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The six teacher guides and the handbook work together to bring Catholic education to young people in a way that is both exciting and challenging. The handbook is designed to be used in a variety of ways, from a traditional classroom to a more flexible, inquiry-based approach. It also contains helpful teaching suggestions and activities to help you bring the faith more fully into the life of the classroom. Catholic identity and faith form the heart of the handbook, and the handbook is designed to be used in a way that is both exciting and challenging.

## Living the Catechetical Ministry in a Catholic School

The mission of a Catholic school is to educate children and young people in all areas of their lives, to help them grow in their faith, and to prepare them for the challenges of the world. A Catholic school is a place where students can learn about their faith and how to live it in a way that is both exciting and challenging. The handbook is designed to be used in a way that is both exciting and challenging, and it contains helpful teaching suggestions and activities to help you bring the faith more fully into the life of the classroom. Catholic identity and faith form the heart of the handbook, and the handbook is designed to be used in a way that is both exciting and challenging.

# Chapter 41

## Tuning In to God

### Preparing for the Chapter

#### Background for the Teacher

##### Morning and Evening Prayer

It has been said that God doesn't need our prayer—we do. As an old proverb has it, “A day hemmed with prayer is less likely to unravel.” And no one can argue with that. As one day opens into another, or closes in upon itself, never to be seen again, it is good to mark those turning points with prayer.

But, in our busy lives, how? Commuting time is a great time to pray. The morning and evening rush hours happen to coincide with the traditional linchpins of the Liturgy of the Hours, Morning and Evening Prayer. Join in with your own favorite “psalms, hymns, and sacred songs” (Ephesians 5:19). Sing and pray while driving or riding public transportation. (In the latter case, of course, you will sing and pray in the silence of your heart!)

Begin with a hymn. Add a psalm. You might want to memorize the traditional canticle for Morning Prayer, the *Benedictus* (“Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel”) and the traditional canticle for Evening Prayer, the Song of Mary, or *Magnificat* (“My soul magnifies the Lord”). End with the Our Father. And there you have it! The whole Church is praying with you!

No, God may not *need* our prayers and praise. But how do we know that he does not *like* them, or look forward to hearing from his beloved children? Parents do not *need* their children, but does that mean they are indifferent to their sons and daughters? God cannot be indifferent to us. He loves us. He leaves us perfectly free to call upon him or not, yet he is always there waiting, like the father of the prodigal son, for us to return to our senses. Morning and evening, in our goings out and our comings in, God is waiting for us to head home to him in our hearts.

**Catechism references:** 2623–2625, 2754–2757

#### Teacher's Prayer

Lord God, I sometimes find myself distracted by all that is going on around me, and by my worries and responsibilities. Help me to keep focused on you, to lead me and guide me to do your will and to hear you in the midst of the “noise” of my daily life. Give me the words to praise you, to bless you, and to thank you. Let my prayers be not just for my own needs, but for the needs of those around me and of those far away. Amen.

“Hope does not disappoint us, for God has poured out his love into our hearts by means of the Holy Spirit, who is God’s gift to us.”

—Romans 5:5

## Teacher's Reflection

How can you incorporate Morning and Evening Prayer into your daily routine?



## Background Reading

- *The Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers*, chapter 41
- CCC, numbers 2558–2565, 2566–2597 (prayer)
- Philippians 4:1–7

## Overview

This chapter explores the different ways and reasons to speak to and listen to God in prayer. The students will learn the five forms of prayer: blessing, praise, thanksgiving, petition, and intercession, and that we can pray through vocal prayer—prayer that uses words—as well as through silence, as in meditation and contemplation. The chapter emphasizes the importance of tuning in to God by learning to pray and making time for prayer.



