breastplate (<i>KWL</i>, 2nd edn, Year 4, Chapter 16, p. 131). – In small groups dramatise one line of Psalm 32 or Psalm 51, using the Freeze Frame technique. – In groups students present Psalm 22 reflectively with a visual strategy such as ectotrophic slides, PowerPoint presentations or visual overlays. – Choose a verse from a psalm and design a bookmark, prayer pamphlet or poster. 	
<p>Though we tend to imagine Jesus Christ continually on the move teaching, preaching and healing, the gospels show that he regularly withdrew alone or with his disciples to pray.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus Christ and Prayer: Investigation In groups students record when, where, why and with whom Jesus was praying in one of the scripture references listed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Lk 22: 41 – Jesus knelt and prayed. – Mk 1: 35 – Jesus prayed in a 	<p>Assessment as Learning This task will demonstrate students' ability to analyse Scripture and to identify with a biblical character.</p>

<p>Likewise the saints of the Church, even when they lived very full and active lives, always made time to pray and commune with God so that they would have the strength to carry on their work.</p>	<p>lonely place.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Mt 14: 23 – Jesus prayed on a mountain. – Lk 3: 21 – Jesus prayed before important decisions. – Mt 6: 9–13 – The Lord’s Prayer. <p>Groups share their ideas with the whole class.</p> <p>Ask students to draw, write about or dramatise the scene that is their favourite or that they most identify with.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saints and Prayer: Investigation Having read <i>KWL</i>, 2nd edn, Year 4, Chapter 16, pp. 132–133, research St Teresa of Avila, St Ignatius of Antioch, St Catherine of Siena and St John Vianney. Use the following questions as a guide for the investigation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How did these saints pray? – How did prayer affect their lives? – What do they teach us about prayer? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional Prayers Use a variety of literacy strategies to facilitate the learning of traditional prayers; for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Cloze activity – Partner reading strategy (students to complete in pairs the Our Father and the Hail Mary) 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Code Breaker: children type or write in code the <i>Our Father</i>, <i>Hail Mary</i>, the <i>Doxology</i> or the <i>Act of Contrition</i>, which are listed at the back of <i>KWL</i>, 2nd edn, Year 4 student text book. Students then swap prayers with a partner for decoding. 	
<p>Additional Reading for Teachers</p>	<p>SYNTHESIS</p> <p><i>How will students demonstrate their understandings, beliefs, values, skills and feelings in relation to the topic? How will students take action based on their learning? What strategies and tools will enable students to discern their action, to plan and implement action and to evaluate their action?</i></p>	<p>Assessment: for learning, as learning, of learning</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prayer Expo Having developed a deeper understanding of prayer, the class creates a prayer expo to which the wider school community is invited. The purpose of the expo is to raise the awareness in the community of the richness of prayer in the Catholic tradition. The expo could feature the prayers students have explored and expressed throughout the unit. Where students are exhibiting their own prayerful responses e.g. artwork or liturgical movement, it would be important to ask students for their permission before considering them for an expo, as these are personal expressions of faith rather than works 	

	of art.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Journal Children revisit and respond to the inquiry questions asked in the orientation phase: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How is prayer a part of people’s lives? – How is prayer a part of my life? 	Assessment as/of Learning This journal will indicate the development in students’ knowledge, understanding and value of prayer.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Prayer Book Children design and create a prayer book to reflect their personal prayer journey. This book could contain an image, a formal prayer, a personal prayer and a piece of Scripture. Books may be compiled using any one of the following strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Book in a match box – Flip pad – Concertina book. 	

RESOURCES

To Know, Worship and Love, 2nd Edition

Year 4: Chapter 16, Growing In Friendship With God.

Teacher Resources

Elliot, M, *A-Z Learning Strategies*, Catholic Education Centre, Brisbane.

McMahon Jeep, E & Smith, M sgs 2008, *Daily Prayer Under the Southern Cross*, Sisters of Good Samaritan and Liturgy Training Publications, NSW.

Nolan, B 1999, *Prayer Strategies: A Teachers’ Manual*, Harper Collins, Melbourne.

Reehorst, J 1991, *Guided Meditations For Children*, Roa, Iowa, USA.

Ryan, M 2003, *Expressions: A Religious Series for Catholic Primary Schools – Book 1*, Social Science Press, Katoomba, Australia.

Music

Davey, Shaun 'The Deer's Cry - St Patrick's Breastplate', on *The Pilgrim: A Celtic Suite for Orchestra, Soloists, Pipe Band and Choir*, Tara Music, Dublin.

Websites

In the Worship section of the REsource site there are written, visual and aural resources for prayer, including a rich text version of *The Deer's Cry* and a comprehensive section on Christian meditation in the classroom.

< <http://www.ceo.melb.catholic.edu.au/> >

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION STANDARDS

This unit may be used to assess some of the Level 3 standards.

Students identify with biblical characters and people in the past and present Church by making inferences about their actions, feelings and motives.