

# 15 WAYS TO TEACH CHILDREN TO PRAY

by Nancy Flanders

**T**HE SINGLE MOST POWERFUL THING CATHOLIC PARENTS CAN DO FOR THEIR CHILDREN IS TEACH THEM TO PRAY. As catechists, we can also teach children how to have a close relationship with God. There are a variety of ways to teach your students to pray. No matter what age your learners are, it's never too late. Here are some ideas to use in the classroom, as well as ideas for the students to practice at home:

**1 Introduce common prayers**  
Start with a simple prayer like the Our Father and focus on just that one prayer for a couple of weeks. This prayer specifically teaches us how to show respect, request our daily needs, and ask for forgiveness and protection.

**2 Teach gratitude**  
Jared Dees, catechetical minister, says, "At dinnertime, have parents ask kids to share one thing they are thank-

ful for to help them develop a spirit of gratitude."

**3 Teach your children to listen**  
Teach children how to be still and recognize God's answers to their prayers. This involves follow-up. If a child prays for something, make sure you talk about whether or not she gets what she prayed for. If she does, teach her to say a prayer of thanks. If she doesn't, talk about how that can be an answer to her prayer, too.

**4 Read the Bible together**  
Sister Regina Cochran, F.S.E., says, "Reading the Bible is important, and not just a children's Bible." (She reminds us that there are, of course, certain sections, especially in the Old Testament, that are not story-time material.) She says, "Read from God's inspired Word—especially the stories we all grew up with, such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jonah, etc. These are

exciting to children. Children's Bibles are good for children to read on their own. However, reading pure Scripture to children can make a deeper impact."

**5 Encourage children to keep a prayer journal**  
In it, your students can write down their favorite prayers, draw pictures of themselves talking to God, or illustrate the gifts God has given them for which they are thankful.

**6 Teach obedience**  
Teach children to pray not only for what they want God to do for them, but what God wants *them* to do. This mentality will stay with them through life as they pray for guidance during tough times and when making big decisions.

**7 Teach the five-finger method**  
This approach to prayer may help your students become comfortable

with praying. It includes five steps: give praise, give thanks, make a request for another person, ask for forgiveness, and make a request for yourself.

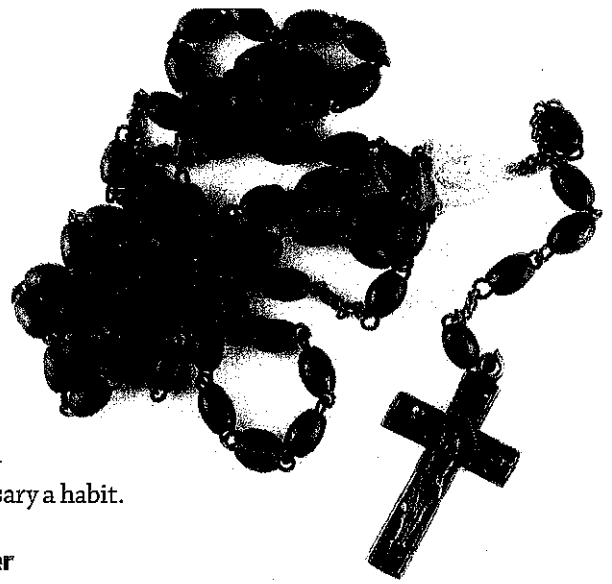
**8 Read** Keep a variety of Catholic books in the classroom and read them together, or just allow your students to explore the books on their own.

**9 Sing** Teach prayer through song. Dees advises parents and catechists to use music with hand motions. Younger children love this, and older kids will come out of their shells. “Praying with praise,” he explains, “will get children more involved and using their voices and bodies for the purpose of praising God.”



**10 Teach the Sign of the Cross** Be sure to incorporate the Sign of the Cross into each prayer you say together, and take the time to teach it correctly. Father Michael Schmitz, chaplain for the University of Minnesota-Duluth Catholic Campus Ministry, says the Sign of the Cross is vital even for young children. He has observed that when many Catholics die, the last gesture they make is to cross themselves. Their very last act on earth is to make the Sign of the Cross, because, according to Father Mike, it has been such a part of their lives as far back as they can remember, beginning with their parents.

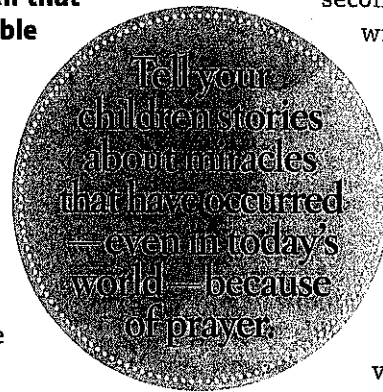
**11 Pray the Rosary** Dees believes it is important to teach the Rosary even to very young children. It may not be possible to pray the entire Rosary in class, but even just a decade can help your students make praying the Rosary a habit.



**12 Create a class prayer** Let your children compose the words to a daily prayer you can say together. This will help them to see that prayers can be in traditional forms (The Lord’s Prayer) or in one’s own words.

**13 Teach your children that nothing is impossible with God**

Let your students know that, even when a dream or a goal seems impossible to reach, with God it isn’t. Tell your children stories about miracles that have occurred—even in today’s world—because of prayer.



us that what is most important is that parents play an active role in praying with and in front of their children. If a child sees their mother and father on their knees, it will take only seconds and he or she will be there with them.”

Prayer is a daily part of our lives and should be for our students, as well. Dees’ last piece of advice is, “Don’t get stuck in the basics.

**14 Read about the saints** Sister Regina says that discussing the saints with your students and reading stories about them can help your children desire a closeness with God while learning about the power of prayer through real-life examples of remarkable lives.

**15 Encourage families to pray together** Father Patrick Peyton always taught, “The family that prays together, stays together”—and this is not a cliché. Sister Regina says, “Experience tells

We tend to sell kids short on how capable they are of praying.” Once you know which methods of prayer will work best with your students and for your class as a unit, stick with them. ▼

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Print out copies of morning prayer, grace before meals, and a prayer before going to bed so your students can pray at home more regularly (see next page).