## Learning Goals

Enable the students to

- learn that there are different ways and reasons to pray
- recognize that we can be in communication with God by speaking to him in the words of prayer or by being still and allowing him to speak to us
- come to know that we become better at prayer with practice and by developing a habit of personal prayer in our lives

## Preparing for the Activities

### Materials

#### “Extending the Lesson”

- five index cards
- 8½-by-11-inch paper or bordered printer paper
- a business-size white envelope
- a prepaid postcard

#### “Media Connection” (optional)

- *Star Wars* DVD (20th Century Fox, 1977)



## Opening with Prayer

1. **Invite** the students to gather in the prayer corner. Direct them to quiet themselves for prayer.
  2. **Light** a candle, make the Sign of the Cross, and lead everyone in saying, "Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God."
  3. **Invite** a volunteer to read aloud Romans 5:5 from page 475 in the handbook.
  4. **Pray** the following:
    - Lord, help us to hear your voice always, even in the midst of the endless stream of communication that seems to surround us.
- Close** with the Sign of the Cross.



## Preview Activity

1. **Distribute** copies of activity master 41A, "Creating a Prayer Card."
2. **Read aloud** the introduction and invite the students to write their prayers in the right-hand space. If some of the students are struggling with the wording of the prayers, direct them to turn to "Appendix A: Catholic Prayers" on page 500 in their handbooks.
3. **Direct** the students to complete their illustration on the left-hand side. When everyone has finished, call on several volunteers to tell what prayer they chose and to explain their illustration to the class. **Encourage** them to tell how the illustration depicts words from the prayer.
4. **Encourage** the students to reread and learn their prayers.

## Introducing Chapter 41


1. **Have** the students turn to page 470 in their handbooks. Tell them that in this chapter they will learn how prayer is an important part of their relationship with God.
2. **Call attention** to the Key Words list on page 475. Tell the students to listen for the meanings of these words as they read them in the chapter.
3. **Invite** a volunteer to read aloud the chapter introduction on page 470.
4. **Lead** a discussion by asking the following questions:
  - How does music influence your mood or your feelings?
  - How can prayer have an effect on your feelings and the way you relate to others? (*Accept all reasonable responses, but lead students to an understanding that through prayer, God enters into the dynamics of our relationships or experiences, and he can help us find the good in situations where we might otherwise not see it.*)

## Forms of Prayer

1. **Invite** a volunteer to read aloud the first two paragraphs of “Forms of Prayer” on pages 471 and 472.
2. **Call on** a volunteer to name the five kinds of prayer. **Tell** the students that they are probably familiar with and have prayed each of these forms, even if they did not know what each is called.
3. **Ask** volunteers to describe, without naming it, the type of prayers they pray most frequently. For example, students might say, “I ask God to help me do well on a test” (*a prayer of petition*) or “I thank God for the beauty of nature” (*a prayer of thanksgiving*). Tell the students that there are many reasons to pray and different forms of prayer.
4. **Call on** a volunteer to tell the name of prayers in which we ask God for something (*prayers of petition*). **Share** with the students that although we often approach God in prayer to ask for something, we must remember to pray simply to talk to God and to praise him.
5. **Call on** a volunteer to continue reading aloud, starting with the “Blessing” paragraph on page 472 and stopping at the paragraph that begins with “Thanksgiving” on page 474.
6. **Lead** a discussion to help the students understand what was read. **Ask:**
  - ▶ In which type of prayer do we ask God to provide for another person’s needs? (*intercession*)
  - ▶ In which type of prayer do we simply acknowledge God’s greatness? (*praise*)
  - ▶ What might be an example, in your own words, of a prayer of praise? (*Accept all prayers, but help students correctly identify prayers of praise.*)
  - ▶ At whom might prayers of blessing be directed? (*another person, such as when we ask God to bless someone we love, or at God himself, such as at Mass when we pray “Blessed be God forever”*)
7. **Invite** a volunteer to read the paragraph about prayers of thanksgiving on page 474. **Ask:**
  - ▶ As Catholics, what is the most important way in which we give thanks to God? (*through the Mass*)
  - ▶ What are some reasons to give thanks to God? (*Accept all reasonable answers, but emphasize that the reasons to give God thanks are often all around us, and so much a part of our lives that we sometimes take them for granted. Examples of this might be a sunny day, rain, our families, the food we eat, our schools and the education we receive, and our gifts and talents.*)







