As catechetical leaders, we want to do all we can to lead children/youth and adults to a deepening of their prayer lives. Listed here are 52 ways to pray (there are, of course, many, many more). Why not try a different one each week? Different children (and adults) will lean toward different ways of praying. By providing people with varied and rich experiences of many different ways of praying, we can help them discover those forms which best help them to come closer to God and God’s family in the intimate encounter of prayer.

1. **Doodle-Your-Feelings Prayer.** Provide children/youth with paints, magic markers, colored chalk, or crayons to interpret for themselves the words as you lead them in prayer. This type of prayer can be used to express feelings about a variety of themes. Try this for starters: “God who loves us, you have given us so many people to love. This is how I feel when I think of my family... This is how I feel when I remember my friends...”

2. **Sing the Responsorial Psalm from Sunday’s Mass.** The Psalms are the most powerful prayers of our Judeo-Christian heritage. Many are songs of praise to God. Others are prayers of thanksgiving, prayers asking forgiveness, prayers said in times of danger. At each Sunday liturgy, we sing a psalm in response to the first reading. So why not draw on that source for prayer? Sing the refrain of the Sunday psalm as a mantra for your group throughout the week. Sing it often.

3. **General Intercessions.** Have the children/youth model their petitions on the format of those we pray together at the liturgy: prayers for the needs of the Church; prayers for public authorities and the salvation of the world; prayers for those oppressed by any need; prayers for the local community.

4. **Litanies.** Among the Church’s traditional prayers are many beautiful litanies, e.g., the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, the Litany of St. Joseph, the Litany of the Saints. These can be found in numerous prayer books. Children/youth can also compose their own.

5. **Signing of the Senses.** This blessing prayer can be found in The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. It would make an ideal prayer when the catechist has invited the parents to join the group for a closing prayer service.

6. **Music.** Use music for quiet, reflective listening. Play as background for meditation. Play during a prayer service; put your original prayer to music.

7. **Scriptural Reflection.** After hearing the Word proclaimed, take time for each person to reflect and then share their reflections with others. Ask: What did Jesus want me to hear today in this reading?

8. **Journals.** For many children/youth, writing can be a calming, prayerful experience. Provide times for journaling. At times, the catechist can suggest the topic. Example: Write about a time you felt God’s forgiveness. At other times quiet moments can be provided so that children/youth can compose their own prayer thoughts.

9. **The Jesus Prayer.** This ancient Christian contemplative prayer consists of short phrases from Scripture prayed over and over again in order to quiet down and become more and more aware of God’s presence. The most popular phrase is “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”
10. **The Prayer Bag.** Make a prayer bag by filling a bag with pictures, words, and small objects that are likely to help children think of ideas and things they might want to pray about. Invite each child to pull three items from the bag. Encourage children to write a prayer using all three objects.

11. **Rites Of Forgiveness.** Celebrate the gift of God’s forgiveness frequently in prayer together. See especially Rite IV of the Revised Rite of Penance, a nonsacramental celebration of penance.

12. **Liturgical Prayer.** Invite children/youth to compose prayers which follow the format of our liturgical prayer.
   - greeting (loving and gracious God...)
   - remembering (as you promised...)
   - request (please teach us...)
   - praise (we pray with confidence because of your goodness...)

13. **Newspaper Prayers (1).** Encourage children/youth to bring articles from the newspaper about people and events which need prayer. (This will broaden their scope of concern beyond themselves.) Include these needs in your daily prayer.

14. **Newspaper Prayers (2).** Invite the children/youth to pretend to be a person who is currently in the news. Write a prayer (thanksgiving, praise, sorrow, or petition) which that person might pray.

15. **Photo Prayer.** Invite children to bring a photo (or draw a picture) of someone for whom they want to pray. As they hold the picture in their hands, invite them to feel Christ’s strength, peace, and love surrounding that person. Have them spend a few moments speaking to God about that person.

16. **Prayers from the Sacramentary.** Gather prayers from the Sacramentary, the book of liturgical prayers used by the priest at Mass. Type the prayers you choose on cards, one prayer for each person, putting her/his name into the prayer. Put the cards in a basket. Have each child pull a card from the basket. He or she is to pray the prayer on the card for the person whose name is included in the prayer during the following week. Example: “God, our Creator, may the work and studies of (Tim) bring him growth in this life and help him extend the Kingdom of Christ in our world. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

17. **Alphabet Prayer.** Invite the group to work together on a thanksgiving prayer which names something for each letter of the alphabet. To enhance it, they could also use an adjective beginning with the same letter. Example: Lord, we thank you for adventurous aardvarks, boisterous bears, etc.

