

Teaching Guide for  
**Praying**

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# Introduction



## THIS COURSE AND THE DISCOVERING PROGRAM

This course, *Praying*, provides information and strategies to help awaken young people to new ways of understanding, experiencing, and valuing prayer in their life. It seeks to deepen the prayer life the students already have and to encourage a continually maturing life of prayer appropriate to their age and development.

Though most adults would readily agree that a course on prayer belongs in a religion curriculum for young people, many teachers are somewhat reluctant to facilitate such a course. They believe that they are not “saintly” enough, or they perceive prayer as an activity of the spiritually advanced. Neither saintliness nor advanced spiritual development is required, thankfully. Maturity and a sincere desire to deepen one’s spiritual life and invite the students in this pursuit are requirement enough.

Also, many adults think they detect in young people an apathy or antagonism toward prayer. However, if apathy or antagonism exists, it is likely not toward prayer itself but rather toward formulas or rigid views about

prayer. Given an opportunity young people generally respond enthusiastically to personal and engaging kinds of prayer.

Prayer is a topic that calls for very personal sharing about and with God. For this reason you might want to offer this course later in the program, after the students and you have had some time to get to know and become comfortable with one another.

The six session plans of this course are each designed for a 1-hour meeting. If your group is scheduled to be together for more than an hour, the session can be extended with the optional approaches suggested at the end of each session plan. Also consult these approaches as alternative strategies if your teaching style or the students' learning style calls for changes.

The time estimates suggested for the session steps are based on a group size of about fifteen participants. If your group has considerably more or fewer members, you may need to make minor adjustments in the session plans. This course, like all Discovering courses, works well with larger groups, but in such cases you will have less opportunity to address the students' individual contributions and needs.

This course does not readily lend itself to daylong or other types of protracted schedules. Each session focuses on a specific kind of prayer and offers experiences of that prayer. Though it is possible for students to learn about more than one kind of prayer within a session, it will be difficult for them to truly experience and enter into more than one kind of prayer at a time.

If you wish further information about the Discovering Program, which consists of fourteen courses and a unit on confirmation, consult the coordinator's manual.

## BACKGROUND

### The Young Adolescent and This Course

Many adults view young adolescents as the most social of human beings, never happy unless part of an exuberant group. This course recognizes that though prayer breathes and comes to life in an environment of stillness, the study and practice of it can be much more dynamic than that. As you read the sections below, take the time to ponder prayer and silence, prayer and communication, and prayer and God.

During the six sessions of the course, let the students be who they are—young people who pray that their parents will let them buy the latest designer jeans, young people who worry about crime, young people who sorrow over the homeless person who sleeps on the city park bench, young people who want to find a friend they can trust. All their deepest desires are simply longings to be accepted and loved by others, to grow more compassionate and just.

Sometimes young adolescents may seem excessively self-absorbed, but even this is often a cry for acceptance. God accepts them and their prayers unconditionally. God calls them forward; we must try to do this as well.

Put your hope in God's hands and let the Spirit guide you, the students, and the session plans. Many of the students who learn more about prayer during this course will put their new awareness into practice. That in itself will be a great accomplishment.

However, know also that some of the young people may not immediately respond to all that they will be exposed to in this course. Trust that you are planting seeds that will grow when these students are more ready to stand in God's presence in prayer. Be gracious to yourself as you teach this course; trust the Spirit.

### **Active Stillness**

Prayer does not always require silence. Prayer in a classroom of young people is possible and desirable, just as prayer at the liturgy is. Whereas communication with God is of primary importance, silence may or may not necessarily be. The first concern is helping the students discover how God is present and available to them. Once the students realize that God is present to them, they will be able to still themselves, find the deep center of themselves where God dwells, and pray privately or with others.

In the book *The Breath of Life: A Simple Way to Pray*, Ron DelBene, with Herb Montgomery, relates that many people who come to his hermitage ask, "If I am to be silent, what will I *do*?" (p. 13). DelBene notes that "we have mistakenly equated silence with doing nothing" (p. 13). He suggests that the praying person think of himself or herself as a hunting dog

that, after locating its quarry, stands still—pointing to the find. Although still, and "doing nothing," the pointer is alert and attentive. Through our attentive stillness, we can avoid what we might refer to as the "noise" of prayer and concentrate instead on the find which for Christians is the treasure, the pearl of great price, the Kingdom. (P. 15)

This course can help your students begin to learn this kind of active stillness.

