

A photograph of a person with their hands clasped in prayer over an open book. The person is wearing a blue and white striped shirt. The background is a soft, out-of-focus outdoor setting. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent grey box in the upper half of the image.

Ten Characteristics of Prayer in a Catholic Dialogue School



Enhancing Catholic School Identity
www.ecsi.site

KU LEUVEN

These ten characteristics describe and indicate what prayer looks like in a *Dialogue School that recontextualises Catholic faith from the perspective of Post-Critical Belief*. The characteristics are not independent, but work together. They introduce relevant distinctions and nuanced understanding, by describing both what Catholic prayer is and what it is not, that help sharpen the discernment regarding prayer in Catholic schools. These characteristics describe prayer that aligns with the theological and educational views promoted by the *Enhancing Catholic School Identity (ECSI)* project and serve as a basis for dialogue about prayer in the Catholic school.

1 Prayer builds a personal relationship with God.

2 Catholic prayer refers, explicitly or implicitly, to the Catholic faith tradition.

3 Those initiated as Catholics actively participate in Catholic prayer on a voluntary basis.

4 The principle of hospitality.

5 Catholic identity in diversity.




6 Acknowledging the particularity of each religious and philosophical tradition.

7 Recontextualising prayer goes beyond (re)confessional language.

8 Room for mystery and vulnerability, and the call to responsibility.

9 Appropriately preparing for prayer.

10 Being sensitive to the quality of the act of praying. Prayer is not removed from life.

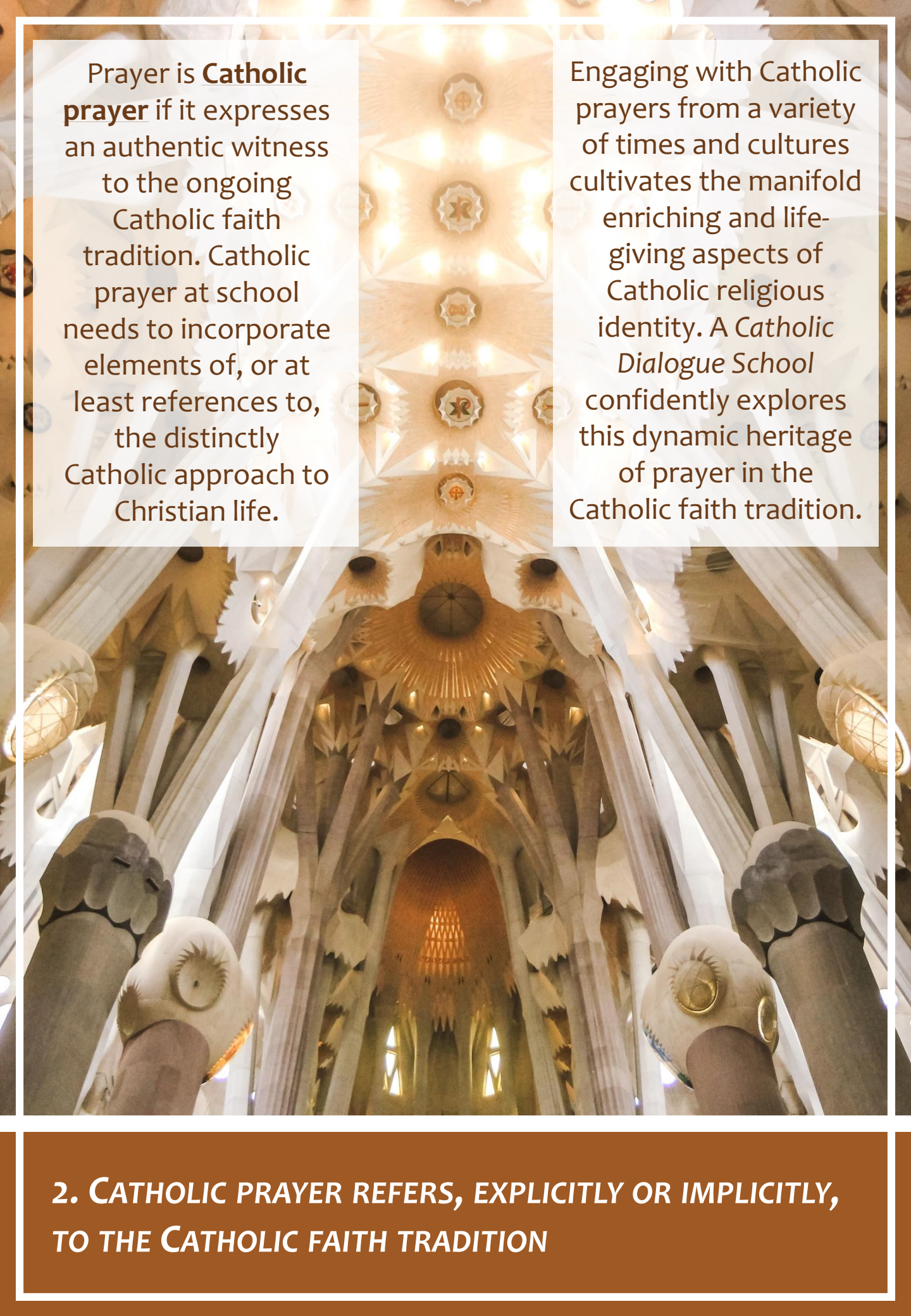


1. PRAYER BUILDS A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

In the Christian tradition prayer is **addressed to God** and expresses a **relationship** with the God of Jesus of Nazareth. Prayer opens the believer and the faith community to the possibility of a reciprocal encounter with a personal God.

From the perspective of *Post-Critical Belief*, prayer is a crucial mediation between human existence and the Divine Reality, who is revealed as a trinitarian communion of Love, and who actually 'touches' the life of those who pray.

