

The Gift of Prayer



Child-Led Prayer at SJB



Why is prayer important?

"You need to speak to God to make your bond better" (Y4)

"Prayer is important because it helps me achieve my goals" (y6)

"It is important because it's a peaceful time of day where you can tell God what you may be worried, sad or excited about" (Y6)

"I know I can tell God anything" (Y4)

"It follows us closer to God" (Y2)

"If you don't say a prayer you might not be a good person" (Y1)

"The key that opens the door to faith is prayer" (Pope Francis)



At St John the Baptist, as a Catholic school, all children are supported in developing a close relationship with God, knowing that they are always loved and that He is always with them. Each child has uniqueness to be celebrated and developed. Using our talents and always trying to do our best links to our school mission statement. High teacher expectations and challenging RE lessons stimulate deep exploration and reflective thinking about the life of Jesus and the history of the people of God. Developing an independence in, and ownership of, class worship from an early age supports children to become their own architect in building their prayer relationship and thus their friendship with God. Children at SJB become aware of their own responsibility as stewards and how they can each make a positive difference to the world and indeed have a responsibility to do so. This awareness is strengthened by our focus on Gospel values and Catholic Social Teaching so that we can all become mini disciples of the Good News.

"You, mother, father! Teach your children how to pray, how to make the sign of the cross!" (Pope Francis)

As teachers and adults in loco parentis we have a responsibility to model prayer but more than this, we have a key role in enabling our children to develop independence in *leading* prayer. The Pope advises that prayer cannot be reduced to an hour on Sundays but suggests that a daily relationship with the Lord should be sought. Prayer at SJB permeates the fabric of daily school life and sets many of our rhythms for each day. We pray as a school family and as a class family. The Pope urges each family to 'rediscover family prayer' which helps to bring about 'mutual understanding and forgiveness'. Our children have a central role in our family and so should they in leading our prayers.

In taking a lead role in our prayer life children will rapidly develop ownership of, feel more comfortable with and confident in prayer and thus in their relationship with God. In this way and through this familiarity prayer will become second nature to them. They will have developed skills for a lifetime of prayer and this crucial practice will become as natural to them as breathing in and out.



"Breathing is made up of two stages, inhaling (intake) and exhaling (letting out). The spiritual life is fed, nourished, by prayer and is expressed outwardly through mission: inhaling and exhaling. When we inhale, by prayer, we receive the fresh air of the Holy Spirit" (Pope Francis)

We need to be careful however that as familiar as prayer becomes it does not become a habit that requires no thought, an activity that is almost automatic with no concentrated focus. Prayer needs to mean something.

"The Lord tells us: 'the first task in life is this: prayer.' But not the prayer of words, like a parrot; but the prayer of the heart: gazing on the Lord, hearing the Lord, asking the Lord," (Pope Francis).

When children take the lead in prayer it instantly becomes more meaningful to them. Inviting and supporting children from a young age to contribute their own personal petitions for prayer adds to this meaning. Our 'living' prayer tables with space for the children to represent their own petitions, lend a great personal meaning to our shared prayer. This encourages children to seek out the Lord in prayer when they face challenging times in their lives because no matter what they face in life God is the one constant who will always be with them and will never abandon them. Truly knowing this enables children to bring their problems to Him.

"Prayer helps me because it helps me not to be worried but I still get worried sometimes" (Y4)

"Praying takes away my nightmares" (Y4) "It makes me feel happy" (Y1)

"When I worry it helps me" (Y4) "We can tell our worries to God" (Y4)

"You can speak to God and tell Him your worries" (Y4)

"I can give my worries to God" (Y4) "For me it helps so you keep calm" (Y2)

"It helps you to calm yourself and ask for help" (Y4)

"Jesus is always with me so I can get out of my problems" (Y4)

"Cast you cares on Him for He has care of you" (1 Peter 5:7)

As the Pope further explains, prayer in the face of a problem, a difficult situation, a calamity, "is opening the door to the Lord so that He will come." Through developing this independence in and a familiarity with prayer in this way we are giving our children a life long gift, something they can rely on and seek comfort in when experiencing tough times whilst in our care and long beyond. It is a gift for their future a precious gift that our Year 6 children take with them out into the world, nurturing them and supporting their emotional and spiritual growth. So that in the face of 'wounds that hurt them and could otherwise lead to a hardness of heart' our children can 'dive into the sea of prayer, the sea of the boundless love of God to experience His tenderness' (Pope Francis).