## Extending the Lesson

- Gather** the following materials for each student: five index cards, a piece of white 8½-by-11-inch paper or bordered printer paper, a business-size white envelope, and a prepaid postcard.
- Ask** the students to write the name of one of the five prayer forms on each card: petition, blessing, intercession, praise, and thanksgiving.
- Ask** the students to think about their relationship with God and the needs and joys of their lives. For each card, they are to write a brief note under that heading. For example, under “blessing” they may write a few names of people or situations they would like God to bless. Under “petition” they may write a few of their own needs. Under “intercession” they may write others’ needs, and so on. **Ask** them to try to use each of the prayer forms.
- Direct** the students, on the piece of paper, to write a letter to God using the notes on their cards. Explain that in prayer, we usually start with praise and thanksgiving and then go on to the other forms. **Assure** them that they may certainly be spontaneous and write whatever is in their hearts. **Tell** them that this letter is theirs to keep and that no one but God will see it.
- When they have finished, **instruct** them to seal their letters in the envelopes, and then write on the front “To God” and the date. **Ask** them to think about a safe place to keep their letters for one year.
- Have** them address the postcards to themselves. On the back, **ask** them to write, “Dear (their own names), It is one year since you have written a letter to God. Find your letter. You put it \_\_\_\_\_. Read it. How has God worked in your life in this past year? Sincerely, (their own names)”
- Tell** them that you will mail these cards next year at this time, about a week ahead of this date. **Explain** that sometimes our concerns are momentary. Other larger concerns take time to work through. This letter expresses trust in God, in whose hands we place our past, our present, and our future.
- Keep** a note on your calendar or in your handbook of the date next year when you are to mail the postcards. Keep them in a safe place until then!



## Activity

- Distribute** copies of activity master 41B, “Forms of Prayer.”
- Read aloud** the directions, then invite the students to write a prayer for each of the five forms. **Direct** the students to pages 471 to 474 in their handbooks if they need to review the five forms of prayer.
- When everyone has finished, **call on** one or more volunteers to share the prayer they have written for one of the five forms.
- Encourage** the students to develop a habit of addressing God in each of these forms when they pray.

## Fun Fact

1. **Tell** the students to read the “Fun Fact” sidebar on page 472.
2. **Explain** that the bubonic plague occurred many times throughout history. **Share** that the most notable occurrence was in the fourteenth century, when the bubonic plague spread throughout Western Europe and killed nearly half the population. **Explain** that this event has come to be known as the Black Death.

## Did You Know?

1. **Read aloud** the sidebar text about schools of spirituality on page 473.
2. **Share** with the students that the schools of spirituality attributed to Saint Francis and Saint Ignatius of Loyola are especially helpful to those striving to develop deeper prayer lives. Both of these approaches to developing an inner prayer life incorporate meditation on God and awareness of his presence, as opposed to praying vocal prayers, as a way to grow closer to God.

## Learning to Pray

1. **Invite** a volunteer to read aloud the first three paragraphs of “Learning to Pray” on pages 474 and 475.
2. **Ask** the students to share the first experiences they can recall of learning to pray. Encourage them to tell who taught them to pray and what the first prayer or prayers they learned were.
3. **Emphasize** that prayer takes practice. While this may seem strange at first, explain that the reason this is so is that prayer is more than just reciting the words of familiar prayers, and that with practice we can learn to tune out distractions and tune in to God when we pray. Also **share** that by praying and forming a habit of regular prayer, we become better at making prayer part of the essence of our lives.
4. **Ask** a volunteer to read aloud the remaining paragraphs of “Learning to Pray.” **Ask:**
  - How does each of the virtues help us to pray? (*Faith helps us to believe when we pray. Without faith, praying would not make sense. Hope helps us to accept God’s answer even when it is not the one we expect. Love for God—and his love for us in return—is at the heart of all our prayers.*)
  - Why is the Christian family the ideal place for children to learn to pray? (*Because the love of parents and siblings are a child’s first experiences of God’s love, an essential foundation for developing a relationship with God.*)

## Activity

1. **Direct** the students to turn their attention to the second activity on activity master 40B, “What Helps You to Pray?”