When praying, the believer and the faith community enter a space where God is connecting, filling, establishing and unifying those things which people, in their own capacity, cannot.



Prayer is **Catholic prayer** if it expresses an authentic witness to the ongoing Catholic faith tradition. Catholic prayer at school needs to incorporate elements of, or at least references to, the distinctly Catholic approach to Christian life.

Engaging with Catholic prayers from a variety of times and cultures cultivates the manifold enriching and life-giving aspects of Catholic religious identity. A *Catholic Dialogue School* confidently explores this dynamic heritage of prayer in the Catholic faith tradition.

2. CATHOLIC PRAYER REFERS, EXPLICITLY OR IMPLICITLY, TO THE CATHOLIC FAITH TRADITION

Catholic Dialogue Schools need to respect and care for the authenticity of every person who is involved in prayer at school. **Actively participating** in Catholic prayer requires the perspective of initiated, faith-filled insiders whose 'hermeneutical spaces' (or interpretative frameworks) are furnished in a Catholic way. This includes those who aspire to become members of the Catholic faith community, and those who as members of a Catholic school desire to experience what it would be like to pray in a specifically Catholic way.



3. THOSE INITIATED AS CATHOLICS ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN CATHOLIC PRAYER ON A VOLUNTARY BASIS

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Other-believers and other-than-believers can be invited to be **respectfully present** when there is Catholic prayer at school. Since their 'hermeneutical spaces' are furnished in different ways, though, it is not possible for them to participate as if they were Catholic believers. They can **contribute**, but always from their own particular points of view. 'Imposed participation' does not exist and if it were attempted, it would not respect the authenticity of the school community members.



4. THE PRINCIPLE OF HOSPITALITY

Those of other faiths and those who are not religious are consistently invited to **be present alongside** the particular prayer culture of the *Catholic Dialogue School*.

As host of a diverse community, the Catholic school extends an open invitation to other-believers and other-than-believers in order to engage in **ecumenical and interreligious dialogue** about different views and practices of prayer and the identities of those involved in it.

