



# personal prayer for kids

## A NOTE TO PARENTS TEACHING CHILDREN TO PRAY

As participants in our parish religious education program, you are trying to build a Catholic culture in your home. This year, maybe more than ever, your children are looking to you to learn about their faith.

One common aspect of Catholic family identity is Catholic family prayer. I'm sure you try to pray before meals. You pray with your children when you tuck them into bed. Maybe you say the rosary together once in a while or have some kind of seasonal prayer in your home, for example, around an Advent wreath.

But what about personal prayer? What about a one-on-one encounter between your child and God? How can parents teach that?

Here is a simple, yet effective way to start.

One family began this practice several years ago with all of their children (now ages 9, 8, 6, and 4). Recently when they asked their children, "What do you think has been effective in teaching you about God?" ALL four of the kids said, "Personal prayer."

Here's how they did it:

1. Everyone in the family participates from the parents to the toddlers.
2. Keep it short. Begin by setting a timer for just 3 minutes.
3. Give everyone a battery-operated candle.
4. Tell them to find a place in the house. This family restricted it to the first floor of their home: one child liked to sit by a window, another wanted to be in a quiet corner, one sat under the dining room table. A toddler might need to sit next to Mom or Dad on the couch and be coached along quietly.
5. These were the instructions: Talk to God silently.
  - a. Thank Him for something.
  - b. Tell Him something you are excited about or worried about.
  - c. Ask Him for something.
  - d. If you still have time, hum a song about Jesus.
  - e. When you hear the timer, make the sign of the cross and say, "Amen."
6. Leave the rest up to God.

- Eventually the 3 minutes can be extended to 5, then 7, sometimes even for 10 or 15. Based on your family schedule this can happen in the morning or before bed. You can aim for every day, but several days a week is fine too.

As children get older, they may want to write in a prayer journal or read from a Bible. If your family has several different picture Bibles or even adult Bibles, you can make those available. Let the children choose one to take to their prayer spot, if they want.

I've attached a page of bookmarks with the prayer format for children. You can cut these apart and give one to each of your children when you have family prayer time to remind them of the steps. They can be copied onto card stock or laminated to make them last longer. There is also a larger size that you can put on your refrigerator or family bulletin board.

If you give this a try and have some successes to report, that would be so encouraging to all of us. If you have other ideas or suggestions, let me know. I'd love your feedback to pass along to other families in the parish.

Even though it's harder for us to be in the same space these days, we are still in this together as members of our parish community and of the body of Christ.