



St Ignatius Catholic Primary School

Prayer Policy

Policy Originator	St Ignatius Primary School
Person /Governor Responsible	Con Bonner / RE Team
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Signed	

The Aims of the school in Developing Prayer

Young children have a natural aptitude for prayer. They are open to God. They respond in joy, wonder, anger, disappointment and elation to the world around them. The whole of Creation is new to them and their days are full of exploration and discovery.

During the Primary Years the main task of the school as a Faith Community is:-

1. as adults, to respond in joy, thanks, sorrow and love to the world around us, to each other and to the children.
2. to create and maintain a stimulating and appropriate environment where prayer can be fostered and developed fully;
3. as adults, to respond in joy, thanks, sorrow and love to the world around us, to each other and to the children.

What is Prayer?

Many teachers are themselves the product of a Catholic school where the word "**prayer**" is often used with facility. Others may have had limited experience of prayer in an educational setting. In view of this, the following definitions of prayer may help to clarify and enhance our understanding of this fundamental but complex concept.

Prayer is becoming open and attentive to God.

Prayer is something you do for God with someone you love and who loves you back.

Prayer is something we do that reveals to God our awareness that what's happening is out of our hands and that we need help.

Prayer is initiated by a God who creatively and persistently encourages

response. Prayer is simply being conscious of the presence of God.

Prayer is searching for God's will even when God seems to leave you confused, a trust in God even when you feel God may have failed you, in grasping for God's presence even when God seems absent, a heartfelt thanks for God's love felt through the compassionate eyes and touch of another.

Prayer is praising and thanking God for the gift of life.

Prayer is a ritual that fosters community, a sense of being one with others and God.

Prayer is an expression of trust in God's readiness to hear our prayers, tinged with the realisation that we cannot foresee or control how God will answer them. Prayer is a way of expressing our faith that God is and cares about our well being. Prayer binds us with departed loved ones who still care about us and can help us.

Prayer is as much a part of Christian life as eating, drinking, or even breathing and is an expression of fidelity, of faithful love.

Prayer is a personal relationship with God.

Prayer is the raising up of the mind and heart to God.

As a Faith Community it is our responsibility at St. Ignatius School.

1. An awareness of God's presence in all things

From an early age children need encouragement to appreciate things, to use them with respect and to see them as a sign of God's goodness and presence. This opens up their minds to the fact that God is everywhere and also fosters respect for all Creation - the environment, natural resources, science and technology.

2. An awareness of God's presence in all people

An obvious way of helping children to become aware of God's watchful and caring presence in our lives is by teaching them how to pray for people. Children learning about the Beatitudes can be given significant glimpses of people in whose lives God's presence and action were visible in who they were and what they did. Also, looking carefully with them at great and heroic people who treated others with care and respect will help them to discover God's presence in people and their lives.

3. An awareness of God's presence in Church

The chief rituals of the Catholic Church are the celebrations of Christ's presence in the world. Looking closely at the sacraments is a significant way of opening children's minds and hearts to God's presence in themselves and others as well as in bread, wine, Water, fire, oil, breath, wind and gesture. Times of sacramental preparation are, particularly important in helping children to look for God's presence in all of life.

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4. An openness to God

Openness to God depends on the belief that God exists and comes to each one of us - that we are unconditionally loved. The more a child feels comfortable in the world the more love he/she will have for God who loves them also.

God needs to be named for children - at home, in formal teaching and also in liturgical sessions.

It is important to remember that a climate in the classroom which develops openness to God is not solely dependent on the actual teaching that takes place but on informal interaction and exchange.

Praying is often the greatest key for helping children to be open to God's presence.

5. Thankfulness

To help children to be thankful is helping them to appreciate what it means to receive, to be sacrificed for, to be loved.

Since being thankful is a learned response, children need to hear and feel it happening in (i) their homes (ii) their classroom (iii) the playground. They themselves need to be constantly thanked for the things they do and say.

Words of thanks are often the most prayerful of all.

6. Reverence

a) For Self

The first and foremost way to teach children Reverence is to treat them respectfully. When we accept children the way they are they learn to value themselves. Only then will they have reverence for others. Reverence for self then translates into a good self-image, a sense of worth and motivation for using personal gifts and talents.

b) for others

A child's reverence and respect for others can be fostered if he/she is taught to really listen to others. Through teaching listening skills, an attitude of respect for the person speaking and his/her views and opinions becomes manifest.

c) for things

Reverence for things can be fostered in children by:

- teachers showing their own respect for the things they have, enjoy and use.
- insisting on the correct use of materials, equipment etc.
- expecting co-operation in cleaning up work spaces.
- always leaving the classroom neat and orderly.
- as often as possible surrounding the children with beauty in their environment through display, use of books, photographs etc.