### **Praying Our Experiences**

For young people who are exploring the silence that leads to God's presence, God might sometimes seem distant. Because many young adolescents are still at the stage of intellectual development where they rely on concrete experiences, they need to see, taste, touch, smell, and hear in order to understand. Through exercises that relate to the students' physical perceptions, this course can help them find God, who is closer to them than their own thoughts and who invites and encourages them to pray in and through their world. In these exercises the students are invited to bring the reality of their life and world to their prayer. They, more than anyone, know what makes up their problems and joys, disappointments and pleasures. These events and experiences must become the leaven of their prayer.

In *Beginning to Pray*, Anthony Bloom, an Orthodox archbishop, reinforces this point when he says,

The first act of prayer is to choose such words of prayer as are completely true to what you are, words which you are not ashamed of,

which express you adequately and are worthy of you—and then offer them to God with all the intelligence of which you are capable. (P. 23)

The students' words, thoughts, dreams, and desires are the necessary ingredients for their prayer. Their own words are the words that God wants to hear.

Archbishop Bloom also stresses that “prayer is an encounter and a relationship, a relationship which is deep, and this relationship cannot be forced either on us or on God” (p. 2). This course sets out to help young people deepen and enrich their prayer life. It makes the positive and realistic assumption that young people are generally eager for a relationship with God, that they want to know the God who loves them, and that they want to believe in this God.

In *Love Bade Me Welcome*, Robert Llewelyn has this to say about prayer and its relationship to the whole of life:

Life must be taken and accepted as a whole, and prayer can never be separated from daily living. . . . A great Christian thinker in the early days of the Church has a famous phrase which speaks of life as “one great unbroken prayer,” and that is to be seen as the ideal, however far it may now be from being a reality. Prayer would then include cooking meals, visiting the sick, mending the garden fence, answering the telephone, eating and drinking and sleeping and all. (P. 44)

If the students with whom you are sharing this course begin to recognize prayer as “coextensive with life itself” (p. 44), their prayer life should be enriched.

### **Nurturing a Life of Prayer**

Life may indeed be viewed as “one great unbroken prayer.” But this course of only six sessions cannot approach prayer from such a wide perspective. Instead these sessions are intended to help the students explore their present prayer life, introduce them to several forms of prayer, and help them realize that they can develop a richer life of prayer.

You may wonder whether you know enough about prayer to help the students pray more deeply. *Praying* is built on the assumption that you have a great deal to share as a mature Christian who has had enough experience with prayer to qualify you as a guide as well as a fellow pray-er.

In addition, as you prepare to teach this course, remember that your students already do pray, each in her or his own way. Your task is to help them recognize and nurture the emerging prayer life that is already theirs.

### **The Theology of This Course**

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says: “[The mystery of faith] requires that the faithful believe in it, that they celebrate it, and that they live from it in a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God. This relationship is prayer” (no. 2558).



Fully one-fourth of the *Catechism*, part 4, is devoted exclusively to Christian prayer. The limited scope of this six-session course makes it impossible to address all the issues laid out in the *Catechism*. Nonetheless, the course intensely addresses the following: the primacy of the Psalms in prayer (nos. 2585–2589); prayer in the life of Jesus (nos. 2598–2622); and meditation and contemplation (nos. 2705–2724). Furthermore, this course’s exploration of prayer culminates in a rich meditation on the Lord’s Prayer, which also brings the *Catechism* to a close (nos. 2761–2865).

A brief excerpt from the *Catechism* using the story of Jesus and the woman at the well offers one view of prayer as God’s gift to us:

The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: there, Christ comes to meet every human being. It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God’s desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God’s thirst with ours. (No. 2560)

This quotation emboldens us to invite young people to enter into a deep and rich life of prayer. The teacher and the student are one in this endeavor: both respond to a God who, as the *Catechism* insists, thirsts for us.

In addition, this course rests on the belief that prayer leads us out of ourselves into an embrace of the world. By the end of the course, its content will have shown that Jesus’ prayer was extended to his world and that the students also are invited to pray for their world.

As the students learn more about prayer, they need to recognize the images of God out of which they pray. In his book *The Great Mysteries*, Andrew Greeley has this to say about our image of God:

There are many possible different interpretations of who God is; for humans must wrestle with the paradox of the graciousness and purpose they occasionally experience and the evil and absurdity which seem so typical of life. Fundamentally, religion is an attempt to harmonize graciousness and evil. God is the center of religion, and our image of God summarizes our response to the puzzle of absurdity and graciousness, of chance and awe.