"It helps me calm down and do hard stuff" (Y4)

At SJB our children are encouraged to develop a wider view of the world, this is evident in the many charities we support and the languages we welcome, celebrate and speak. We consider and explore other faiths and places of worship and make links between religious artifacts, beliefs and practices including prayer. This wider view is also evident in our commitment to the principles of Catholic Social Teaching and particularly in encouraging children to take very seriously their role as stewards of God's creation. It is through this stewardship that our children can realise their responsibility to make their little corner of the world a better place by seeking and using their talents and discerning their vocations. Pope Francis describes vocations as hearing a voice from a friend calling us, that friend is Jesus and the vocation is a perfect fit for just us. Each one of our children is unique and has their own set of unique talents, skills and abilities that they bring to our world and their own vocations to fulfil. Prayer is paramount in allowing children to discern their vocations and thus enabling them to live out their calling to social justice as stewards of creation, to make the world a better place.

"Vocations are born in prayer and from prayer and only in prayer can they persevere and bear fruit." (Pope Francis)

There are many interpretations of prayer and many ways we can pray. Prayer life is essential to the Christian life it is "a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God." (Catechism, 2558) Indeed without prayer, we are shutting

the door to God and our faith will suffer (*Catechism*, 2744). Prayer does not need to be complicated or challenging. We can find God in all the tasks of daily life, prayer can be a focus on doing small things with great love (St Therese of Lisieux) or in other words 'doing ordinary things with extraordinary love' (Jean Vanier). Prayer can therefore be simple and this simplicity should not be lost in unnecessary complications. Jesus himself held children up as an example of such clarity and honesty, unbounded and unburdened by social constructs or the details of 'rules' (Mark 10:13-16). As Saint Therese of Lisieux explains, '*For me prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven*' Indeed, '*it is possible to offer prayer even while walking in public, strolling alone, in a shop or even while cooking*' (St John Chrysostom)

When fostering independence in children to promote child-led prayer it can be helpful to consider prayer in a more structured way, however the spontaneity and simplicity of prayer should not be obscured. Important elements of prayer include perseverance, humility and faith. An attitude of *humility* and basic *faith* looks with confidence to God as the only source that can fulfill our needs and desires.

"Because
I can be
saved
from sin
by God if
I ask
Him" (Y4)

Compare the attitudes of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Jesus's parable from Luke's Gospel (Luke 18:9-14). The Pharisee is one of those who "trusted in themselves... and despised others." He lacked humility and really talks to himself rather than God. He loves himself, but not God or neighbour. His prayer is not true prayer — hence, Jesus says he is not 'justified'. In contrast, the tax collector's prayer is rooted in the humility of knowing he's done wrong, and in faith he looks to God's mercy: "*God, be merciful to me a sinner!*"

Perseverance is also necessary for learning how to pray. It shows our commitment to loving God even if we don't feel any particular benefit. Without perseverance, we won't keep praying. Through helping children build and develop their faith, humility, perseverance and trust in God, we foster independence in their relationship with God, so enabling them to more fully open up the gift of prayer.

"Prayer is a spiritual journey between me and God as you pray the more you tighten your bond with Him and you talk to Him" (Y4)

"I pray to God because I can spend a nice time just me and him" (Y4)

"I pray to God because my Grandma is sick and works hard" (Y4)

"I pray to God for the courage I need" (Y4) "I know I can tell God anything" (Y4)

"If you pray your life gets better and better" (Y2) "It helps me calm down and do hard stuff" (Y4)

"It helps to tell someone when you can't tell anyone else" (Y6)