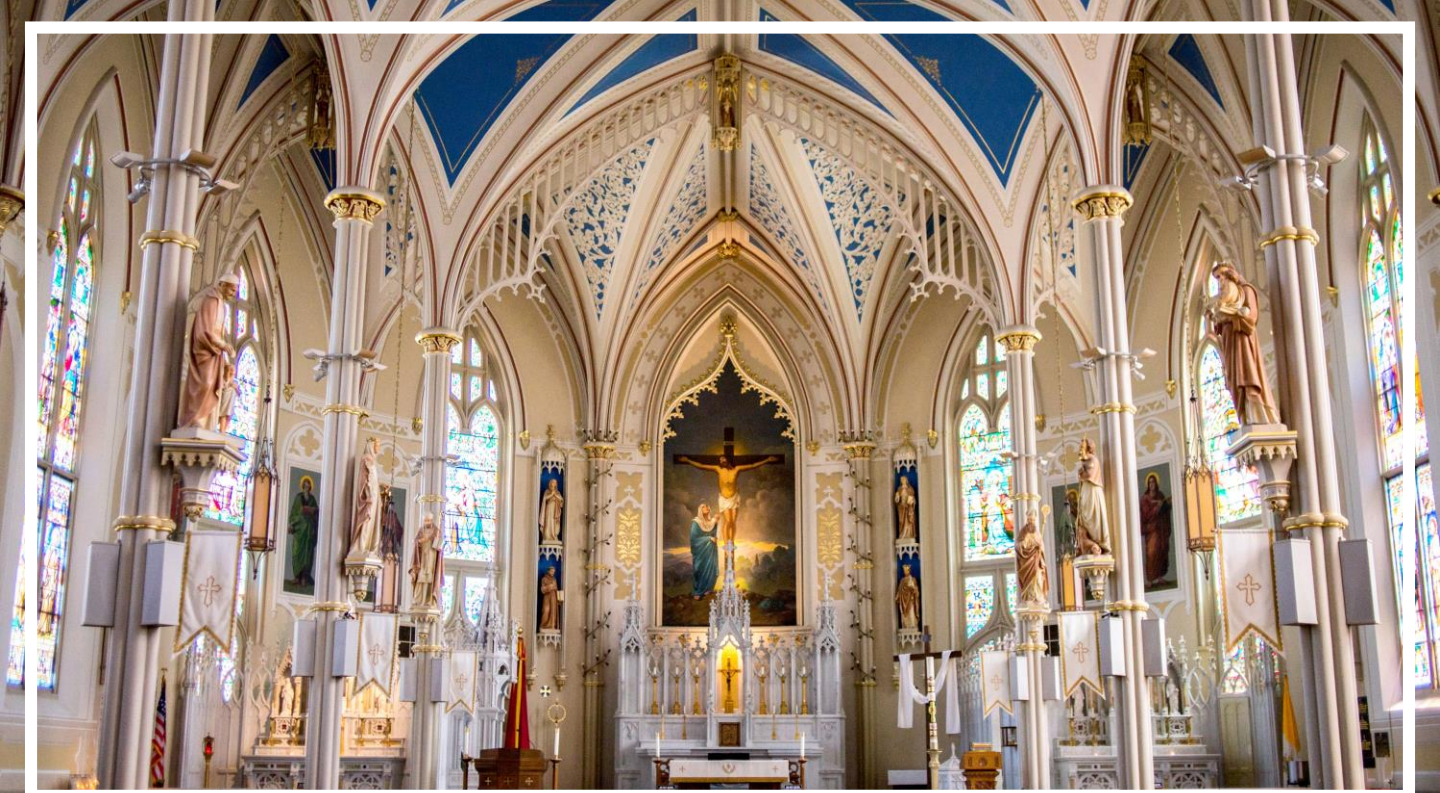
This is also an opportunity for Catholic community members to demonstrate their relationship with a personal God in prayer. In their Catholic prayer practices, they are urged to appropriately account for the presence and contribution of other-believers and other-than-believers. The Catholic prayer culture is enriched as it recognises the face of God in the others who are invited as guests.

Another way to express hospitality, if feasible, is to provide the opportunity for other-believers to pray in their own way at specific times during or after school hours, in an appropriately furnished location.

5. CATHOLIC IDENTITY IN DIVERSITY

The *Catholic Dialogue School* is open for dialogue with diversity – not only as host but also as guest. The school community gladly accepts the invitation to **be present alongside** the particular character of the prayer cultures and rituals of other-believers and other-than-believers, either on or off campus. While being respectfully present in this reciprocal encounter, the authentic Catholic witness humbly discerns God's presence and activity through the others. Such experiences can recontextualise the identity of the school members who are Catholic, enabling them to listen with new ears to the voice of God in their own faith tradition.