18. **Add-on Prayer.** The catechist begins the prayer and each child adds a line, such as: “Loving God, we know you care for us and watch over us. We want to tell you our worries, because we know you always help us. My worry is that my grandpa will die.” (Each child adds on a prayer.) The theme for the prayer might come from something youngsters have been studying so that it will be something they have been thinking about.

19. **Rewrite Prayers.** Use some of our Scriptural prayers or formal prayers and invite the children to rewrite them in their own words. You might do this with Psalm 23, the Magnificat, or the Our Father.

20. **Picture Praying.** Show the children a picture (from a magazine, an art piece, a newspaper, etc.). Invite them to reflect on it with questions such as these: What is happening? What is the feeling? What does it remind you of in your own life? What does it tell you about God? Invite children to write a prayer using the thoughts and feelings that were evoked by the picture.
21. **Meditation.** This is a favorite prayer form today in which we quiet the body and mind and open our hearts to God’s Spirit. There are many ways to help children/youth focus their attention during this quiet prayer. One helpful technique is to suggest that children visualize being with Jesus. Invite them to talk with him and/or listen to Jesus’ words to them.

22. **Prayer with Gestures.** This week teach children gestures for each of the prayers you pray together; or invite them to make up their own. Gestures intensify our involvement with our prayer.

23. **Turnabout Prayers.** These prayers have two parts: a) thanking God for a blessing God has given, and b) asking God to help us remember and care for people who do not have what we have. Example: Thank you, Lord, for all the great tasting, healthful food we have at our house. When I eat, help me to remember those who don’t have all the food they need.

24. **Eucharistic Prayers.** The prayers of our Eucharistic liturgy are rich. Choose any of the following short prayers: The Gloria; the acclamation (Holy, holy, holy Lord, etc.); the mystery of faith (Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again); the Grand Doxology (Through him, with him, in him, etc.)

25. **Guided Scripture Meditations.** Invite participants to become part of a Scripture story. Example: In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the children/youth could imagine themselves as the prodigal, looking at events and expressing their thoughts from his point of view.

26. **Stations of the Cross (1).** This traditional prayer form is an important Lenten prayer. Pray the prayer using one of the many booklets available for children/youth.

27. **Stations of the Cross (2).** Invite children to write and/or draw their own prayers and meditations for the Stations of the Cross.

28. **Stations of the Cross (3).** Invite the children to write a modern-day version of the Stations. Where are people experiencing suffering today?

29. **Pray with incense.** Remind the children that the sweet smell of incense helps us remember that prayer time is a unique part of our day. The Psalms tell us that our prayers rise like incense to God. (Be sure to check that no one in the group has an allergy to incense. Also, incense can cause breathing difficulties for people with asthma.)

30. **Prayer Cards.** Have each child make a card about himself/herself. Invite children to include on their card a situation for which they are praying. Devise a way for children to exchange cards so that each has the card of another person. The idea is for each child to pray for the person whose card he/she receives.

31. **Blessings (1).** The prayer of blessing has always had a unique place within our tradition. As your group session ends, send your children home with a blessing. You might choose to use holy water or trace the Sign of the Cross on their foreheads.

32. **Blessings (2).** Before beginning your session together, invite one of the youngsters to pray a prayer of blessing for your time together.

33. **Blessings (3).** Help the children/youth write a blessing prayer for their families. Have them carefully letter and decorate the blessing so that it can be hung in their homes.
34. Blessings (4). During a lesson on reaching out and making a difference in our world, invite the children/youth to bless each other’s hands with holy water.

35. Blessings (5). At times use oil in your blessings because it is a powerful symbol for strength, healing, and comfort.

36. Centering Prayer. This very ancient prayer form calls for us to rest in God’s presence and attempt to be as quiet and still as we can. Lead the children through a relaxation exercise and invite them to clear their minds. If any thoughts, images, ideas, or concerns come to mind, advise them to let these things float out of their minds as clouds float across the sky. Each child might choose a word to focus on (Jesus, peace, and the like) whenever any unsettling thought tries to push into their consciousness.