7. Stillness

We live in an increasingly noisy and active world yet silence and stillness are the most effective tools of prayer. Children should be encouraged/invited into silence and helped to become totally still so that they can listen to and learn what is going on inside themselves and can hear what God has to say to them.

8. Compassion and Justice

Often the children we teach have more than they need and do not appreciate the good things they have. As teachers we should:

- (a) expand their consciousness to the pain and hurt of real people all around them.
- (b) give them opportunities to reach out and help others in small but meaningful ways, remembering that sometimes those who are hurting are very close, in school or at home among their families and friends.

Nurturing prayer in the classroom

The policy realises that developing the children's Prayer Life is particularly difficult in the present educational climate, where the stresses and pressures tend to erode the atmosphere of calm and reflection which are so fundamental to this activity. The following may prove helpful as a "day to day checklist" for us to evaluate our work in this area.

Make sure that there are regular times set aside for prayer i.e. at the beginning and end of each session. These need not be immediately at the beginning and end. Wait until it is possible to ensure a calm atmosphere. If it is impossible to manage this sort of atmosphere every time then don't attempt to pray. When you pray with the children make sure it is always positive and unforced. If the atmosphere is wrong - leave it.

Look for ways of involving the children's prayer in their everyday life.

Experiment with different types of prayer e.g. formal, spontaneous arising out of that particular moment, children's own prayers (written and oral). Modern prayers to be listened to or read aloud, the prayers of the mass, reading or thinking about a piece of scripture, meditation

Work against stereotypes.

Look constructively at the vocabulary you use with the children Do. you mention God, Jesus, the Church and the Christian way of life? Does your own way of communicating your own feelings to the children provide an effective model for them to start putting their own thoughts and feelings into order. Do you encourage them to talk freely about their feelings, fears and wishes to you in such way that this skill may be developed into. a more abstract way of communicating with God.

Are you providing an effective and positive structure for self evaluation.

Make sure you are trying to make prayer mean something to you personally. How can you make it part of your life? Don't be frightened of it - give it a go. Try these techniques for yourself first. You never know.

Respect

The "Respect" section of the process aims to lead children to a deeper understanding, to clearer vision, to the discovery of significance and value - thus enabling them to grasp the richer meaning of the life experience. It allows the children time and space to think about and appreciate the discoveries they have made.

It is during such time that they may:

- be touched by the mystery of Life
- acknowledge differences
- work with problems
- come to term with anxieties
- grapple with puzzling experiences
- question and challenge attitudes and problems

Each topic provides a "focus of reverence" - a special experience of awareness which enables the children to explore their feelings, thoughts and attitudes and to respond in practical ways through words, gestures, song and dance, writing and service of others.

Informal Prayer

This form of prayer uses the ordinary, everyday language of praising, thanking, asking, saying sorry and is provided for through stories and activities which avoid a simplistic, magical view of God.

Formal Prayer

Formal words of prayer are introduced gradually throughout the programme the children are familiarised with them:

(a) by hearing them said

(b) by singing them

(c) by focusing on small phrases which are incorporated into the topics/themes as and when appropriate.

(d) by learning them by heart.

Eucharist topics focus on: Eucharistic Prayers

Reconciliation Topics focus on: Penitential Rites.

Liturgical Topics focus on: Gestures and Postures of Liturgical Prayers

The traditional invitation "Let us Pray" allows for free/individual response. The children are given the experience of

- a) personal ~ prayer the invitation to be still and listen to God
- b) Communal prayer ~ the call to gather together in worship.

Scripture

In the Scripture passages of "Relate" the children encounter Jesus as a man of prayer and one who teaches his disciples to pray. They are introduced to the psalms and the use of Scripture in prayer.

Rejoice

Prayer forms part of the Celebration of every topic.

Remember

The children are encouraged to choose a prayer as a way of remembering what they have learned

Prayer with children (Age 3-11)

Prayer in the programme builds upon the children's natural spontaneous expressions of joy, wonder, awe, concern, thanks, sorrow, sadness, anger, fear and disappointment evoked through a growing awareness of themselves, others and their world. The "Focus of reverence II develops a special experience of awareness and the ability to be still and quiet.

Age 6+

The formal prayer using set forms of words is introduced.