Pupil Led and Pupil Expectations			School/Adult planned liturgies and prayers – different sized groups	Resources
Year Group	Prayer and Celebration of the Word (Class based)	Liturgies/Masses (Wider group based)		
Early Years	<p>By Advent all children should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead the sign of the cross and any prayer the school regularly uses at the start of worship, e.g. the school prayer, welcome prayer. • Join in the set morning, lunchtime and end of the day prayers. • Help in the setting up of the prayer focal point. <p>By the end of the Summer term all children should have the opportunity to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be involved in an aspect of class prayer e.g. passing around a symbol or prayer focus. • Plan and set up the focal point for worship according to liturgical season/RE topic guided by an adult. • Join in saying Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be – led by an adult. • Evaluate prayer times as a class, on the proporma guided by an adult. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children know the routine(s) for gathering. • As a class, plan a liturgy for Easter (or other key liturgical celebration) with children suggesting prayers and focal point with adult support. • Evaluate liturgies as a class, recorded by an adult on the proporma. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff model reverence and school agreed “postures” and lead responses/prayers/singing e.g. during prayer – hands together/out-stretched. • Build to 30 secs silent reflection – children could be involved by ringing a bell as a signal to start. • Encourage opportunities for spontaneous prayer. • Pupils contribute to Class spiritual journey book or prayer baskets. • Whole school prayer and liturgies throughout the year e.g. Remembrance, Harvest, Advent and Lent penitential liturgies, Holyday Masses and Liturgies, Ash Wednesday, beginning and end of year. 	<p>Prayer box of cloths, Bible, Candle, artefacts that is added to during the year.</p> <p>Proporma for evaluating liturgies.</p> <p>Record pupil involvement in planning and preparing liturgies through photos.</p> <p>Home link e.g. prayer bag, travelling nativity.</p>
Pupil Led and Pupil Expectations			School/Adult planned liturgies and prayers – different sized groups	Resources
Year Group	Prayer and Celebration of the Word (Class based)	Liturgies/Masses (Wider group based)		
Years 1 and 2	<p>Children can</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan and prepare focal point for worship according to liturgical season/RE topic initially guided by an adult. • Generate their own way of gathering to begin the liturgy. • Lead the welcome including the Sign of the Cross and The Lord be with you... with children responding appropriately. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By Summer 2, Yr1 with support from an adult plan a class liturgy – choosing scripture and music with adults identifying theme. • Evaluate liturgies as a class, recorded by an adult on the proporma 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build to 1-2 minutes guided meditation and silent reflection. • Encourage opportunities for spontaneous prayer beyond planned liturgy times. • Pupils contribute to Class spiritual journey book or prayer baskets. • Whole school prayer and liturgies throughout the year eg Remembrance, Harvest, Advent and Lent penitential 	<p>Prayer resources to include cloths, Bibles, prayer stones, relevant artefacts.</p> <p>Prompt card with welcome “The Lord be with you” and “In your spirit”</p> <p>Beginning/End of scripture.</p> <p>Proporma for planning evaluating liturgies.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond with spontaneous prayer (e.g. prayer pebbles) relevant to the theme of the liturgy. • Lead Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be, morning, lunch and end of the day prayers. • Bow their head at the name of Jesus and Mary • Participate in saying traditional beginning and end for readings and scripture. • Evaluate liturgies as a class, on the proforma guided by an adult. 		liturgies, Holyday Masses and Liturgies, Ash Wednesday, beginning and end of year.	
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Year Group	Prayer and Celebration of the Word (Class based)	Liturgies/Masses (Wider group based)	Resources	
Years 3 and 4	<p>Children can</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the class prayer space is liturgical correct • Independently generate their own way of gathering to begin the worship and liturgy, including the welcome. • Lead traditional beginning and end for readings and scripture • Lead Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be, School Prayer, morning, lunch and end of the day prayers. • Bow their head at the name of Jesus and Mary, and the consecration • Guided by adult, plan and lead class prayer and worship including choosing scripture relevant to the liturgical year, a response to the scripture (explanation and links made to scripture), their own mission/going out for children to complete 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guided by adult, plan and lead wider school liturgies including choosing scripture relevant to the liturgical year, a response to the scripture (explanation and links made to scripture) their own mission/going out for children to complete the liturgy. E.g. link to CST, appropriate music and focal point • Work with Parish Priest/ RE leader/ headteacher/class teacher to reflect on the theme and readings of class/phase Masses and write Introduction and Prayers of Intercession relevant to the theme. • Participate in prayers linked to sacramental preparation e.g. Act of Contrition; Eucharistic Prayer; Gloria or liturgical season e.g. The Rosary, Stations of the Cross. • Genuflect when they enter/leave the church – end of pew. • Bow in front of the altar. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rosary – October and May • Stations of the Cross • 5 minutes guided meditation – children could be involved by ringing a bell as a signal to start. • Encourage opportunities for spontaneous prayer beyond planned liturgy times – as part of the liturgy, response to joyful or sorrowful events (personal or wider community). • Pupils contribute to Class spiritual journey book or prayer baskets. • Join Parish Mass once per term. • Support sacramental preparation e.g. First Holy Communion, Act of Contrition; Eucharistic Prayer; Gloria. • Whole school prayer and liturgies throughout the year e.g., Remembrance, Harvest, Advent and Lent penitential liturgies, Holyday Masses and Liturgies, Ash Wednesday beginning and end of year, Phase Mass • Pupils are given opportunities to use their gifts to enhance the prayer and liturgies of the school 	<p>Prayer resources to include cloths, Bibles, prayer stones, relevant artefacts. Prompt card with welcome “The Lord be with you” and “In your spirit” Beginning/End of scripture.</p> <p>Proforma for planning evaluating liturgies.</p>