Some versions of God see him as benign but forgetful; humans must remind him of his promises and sometimes wake him up from his sleep. . . . Others see him as crotchety and difficult, easily offended by those who violate his plan, and quick to take salutary vengeance; humans must constantly placate and calm him. . . . Still others think that God is fundamentally uninterested in the universe he has created, leaving its governance to irrational, or at least nonrational, forces he has set in motion. (P. 5)

Greeley goes on to describe the God whom the Israelites encountered at Sinai. This God was “a Gracious Purpose, which they perceived as unilaterally liberating His people and then entering into a passionately loving commitment to them” (p. 6). Finally, Greeley describes the God of Jesus, who “is madly, insanely in love with his human creatures” (p. 9).

A belief in this multifaceted God underlies the six sessions of this course. As the students get in touch with the image of God out of which they pray, they can appreciate even more the call they receive from this God to pray.

## Teaching This Course

Each course in the Discovering Program consists of two components: a teaching guide like this one that fully describes the course goals, objectives, content, and session plans, and a companion student booklet. The booklet is not a conventional textbook, in that the students are never expected to read it outside of the sessions. In fact, substantial reading is never required as a regular feature of the learning process. Nor does the booklet look like a textbook; for instance, it contains no recognizable chapters as one would expect in a standard text. The student booklet for each Discovering course, rather, is to be used only in conjunction with the session plans described in the teaching guide. It is effective in this way because of the following features:

- The booklet provides a kind of running summary of the themes and essential information that are presented through the engaging session plans. This gives students a record of what they have learned in the course. It is also a helpful feature when a student misses a session; at the next session, you can ask him or her to briefly review relevant pages from the booklet.
- The booklet uses sidebars and quotes related to the main topics to draw the young people further into the material and enrich their learning. You may use the sidebars in any way that seems appropriate—perhaps as discussion-starters, topics for journal entries, or simply focal points for a brief silent reflection.
- The booklet includes an occasional personal reflection or journal-writing activity that students are asked to complete quietly on their own.
- The booklet presents activities designed for use in small groups—such as discussion-starters, role-plays, and vignettes.
- Finally, the booklet's attractive design—using original art, bold colors, interesting type, evocative photos, and so on—is intended to support the total learning process.

### Student Booklet Sidebars

The student booklet includes a number of quotes, brief stories, and bits of interesting information that are not central elements of the course content. Set off graphically from the other booklet materials, these sidebars are generally not referred to in the session plans. They are included in the booklet to spark the students' interest and imagination. As you prepare for each session, reflect on the sidebars and decide if you wish to use any of them in your teaching.

### **Student Booklet Bound into the Teaching Guide**

For your convenience and easy reference, a complete copy of the student booklet for *Praying* is bound into the back of this guide. You may find it helpful to tab or mark the booklet pages related to a given session as you prepare to teach it. That will make it easy to flip back and forth between the guide and the booklet.

### **Student Booklet Pages in the Session Plans**

As a visual aid, reduced versions of some student booklet pages are reproduced in the left-hand margin of the session plans. Such pages appear at the beginning of the related instructions. If more than one booklet page is involved in an activity, only the first of those pages is reproduced in the margin.

### **Prayer Experiences**

Establish a prayer area within the room where you will meet with your group. This area will become a focal point for a time of prayer during most sessions. An enthroned Bible in a designated place in the prayer area attests to the importance of the Scriptures and of shared prayer. Items such as a candle and a plant or flowers are recommended for the enthroned Bible.

A prayer opportunity generally ends each session. Everyone is called to prayer through simple words and actions, such as lighting a candle, moving to a new location in the room, asking for silence, or playing music conducive to silent reflection. These simple gestures help settle everyone down and center them for reflection and prayer.

Guided prayer is used three times in this course. If you find that your group cannot—or will not—take these meditations seriously, it is best to avoid them and adapt the prayer to a style with which the students are comfortable. Most teachers report success with guided prayer but sometimes run into difficulty using the technique with sixth graders, who commonly lack experience with this kind of prayer.

### **The Bible**

The Bible is another key tool in the Discovering curriculum. The students in this course frequently use Bibles and must be able to look up scriptural citations. If possible, provide a Bible for each of your students. Ideally, everyone would get the same translation. If this is not possible, try to divide your group into smaller groups of people with the same translation. Comparing the various translations can add a further dimension to your discussions throughout the course, though it may slightly complicate some activities and discussions.