6. ACKNOWLEDGING THE PARTICULARITY OF EACH RELIGIOUS AND PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION

Acknowledging the particularity of every religious and philosophical tradition helps to avoid both the glossing over of differences, and the assumption that all religions have the same ultimate end. Either of these views forecloses an opportunity for dialogue.

It is important to avoid syncretism or 'multi-religiousness,' where different traditions are somehow combined, resulting in a lack of attention and respect for their particular characteristics.

Blending or confusing various religious and philosophical traditions runs the risk of extinguishing them. Instead, identifying the origins of prayer texts, practices and rituals, and putting them in their proper contexts, resists the urge to claim all we like as our own.

A considered openness towards and appreciation of differences provokes a constructive and critical awareness of one's own identity for Catholics, other-believers, and other-than-believers alike.

7. RECONTEXTUALISING PRAYER GOES BEYOND (RE)CONFESSIONAL LANGUAGE




Prayer in a Catholic Dialogue School needs to be *recontextualised*, so that it can be an authentic, meaningful and contextual expression of Catholic faith in the contemporary era.

In recontextualised prayers, elements of the Catholic faith tradition and the current context (time, culture, events, and circumstances) **interact** in such a way that there is a shift in meaning that evokes existential transformation and invites revelation. In other words, the *Five Criteria for Recontextualisation* need to be applied*.

Traditional, confessional or reconessionalising Catholic language when intentionally incorporated in recontextualising prayer practices can be very valuable as it enhances connectedness with the Catholic faith tradition.

*See the PowerPoint presentation: *ECSI Five Criteria for Recontextualisation* and the nine accompanying YouTube video's (total running time 49:18 min).



8. ROOM FOR MYSTERY AND VULNERABILITY, AND THE CALL TO RESPONSIBILITY

A sustainable faith is one that can identify God's work and presence in both positive and negative experiences. Acknowledging the good and offering praise has a counterpoint in acknowledging the difficult and seeking God's presence. More than simply acknowledging good or bad circumstances, prayer seeks to reorient one towards God. Seeking God through interruption, mystery, intrusion, fear, tragedy, unfulfilled desires, forsakenness, and other uncomfortable emotions deepens faith and builds a religious identity. Expressions of mystery and vulnerability call the faithful person to embody faith through responsible action, in the same way that the expression of gratitude and joy spills over into praise and celebration.

In a context of busyness and distraction, marked by diversity where people are at different starting points, proper preparation is important before engaging in actual prayer.

Various techniques may be used to bring people to that place where prayer might arise: whether a simple few moments of silent reflection; pausing to intentionally align body, mind and spirit; exercises that enhance concentration, focus and cultivate a deeper awareness of life; or a more focussed time of mindfulness practices, (generic) meditation, and structured self-examination.

Appropriate techniques can help to **open our 'hermeneutical space'**, in other words to discover personal motives, to expose what hinders greater awareness, to approach reality in open-minded and less biased ways, to accept and embrace all that is, and to become receptive to being touched by something new.

While such techniques cannot be seen as prayers as such, they can help prepare Catholic believers and other-believers for prayer, while other-than-believers are likely to be helped in other particular ways.



9. APPROPRIATELY PREPARING FOR PRAYER

10. BEING SENSITIVE TO THE QUALITY OF THE ACT OF PRAYING. PRAYER IS NOT REMOVED FROM LIFE



Rather than just a text, prayer is a heartfelt act. Prayer in the *Catholic Dialogue School* is carried out with earnestness, authenticity, attentiveness and a sense of humility.

Due consideration is given to how, when and where prayer activities occur. The manner and style of prayer is adapted to the age and circumstances of those participating. There is thought given to the timing of prayer in the school day so that prayer is not rushed or competing for attention among other activities. The physical space is made ready for the act of prayer, with an awareness of the setting and the content of the prayer.

Quality is apparent in the thoughtfulness, sensitivity, and adaptability of the act of praying which makes room for new meanings in new contexts.