2. **Read aloud** the directions. Allow the students to silently reread the paragraphs indicated. Direct them to complete the activity. You may wish to have the students work in pairs to discuss their responses. However, encourage them to write their answers independently.
3. **Invite** volunteers to share what they have written.

## Pray It! Liturgy Connection

1. **Invite** a volunteer to read aloud the “Pray It! Liturgy Connection” sidebar on page 474.
2. **Share** that the Liturgy of the Hours includes eight times of the day (eight “hours”) during which prayers are to be said. These hours refer to specific times of the day, and are identified as follows:
  - Matins, prayed during the night
  - Lauds, or dawn prayer
  - Prime, or early morning prayer
  - Terce, or midmorning prayer
  - Sext, or midday prayer (at noon)
  - None, or midafternoon prayer
  - Vespers, or evening prayer
  - Compline, or night prayer (before retiring)
3. **Tell** the students to identify one or more of these times for prayer, or their own chosen times, and to develop a habit of praying, either a traditional prayer or in their own words, at those times of day.

## Personal Prayer

1. **Invite** a volunteer to read aloud “Personal Prayer” on pages 477 and 478.
2. **Explain** that vocal prayer is prayer that uses words, either in the form of traditional prayers such as the Lord’s Prayer or the Hail Mary, or in our own words as we speak to God in prayer.
3. **Ask:**
  - ▶ What are some other ways we can pray? (*through liturgical or other music that allows us to focus on God; through meditation, in which we use our thoughts and imagination to get closer to God; and through contemplation, in which we focus our minds and hearts on God*)
  - ▶ What might be some benefits to using silence in our prayers? (*By being silent and still, we can become more aware of God’s presence, and we can listen for his movement in our lives.*)



## Additional Activity

### Meeting Jesus on the Mountain

1. **Invite** the students to join with you in a contemplative prayer. Explain that they will need to use their imagination to participate in the prayer.
2. **Ask** them to close their eyes as you set the scene.
3. **Read** the following slowly, pausing where indicated:

You are about to travel up a high mountain. The path is narrow and steep. As you begin, you are not sure you can make it to the top. You keep going. You are snagged by bushes. You trip on loose stones under your feet. The path seems to go in circles. You reach a clearing and look down. The whole valley spreads beneath you. You must be almost there. You keep going, and the path gets a little easier, step by step. As you take one more step, and brush aside a tree branch, you see a clearing ahead of you. Someone is sitting there, waiting for you. You come closer. Could it be? Yes, it is Jesus. He looks at you silently. *(pause)*

What do you say to him? *(pause)*

What does he say to you? *(pause)*

Sit quietly before Jesus for awhile. *(pause)*

Now head back down the mountain, remembering what he told you.

You are at the bottom now. Let us now say together the prayer that Jesus taught us.

“Our Father who art in heaven . . . Amen.”

Now open your eyes.

4. **Ask** if any volunteers would like to share their experience of this meditation. You might ask how they felt climbing up or climbing down, or how they feel now (in one or two words). They may or may not want to share the exchange they had with Jesus.

## Live It!

1. **Read aloud** the “Live It!” sidebar on page 479.
2. **Ask** the students how many of the devotions listed are familiar to them. **Allow** volunteers to respond and to tell about a devotion they know.
3. **Share** with the students brief explanations of some of the devotions. Encourage them to participate in or practice these devotions.

## FYI

### The Prayer of Taizé

The Community of Taizé was founded in 1944 by Brother Roger. He thus began to fulfill his vision of founding an ecumenical community of monks. In this community, men from various faiths would live, work, and pray together. In 1949, the first monks of this new community took lifelong vows on Easter Day. Since that day, Taizé has become an influential force among young people and also among Church leaders of many denominations.

When Pope John Paul II visited Taizé in 1986, he said, "One passes through Taizé as one passes close to a spring of water" (Taizé Community Web site, "Perspectives on Taizé"). The spring of water offered by Taizé is their life of prayer. A form of that prayer (group prayer in silence with meditative music composed by the monks) has become popular in some parishes. Perhaps a parish near you offers this form of prayer.