The following translations are among the best available for Catholic young people:

- The New American Bible (1991). This version is a modern translation of the Scriptures that is faithful to ancient sources. It is approved for use during the liturgy of the word and therefore will be somewhat familiar to the students.

- The New Jerusalem Bible (1990). This translation uses contemporary language, comes closest to using inclusive language, and provides theological insights through extensive notations that accompany the text. It is also an approved translation for use in the liturgy of the word.
- The New Revised Standard Version (1989). This translation uses gender-inclusive language when such use is consistent with rigorous biblical scholarship.
- The Good News Bible: The Bible in Today's English Version (1993). This translation attempts to capture and convey the meaning set forth in the original texts, in language that is accessible to a broad readership. It is truer to the original meanings than are paraphrased versions, and it is presented in language that young people can more readily understand. Most students respond enthusiastically to this translation. It can be obtained from the Catholic Bible Press, a division of Thomas Nelson.

Some of the scriptural excerpts in this course are cited as adapted. Such passages generally have been adapted to make the language more accessible and to avoid exclusive language.

### **Student Prayer Journals**

Consider including a prayer journal component for the course. If you decide to do so, supply or ask the students to bring something to use as a journal, such as a blank notebook or blank sheets of paper stapled together. At each session give the students something specific to write about; you will find suggested assignments in the Options section at the end of each session plan in this teaching guide. Between the sessions take the journals home with you or invite the young people to keep them in a secure place in the meeting room. Assure the students of privacy, and solicit their permission for you to read their journal entries occasionally.

### **Some Preparation Needs**

This course supplies six session plans and a variety of optional approaches in the teaching guide, as well as additional ideas in sidebars in the student booklet. It includes only strategies and activities that require a reasonable amount of preparation, and materials that are inexpensive and easy to locate.

Before teaching this course, read each session plan and become comfortable with the learning strategies. If you are unfamiliar with some of the prayer techniques, such as guided meditation, you might want to record yourself on audiotape reading the directions, and then play the tape back so that you can hear your own voice and evaluate your pacing, tone, and so on.

Think about your prayer life and the prayer ways with which you are most familiar and that you find most helpful. Do not hesitate to share these with your students. Think about gestures, forms of address, postures, and places, as well as words. Consider sharing with your students prayers you have memorized and love.

Try to recall what your prayer was like when you were the students' age. Be ready to share with the young people stories about your prayer at their age, taking care to avoid deadly "When I was your age . . ." lectures.

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Curriculums take on greater clarity, direction, and purpose if they are described in terms of their goals and objectives. This observation is based on a commonsense principle: We have a difficult time getting somewhere if we do not know where we are going. Educators who design learning experiences must identify their destination as a first step in determining how to get there. The statement of goals and objectives is a practical way to identify the desired outcomes for a program.

In the Discovering Program, goals and objectives are used in the following ways.

**Goals.** Goals are broad statements of what we wish to accomplish—learning outcomes we hope to achieve. The coordinator’s manual for the Discovering Program provides the goals for all the courses in the curriculum. Each course within the total program also includes a statement of its goals. The goals often have an idealistic quality, inviting the teacher to reflect on how the course relates to the personal and faith development of the young people. At the same time, the course goals are realistic, measurable, and attainable. As a teacher, at the end of the course, you should be able to look back and determine if you have in fact achieved the course goals.

**Objectives.** Objectives are statements that define how to get to the goals. They name specific tasks that must be accomplished if the goals are to be achieved. The coordinator’s manual identifies the objectives for each course in the curriculum. Each course, in turn, supplies a clear statement of objectives for each session in the course.

### The Goals and Objectives of *Praying*

#### Goals

The goals for this course in the Discovering Program are as follows:

- that the students expand their understanding of prayer
- that they experience several different prayer forms
- that they develop new prayer skills
- that they imitate Jesus as a model of prayer

#### Objectives

Each session has its own objectives, which will help realize the course goals. The objectives of *Praying* that follow are phrased as tasks for the young people.