	<p>the liturgy e.g. link to Catholic social teaching, appropriate music and focal point.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate liturgies as a group and class, on the proforma guided by an adult. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate liturgies as a group and class, on the proforma guided by an adult. 		
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Year Group	Prayer and Celebration of the Word (Class based)	Liturgies/Masses (Wider group based)		
Years 5 and 6	<p>Children can</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan and lead class prayer and worship including generating how they gather, choosing the form of the worship, the theme and appropriate scripture relevant to the liturgical year or to current events (school, local or world-wide), a response to the scripture (explanation and links made to scripture), quiet reflection time, key going forth message/ mission, (e.g. link to Catholic social teaching action), appropriate music and focal point. Plan and lead guided meditation. Lead Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be, the morning, lunch and end of the day prayers Bow their head at the name of Jesus and Mary, and the consecration Evaluate liturgies as a group and class, giving reasons for their response and recommendations on the proforma – both guided by an adult and independently. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participate and respond appropriately during Mass Genuflect when they enter the church – end of pew Bow in front of the altar Plan and lead liturgies and worship beyond their own class or phase which reflect the liturgical season, e.g. Advent and Lent Prayer Stations within Penitential liturgies, Remembrance Service Train younger children to plan and lead prayer and liturgies. Plan whole school Masses and Liturgies alongside the school Chaplain and Parish Priest. Participate in traditional Catholic prayers, e.g. Eternal rest... Angelus, Hail, Holy Queen, Creed Lead traditional Catholic prayers, e.g. The Rosary, for other children. Contribute to the planning and leading of liturgical events e.g. May Procession, Corpus Christi procession, Emmaus walk, Stations/Way of the Cross, School Feast Day. Evaluate liturgies as a group and class, giving reasons for their response and recommendations on the proforma – both guided by an adult and independently. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 –15 minutes Eucharistic Adoration/Guided Meditation Stations of the Cross. Encourage opportunities for spontaneous prayer beyond planned liturgy times – as part of the liturgy, response to joyful or sorrowful events (personal or wider community). Pupils contribute to Class prayer book/prayer tree. Prayer leaders – collect and return prayer resources to the RE cupboard/store. Join Parish Mass once per term. Whole school prayer and liturgies throughout the year e.g. Remembrance, Harvest, Advent and Lent penitential liturgies, Ash Wednesday. Holyday Masses and beginning and end of year. 	<p>Prayer resources to include clothe, Bibles, prayer stones, relevant artefacts.</p> <p>Prompt card with welcome “The Lord be with you” and “In your spirit” Beginning/End of scripture</p> <p>Traditional Catholic Prayers</p> <p>Proforma for evaluating liturgies.</p> <p>Planning proforma</p>