37. Prayer Box. Invite the children to make a prayer box for their family dinner table. Inside they might place copies of some of our Church’s formal prayers, prayers from various books of prayer, as well as prayers written by the children themselves. In pulling out a different prayer each evening, families will be using a variety of prayers.

38. Traditional Prayers. Take extra time to pray some of the formal prayers of our faith, praying each one slowly and thoughtfully line by line.

39. Pocket Prayer. Soldiers used to sew a copy of the words of Psalm 91 (“You are my fortress,/my place of safety;/you are my God,/and I trust you.” CEV) inside their uniforms. This text was believed to be a protection against bullets. Ask the children what prayer they would like to keep in their pockets to protect and guide them throughout the day. Invite them to write it and keep it in their pockets.

40. Prayer Tour. Take a field trip. Stop at different locations to pray for different issues, people, and situations. Examples:
- Local schools: Pray for friends, teachers, and administrators.
- Police department: Pray for the safety and peace of the neighborhood.
- Hospital or convalescent home: Pray for the needs of the sick and elderly.
- Funeral home: Pray for families who are grieving.

41. Affirming Prayers. Pray about the here and now in a positive way, affirming the fact that something good is happening right now, in the present. Examples: “God loves me and helps me.” “Jesus is with me in all I do, helping me find a way to get through.”

42. Prayer from Around the World. Invite the children to learn about and then borrow some prayer customs from other cultures: Moslems stop to pray six times a day. Some Eastern religions put emphasis on body posture and breath control (yoga). Psalm prayers of the Hebrews are chanted.

43. Enthroning the Bible. Begin your session together with an enthronement of the sacred Scriptures. Involve everyone in the procession as you move into your meeting place. One person carries the Bible. As the children reach the table, they might form a line on each side of it. The Bible bearer, who is last in procession, reverently places the book in its place while everyone sings an appropriate hymn. Participants may show reverence for the Scriptures before leaving the table by making the Sign of the Cross on the open Scriptures, or by bowing before the Bible.

44. Journal Writing with Scripture. Display a short verse from Scripture. Invite your young people to sit in silence and listen as you reverently read the verse. When they are ready, they can begin a letter to Jesus in their journals about their thoughts that spring from this Scripture passage.
45. **Thanksgiving Journal.** Giving thanks is (or should be) our primary way of praying to God. Purchase or make a beautiful journal for the whole group to write in. Periodically, as a group, brainstorm things for which to say “thank you” to God. Have your young people take turns writing about or drawing pictures of the things for which the group is thankful.

46. **Pray the Creed.** The Creed is a prayer that sums up what we believe as Catholics. Pray one or both of our Creeds, the Nicene Creed or the Apostles’ Creed. Invite young people to write what they believe as Catholics in their own words.

47. **Prayer Pilgrimage.** Take a walk to a nearby chapel, grotto, outdoor shrine, your parish church, or a special prayer room. Suggest to the children/youth a topic for reflection as they walk.

48. **Collect Mealtime Prayers.** Grace before meals is a favorite way to pray for most families. Research and compile into a booklet mealtime prayers from different cultures, traditions, people, and places. Make a copy of the booklet for each family in your program.

49. **Acts of Faith, Hope, and Love.** Pray the Church’s traditional Acts of Faith, Hope, and Love. Then invite the children to write their own versions of these prayers.

50. **Reaching Out.** Invite your children/youth to participate in your parish food drive. In addition to earning the money to purchase food, have them write a prayer of blessing and tape it to each can, box, or package of food. (These gifts can be part of the Presentation of Gifts during the liturgy.)

51. **Pondering Prayers.** Encourage the children/youth to choose one word, one phrase, or one line from Sunday’s Gospel. Give them quiet time to mull the word and its meaning for them in their minds and hearts.

52. **Pray with Our Rituals.** Share the Sign of Peace; renew baptismal promises; go through the Book of Rites and find short blessings and prayers for the celebration of the various sacraments. Examples: “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His mercy endures forever.” (From the Rite of Penance); “God our Father, you sent your Holy Spirit upon the apostles, and through them and their successors, you give the Spirit to your People.” (From the Rite of Confirmation).

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**Source:** CATECHIST Magazine, September 2001

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