##### *Session 1: “Praying Always and All Ways”*

The students will do the following:

- formulate a personal definition of prayer
- consider when, where, how, and why people pray
- practice shared prayer

*Session 2: “Praying with Our Images of God”*

The students will do the following:

- identify images of God that have influenced their prayer
- identify their own images of God
- use their images of God in prayer

*Session 3: “Centering Ourselves in God”*

The students will do the following:

- practice a centering prayer
- recognize the Lord’s Prayer as a prayer that reflects the attitude and spirit of Jesus’ prayer
- identify the Lord’s Prayer as their own personal prayer
- explore the relationship between prayer and action

*Session 4: “Learning the Prayer of the Heart”*

The students will do the following:

- identify the characteristics of the prayer of the heart
- recognize the value of the prayer of the heart
- practice their own prayer of the heart

*Session 5: “Meditating with the Scriptures”*

The students will do the following:

- become familiar with meditating as a form of prayer
- participate in a guided meditation

*Session 6: “Living Out Our Prayer”*

The students will do the following:

- recognize that Jesus’ prayer overflowed into action for others
- understand the relationship between prayer and action
- consider committing themselves to becoming persons of prayer

## RESOURCES

### Strongly Recommended

If you have time to read only one or two books as a preparation for this course, you might want to choose one or both of these:

Egan, Keith J. *What Is Prayer?* Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1973.

Link, Mark. *You: Prayer for Beginners and Those Who Have Forgotten How*. Niles, IL: Argus Communications, 1976.

### Also Recommended

The following books also provide helpful background and enrichment for this course:

Bloom, Anthony. *Beginning to Pray*. New York: Paulist Press, 1970. Pages 71 to 73 provide good insights into meditating with the Bartimaeus story from Mark 10:46–52. This story is used in session 5.

- Calderone-Stewart, Lisa-Marie. *In Touch with the Word: Lectionary-Based Prayer Reflections for Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1996. This book offers lectionary-based prayer reflections for adults, teens, and children.
- DelBene, Ron, with Herb Montgomery. *The Breath of Life: A Simple Way to Pray*. Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1981. The entire book concerns the breath prayer, or prayer of the heart, which is introduced to the students in session 4.
- de Mello, Anthony. *Sadhana: A Way to God*. Saint Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978. Pages 108 to 113 provide background on the use of the name Jesus and the Jesus Prayer. This will be helpful for session 4.
- Kater, John. *A Faith for Teenagers: Making Sense of Life*. Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1987. Pages 95 to 109 are especially helpful in understanding young people and prayer and the meaning of prayer.
- Llewelyn, Robert. *Love Bade Me Welcome*. New York: Paulist Press, 1984. Chapter 4 discusses the nature of prayer, and chapter 5 explores repetitive prayer and centering; these two chapters will be helpful for sessions 3 and 4. Chapter 6 discusses praying with the Scriptures, which is explored in session 5.
- McDonnell, Rea. *Prayer Pilgrimage Through Scripture*. New York: Paulist Press, 1984. Chapter 2 provides good background on images of God.
- Poloma, Margaret, and G. Gallup Jr. *Varieties of Prayer: A Survey Report*. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992. This book is the result of an objective analysis of over one thousand Americans, regarding their experiences of the power of prayer in their life.



SESSION  
**1**

# Praying Always and All Ways



## AN OVERVIEW OF THIS SESSION

### Objectives

The students will do the following:

- formulate a personal definition of prayer
- consider when, where, how, and why people pray
- practice shared prayer

### Session Steps

This session uses pages 1 to 3 of the student booklet and includes the following steps:

- A. an icebreaker and a course introduction (10 minutes)
- B. a brainstorming exercise on the word *pray* (15 minutes)
- C. the student booklet activity “Thoughts on Prayer” (10 minutes)
- D. the student booklet activity “What If God . . . ?” (15 minutes)
- E. a closing prayer (10 minutes)



## BACKGROUND

This session provides an introduction to prayer and offers the students and you a way to understand better the students' attitude toward and experience of prayer. The students can be expected to have some experience with prayer. However, like that of all serious Christians, their prayer life needs nourishment and support so that it might deepen. This is why people who take their communication with God seriously seek out spiritual directors or mentors to accompany them on their lifelong journey of prayer.

This session opens with an icebreaker that serves the dual purpose of getting the students acquainted and helping them discern the dimensions of their prayer life. It also helps them discover how their prayer is similar to and different from that of their classmates. The icebreaker is followed by a brief course introduction.

This session invites the students to recall their experiences with and observations about prayer. As the session progresses, activities such as brainstorming and reflecting on the opinions and views of others help the students realize that they can pray always and all ways. Another exercise asks them to identify specific times and places commonly associated with prayer and to consider how they can make prayer part of their daily life. Finally, they are asked to make a commitment to daily prayer. This expectation that they pray now and continue to pray helps the students to regard prayer as necessary to their life, just as food, sleep, learning, and fun are.