Brother Roger, founder and prior, was killed by a mentally ill woman during Evening Prayer on August 16, 2005. He was ninety years old.



### Closing Activity

1. **Distribute** copies of activity master 41C, "A Prayer Puzzle."
2. **Read aloud** the instructions and **direct** the students to use the clues to help them unscramble the words and write them in the spaces provided.
3. **Encourage** the students to finish unscrambling all the words and to fill in the missing letters at the bottom to identify the Marian devotion.
4. When all have finished, **invite** volunteers to share their answers for each clue.



### Closing Prayer

1. **Invite** the students to open their handbooks to page 471. When all are ready, **ask** a volunteer to read aloud the prayer in the "Pray It!" sidebar.
2. **Conclude** with the following prayer:
  - ▶ Jesus, teach us to pray at all times of the day. Teach us that although we can sometimes feel like we are too busy to find time for prayer, spending time in communion with you through our day will enrich us spiritually and in all ways. Give us your love, send us your blessings, and fill our hearts with gratitude. Amen.

**Close** with the Sign of the Cross.

## Chapter Test

1. The chapter test will help the students recall what they have learned. The test covers the key points of the chapter.
2. **Distribute** copies of the chapter 41 test from the *Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers Test Booklet*.
3. **Explain** to the students that completing the test exercises will help them remember the content of the chapter they have just completed. **Direct** them to work quietly to complete the test.
4. **Collect** and **grade** the test. Alternatively, you may wish to **review** the answers to the test as a group. **Review** with the students any items that were generally misunderstood. **Refer** to the answer key at the back of the test booklet for the correct answers as well as a list of the pages on which the answers can be found.

## Social Justice

### Prayer and Action

It is an often-debated question: what is better, or more pleasing to God—prayer or action? Granted, in the Gospel of Martha and Mary, Jesus commends Mary for choosing “the better part” (Luke 10:42, NAB) by listening to him rather than helping Martha serve the other guests. In reality, we find that most of us are called to do both—to listen to Jesus and to serve him in others. The Apostle John wrote to his early Christians, “My children, our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action” (1 John 3:18). The Apostle James seems to agree, for he wrote, “Do not deceive yourselves by just listening to his word; instead, put it into practice” (James 1:22). James draws a vivid hypothetical picture of faithful Christians meeting a brother or sister without food or clothing: “What good is there in your saying to them, ‘God bless you! Keep warm and eat well!’—if you don’t give them the necessities of life? So it is with faith: if it is alone and includes no actions, then it is dead” (James 2:16–17).

Social justice calls out to us each day through the many causes and agencies that serve homeless adults and families, needy or sick children, and those who are unemployed or disabled. If we take these calls seriously, and ponder them in our prayer, we will find ways to help. Choose one way in which your group can put faith into action through prayer and a social justice activity. Choose one cause or agency to pray for in the coming weeks. For example, you may choose Habitat for Humanity as a focus of your prayer. You may also want to volunteer as a group to work with Habitat for Humanity in providing affordable housing in your community. You may want to pray and work for a local food bank or for Meals on Wheels. Whatever you do for the least of the brothers and sisters of Jesus, you do for him (see Matthew 25:31–46).

## Media Connection

Two scenes from the movie *Star Wars* (1977, 121 minutes, rated A-II and PG) are excellent examples of an ordinary person taking time to shut out the day-to-day noise and “tune in” to listen to the Spirit. The first of these scenes takes place on the Millennium Falcon when Obi-Wan Kenobi first introduces the concept of “the Force” to Luke Skywalker.

The second of these scenes is near the end of the movie, when Luke is attempting to attack the Death Star. He hears the voice of Obi-Wan encouraging him to trust the Force and use it to guide his actions. Either or both of these clips could be used as part of the closing prayer.

**Note:** For movies with a U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops rating of A-II, show only preselected scenes. Obtain parental permission for the students who are under age thirteen to view an A-II rated movie, and use your best judgment regarding the appropriateness of the film and the advisability of viewing relevant excerpts.