## PREPARATION

### Materials Needed

- blank name tags
- colored markers
- copies of handout 1–A, “Prayer Ways,” one for each student
- pens or pencils
- one 10-by-13-inch envelope
- newsprint and markers
- tape
- student booklets, one for each student
- blank self-adhesive labels, one for each student
- a Bible, a pillow or a Bible stand, a table and a cloth, a cross or a statue, a live plant or other item from nature, and a pillar candle and matches (These items are referred to in subsequent materials needed lists simply as an enthroned Bible.)
- a tape or CD player, and a recording of reflective instrumental music (optional)
- cards made from resource 1–A, “T-Shirt Card,” one for each student

## Other Necessary Preparations

Prepare to lead this session by doing the following things and checking them off as you accomplish them:

- For step B.* Prepare and post four pieces of newsprint as described in step B.
- For step D.* Complete the student booklet activity “What If God . . . ?” in order to become familiar with its content.
- For step E.* Create T-shirt prayer cards and fill them out for the students, as directed in step E.
- If you wish to change the procedure to better fit your teaching preferences or the learning style of your group, see the Options section at the end of this session plan.

## Teacher Prayer

Place yourself in God’s presence and, in a spirit of thanksgiving and praise, pray for the young people you will work with during this course.

Say or read aloud the names of the students and ask God’s blessing on each of them. If you know the students and can picture them, offer a prayer of thanksgiving for one strong quality in each that you have observed and hope to draw on throughout this course. End your meditation with a prayer such as this:

Your Son taught us to pray to you as a father. We are all your sons and daughters, and sisters and brothers to one another. Help me to know when to lead and when to follow. Help me to listen and be still. Look kindly on all of us and lead us to you. I ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our brother. Amen.

## PROCEDURE

### A. Icebreaker and Introduction (10 minutes)

1. Greet the students as they enter the room. Provide blank name tags and colored markers, and ask each student to create a name tag using the name or nickname she or he prefers.

2. When everyone has gathered, welcome the young people to this course on prayer. Pass out copies of handout 1–A, “Prayer Ways,” and pens or pencils. Emphasize your confidence in their ability to pray, and recognize their familiarity with many kinds of prayer and ways of praying. Explain that they will begin the course with an icebreaker activity that draws on their prayer experience.

Direct the students to write their name at the top of the handout they just received. Then instruct them to write their name or initials in the squares of the handout that describe their knowledge or experience of

prayer. Emphasize that this is not a test, and if they cannot sign many of the spaces, that is all right. Tell the students that at this time they can ignore the question, What else is new? at the bottom of the handout. Add that they will be able to respond to it at the end of the course.

3. Instruct the students that they will now gather as many signatures as possible from fellow students who have had the prayer experiences stated in the squares of the handout. Point out that the students are to sign a square only if the prayer statement in that square is true for them. Tell them that you trust their honesty as they complete this activity.

Announce a 5-minute time limit. Then ask the young people to begin. Monitor the time and alert the students when a minute is left.

4. When time is up, call the students together. Ask for a show of hands to indicate how many responded positively to each statement on the handout. Begin with a statement that the majority of the students can be expected to have signed as being true for them. For example, you might start by asking the following question:

- ▶ How many of you got at least one signature of a classmate who knows a prayer by heart?

It might be necessary to note that some of the squares may be unsigned. Keep in mind that empty squares signal possibilities for the students to experience new ways of prayer.

5. Bring this activity to a close by making the following observations in your own words:

- ▶ This activity shows that many of you are already praying people.
- ▶ Prayer grows and changes as people grow and change.
- ▶ This course is designed to help you learn more about prayer by experiencing it as well as discussing and reflecting on it.
- ▶ Because prayer is a personal activity that often touches upon sensitive issues, this course invites you to share your prayer only if you choose to do so.

6. Collect and save the students' handouts for reference and comparison in session 6. Be sure the students' names are on the papers. Place the papers in a 10-by-13-inch envelope, then seal the envelope and store it in a safe place until session 6.

## **B. Brainstorming Exercise: The Word *Pray*** (15 minutes)

*Before the session.* In large letters write each of the following terms at the top of a separate piece of newsprint: "Places," "Reasons," "Actions," and "Your words." Underline the first letter of each term, or outline it in a bright color, to make it stand out. Mount the pieces of newsprint along a wall horizontally in the order given here, so that the emphasized letters spell *pray*.

Leave plenty of space between the pieces of newsprint to allow the students to circulate and write responses on them.

1. Call the students' attention to the pieces of newsprint you posted on a wall earlier. Point out the word pray formed by the emphasized letters. Briefly clarify each of the descriptive words on the newsprint. Help the students to think of places where they pray or can pray; reasons they and others pray; actions used to express prayer (e.g., gestures, dancing, incensing, bowing, and rituals such as the sign of the cross); and words they use to pray (memorized and original).

2. After the young people have had a few moments to reflect, set out an array of colored markers and invite the students to come forward and write on the appropriate newsprint the words that came to mind as they thought of each element in their prayer. Mention that they can draw on information they gathered from the icebreaker exercise that opened the session. Assure the students that spelling and grammar are not as important in this exercise as getting the information written down. Have them come forward as ideas occur to them; expect this process to be a little chaotic!

3. Afterward read aloud some of the students' written responses. Ask for comments but do not expect much discussion at this point. Respond as you see fit. Avoid overreacting to seemingly irreverent comments. Rather take them seriously and ask any student making them to expand her or his thoughts.

Note: Save the pieces of newsprint for use in the opening exercise in session 2.



Booklet page 1

### C. Booklet Activity: "Thoughts on Prayer" (10 minutes)

1. Distribute the student booklets and blank self-adhesive labels. Instruct the students to write their name on their label and stick it on the cover of their booklet. Give them a few moments to leaf through their booklet. Tell them that they will use the booklets as part of each session and that you will collect them for safekeeping after each meeting. Add that the students may take them home at the close of the course.

2. Direct the young people's attention to "Thoughts on Prayer" on pages 1 to 2 of their booklet. Read the introduction to that material aloud. Ask volunteers to read the quoted statements out loud to see what their peers may think and how the views of some young people compare with their own views. Afterward ask these questions:

- ▶ Which of these statements do you agree with? Why?
- ▶ Which of these statements do you disagree with? Why?
- ▶ Which of these statements give you new ideas about prayer?



Booklet page 3

## D. Booklet Activity: “What If God . . . ?” (15 minutes)

1. Direct the students to “What If God . . . ?” on page 3 of the student booklet. Observe that the students have shared their ideas about prayer and have read about others’ ideas. Read the directions on page 3 aloud. Tell the students that the situations listed in this activity open up new ways of thinking about when and where they can meet God in prayer and about the content of their prayer.

Announce a 5-minute time limit on this activity. Alert the students when time is about to expire.

2. Make the following observations in your own words:
- ▶ The first two situations relate to the time and place where you might meet God.
  - ▶ The remaining situations, 3 to 6, give hints about how you might pray and how God might respond to your prayer.

Elicit a discussion of the situations, assuming the role of God and inviting volunteers to share their responses to each one.

3. Bring this activity to a close by noting that the young people can use this exploration of the places, times, and content of prayer as a basis to commit themselves to deepening their own prayer.

## E. Closing Prayer (10 minutes)

*Before the session.* Use resource 1–A, “T-Shirt Card,” as a pattern to create T-shirt prayer cards to give to the students, one for each student. To make these cards, first follow the directions on the resource. Then, using bright colored markers, print a student’s name on the inside of each card, and write a prayer for that student. If you know the young people personally, identify for each a specific quality you appreciate and include it in his or her prayer. For example, “Thank you, God, for LeJuan’s willingness to participate.” If you do not know the students, the prayers can reflect your hopes for them. For example, “God, bless Diane and help her grow in her prayer life this year.” Be careful not to repeat any of the prayers; the students will likely compare their cards to be sure that the prayers in them are indeed individualized. (Young adolescents often test us to see if what adults tell them is truthful.) Most of the students will appreciate these prayers and will be happy to know that you pray for them and that you have special thoughts about each of them.

1. Gather the students in a circle around the enthroned Bible. Light a candle, darken the room, and, if you wish, play reflective instrumental music in the background.

2. Read Phil. 1:3–5, which is printed on the front of the T-shirt cards you made before this session. Before handing out these cards, tell the students that they express your prayer for each of them during this course.

3. Call each student by name and present him or her with the card that you made. Expect the young people to read their card as soon as they receive it. Be sure to allow enough time for the last person to read his or her card, before you proceed.

4. Encourage the students to quiet themselves. Refer to the words printed on the back of their card. Read each point on the back of the card, and note that there are spaces for them to write in the place and time that are best for their prayer, and their signature. Explain the meaning of signing an agreement. Emphasize that it is a way of assuming some kind of responsibility. Ask the students to give examples of when their signature has had this kind of meaning. (They might suggest signing a library card or another kind of membership card, signing a gift certificate promising to do a chore for their parents, etc.)

Tell the students that they will have about 3 minutes to fill in the spaces on the back of their card, and signal them to begin. Circulate among the students and help any who need and welcome your assistance.

5. When time is up, turn off the music and invite the students to pray aloud the reading from Phil. 1:3–5.

Thank the students for their cooperation and tell them how pleased you are to be sharing this course with them. Collect the student booklets as the students leave.

## OPTIONS

After reading the session plan, you may choose to do some things differently or to make additions to an activity. Consider your time limitations first and then the following optional approaches.

**For step A.** Invite the students to raise any questions they have about prayer. Likely concerns are whether prayers are always answered or how many kinds of prayer there are. If the students are comfortable with one another, tell them to ask the questions aloud as you record them in a notebook. If you think the students are reticent to ask their questions out loud, direct them to write the questions on slips of paper and then collect the questions. Tell the students that in future sessions you and they will respond to these questions. Be sure to set aside time in future sessions to address these questions.

**For step A.** If you think it is necessary or appropriate, establish guidelines for group discussions. Invite the students' ideas as you list them on newsprint. Or consider posting the following guidelines and asking the students to add to them:

- All opinions are respected.
- One person speaks at a time.
- Each person deserves to be listened to.

- Each person has a right to speak or to pass.

Post the newsprint guidelines in the meeting room for this and subsequent sessions.

**For step B.** If the students' responses to the brainstorming exercise show a lack of familiarity with memorized prayers such as the Hail Mary or the Glory Be (the Doxology), you might want to engage them in the following activity: Post a familiar prayer such as the Glory Be on newsprint. Give the students time to read it slowly. Direct the students each to copy the prayer on a sheet of blank paper, leaving out key words and phrases. Then ask the students to pair up, exchange with their partner their written versions with the words and phrases missing, and challenge their partner to supply verbally the missing words and phrases. Instruct them to do this several times with different partners. The repetition should jog their memory.

Also, consider opening each session of this course with one well-known prayer, inviting the students to pray along with you.

**For step C.** Read aloud each statement from "Thoughts on Prayer" in the student booklet and ask the students to respond to it by showing ten fingers if they strongly agree with it, five fingers if they agree with it, or no fingers if they disagree with it or are indifferent to it. Or adjust this activity in the following manner: Give each student ten beans. Read each statement and ask the young people to vote on it by casting a number of beans to represent their level of agreement or disagreement with it. Note that ten beans is the strongest agreement and one bean represents the strongest disagreement. Direct one student to tally the votes by entering in her or his student booklet, next to the appropriate statement, the number of beans cast for it. Afterward invite this student to report the group's votes, and elicit a discussion of the results.

**For step D.** Invite volunteer students to dramatize some or all of situations 3 to 6 from "What If God . . . ?" in the student booklet. If your students seem skeptical about performing the dramas, offer encouragement and be willing to take part in them yourself. With your help the young people may be able to enter into the activity and enjoy thinking of God and prayer in a new way. Expect laughter while the students perform. Feel free to enter into a discussion after each role-play, and help direct it when you sense this is necessary.

The following ideas may help with each dramatization:

- *For God as listener of their music (situation 3).* Help the students generate a list of titles or lyrics that they want God to hear, sing, or dance to.
- *For God as salesperson (situation 4).* Suggest that the students consider God as offering or "selling" peace, friendship, or love. Challenge the students to name the price—such as a willingness to forgive, to include, or to be generous.
- *For God as counselor (situation 5).* Ask the students to select a problem or question that is typical of young people. Avoid putting a student in a situation that requires self-disclosure.

- *For God as baseball cap designer (situation 6).* Ask the students to set up a dialog in which God helps them arrive at a saying or a symbol that truly expresses their understanding of God.

Note that this approach will take additional time and require adjustments in the remainder of the session.

**For step E.** If you are using the prayer journal component for this course, ask the students to enter in their journal the information about choosing a prayer time and place from the back of their T-shirt card. Suggest that they also copy in their journal a prayer or an idea from the sidebars on pages 2 and 3 of their student booklet and write their own reflection on it.