



YEAR LEVEL	7 and 8
TITLE	Communities at Prayer
STRAND	PRAYER AND DISCERNMENT
SUGGESTED DURATION	10 weeks (25 hours)
ENDURING QUESTIONS	What is prayer? How can I nurture my spirituality?

Unit Focus

Students examine various forms of prayer used within the school and local community. Attention is drawn to the influences of other religious traditions on the choice and practice of prayer forms. Opportunity is given for the students to explore how prayer relates to, but is not bound by, a particular time and space. Students also investigate how prayer can build community.

Achievement Standards

By the end of Year 8:

Students examine various forms of prayer that have arisen from cultural and scriptural faith traditions over time.

Students engage in various forms of prayer.

Unit Outcomes

By the end of this unit students should be able to:

1. Recognise how prayer in our school/parish community nourishes and enriches our relationship with God and each other.
2. Explore examples of personal, communal and liturgical prayer from scripture and Church Tradition.
3. Understand the importance of different mediums of expression in prayer.

Key Understandings for Students

- Prayer is a response to a loving God. Prayer is also communicating honestly and openly with God about our lives.
- Prayer is for all people regardless of their age, race, beliefs, sex, class, and social status.
- Our relationship with God and each other can be developed and nourished through individual and communal prayer.

- Prayer takes place in a variety of ways including spontaneous prayer – there is no single ‘right’ way to pray.
- People pray in different ways according to their personality, stage of life, culture, religious background.
- Different forms of prayer can be learnt and developed through a regular practice. There are formal prayers which ought to be known well.
- Prayer engages the whole person. It is not just an exercise of the mind.
- Prayer requires effort and perseverance. It is not always easy to pray, but ‘the Spirit comes to help us’ (Romans 2:26-27) in discerning our choices.

Student Context

Teachers can expect Year 7 and 8 students to exhibit an increasing capacity to reflect on existing knowledge and to better understand cause and effect along with a deeper understanding of how symbols can be connected to abstract concepts. This along with the natural curiosity and enthusiasm of students commencing secondary schooling, suggests the use of a diverse range of teaching and assessment strategies that allow for individual abilities and interests. The exploration of diverse ways of praying and the culturally influenced methods of prayer should motivate students at this level.

Students will bring with them to this unit a number of both positive and negative experiences of prayer methods. Their image of God may well be a childhood one which will now be found to be inadequate. The search for a spiritual dimension to life in terms of finding meaning and space is a common adolescent experience. Usually they will be open to the use of music, chant and meditation in prayer, and will be able to name favourite places of peace and meaning. The process of investigating the presence of prayer in the school community will also serve as a way of researching the culture and tradition of the school.

It is important to acknowledge the students’ past experience, or lack thereof, of family, school and parish community, and to help them own their own experience and be able to build on it.

Theological Background for Teachers

- Prayer is communication with God and an awareness of the Creator’s powerful and loving presence. Prayer is a response to God: a basic openness to and communication with God, within a dialogue initiated by the Creator.
- Prayer can be silent or verbal, formal or informal, private or communal.
- The Gospels describe Jesus praying to God frequently. He went off to quiet, deserted places to pray before crucial events in his life and ministry.
- The origin of the word ‘*prayer*’ is to entreat or to ask. In Christian tradition the faith community has come to describe prayer as the raising of one’s heart and mind to God.
- In the Christian tradition there are many ways to pray, including participation in the worship of the Church community, joining Bible studies, local prayer groups and spiritual renewal movements, and quiet prayerful reflection alone or in communal settings with others.

- Prayers of petition ask something of God; it centres on human needs. Prayers of adoration offer praise to the Creator. Prayers of thanksgiving express gratitude, humility, and awareness of God's greatness. Prayers of contrition focus on human failures and sinfulness but also on God's ever-present offer of mercy and forgiveness to the sinful human community.
- Communal prayer is:
 - a celebration of God speaking through the Scriptures;
 - a community celebrating God's love and forgiveness.
- Communal prayer should:
 - be relevant and meaningful for the students' level of faith, and incorporate the use of symbols accessible to students of a specific age group;
 - establish a reflective atmosphere;
 - provide an opportunity for the student to come into contact with God and to experience a sense of awe and wonder;
 - enable students to reflect on the presence of God in their life experiences;
 - encourage formal and informal responses.
- In common with all religious rituals, Christian liturgy has the following characteristics: it is structured, familiar, and repetitive. It is the common action of a community assembled to experience the presence of the Divine within the ritual moment. It is the public prayer of the whole Body of Christ.
- Discernment is the art of prayerful decision making that uses specific spiritual practices. It means being aware that God wants us to make good decisions, that God will help us make good decisions.
- We are often moved by competing forces. Therefore discernment is the ability to see clearly what those forces are; to be able to identify, weigh and judge them; and finally to choose the path most in line with God's desires for you and for the world. It takes into account the richness and complexity of a person's life and—most importantly—assumes that God is active in the decision-making process.

Scripture

Mt 6:5-15 - Concerning prayer

"And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

"Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And do not bring us to the time of trial,

but rescue us from the evil one.

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Rom 8:26-27

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.

And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Major Assessment Task & Rubric

Students create a hard copy prayer journal, which reflects their understanding and knowledge of prayer. This journal will be compiled throughout the unit.

The journal should include:

- A Contents page.
- A reflection based on your interview of a family member or friend about when they pray communally.
- Your own definition of prayer.
- Group prayer Wordle.
- (If appropriate), a prayer / prayer style from another religious tradition. Explain where it comes from and how it is used.
- A response to three gospel passages outlining (i) where, when and how Jesus prayed? (ii) what these texts say to you about the meaning and purpose of prayer, ways of praying and places of prayer?
- Your recontextualised Lord's Prayer.
- A description of one of the liturgical prayers used during the Mass.
- One example of each of the six common types of prayer (Blessing; Adoration; Petition; Intercession; Thanksgiving; Praise)
- A short statement from Pope Francis teaching about prayer and why was this chosen
- A song, a photo and an artwork that speaks to you of prayer, or could be used in prayer, with a short commentary for each.
- A personal reflection on the many ways in which people can pray together.

It is expected that students and teachers will co-construct an assessment rubric for this task beginning with the below. Teachers are encouraged to assess skills and knowledge from other learning areas that may be included in this task.

	WELL ABOVE EXPECTED LEVEL	ABOVE EXPECTED LEVEL	AT EXPECTED LEVEL	BELOW EXPECTED LEVEL
KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING	Has demonstrated an excellent understanding of	Demonstrates a clear understanding of	Has demonstrated a good understanding of	Shows some understanding of some of the

	all of the elements of this assignment and their application in daily life.	the meaning and purpose of the elements of this assignment.	all elements of this assignment.	elements of this assignment.
REASONING	Insightful consideration of how individual and communal prayer nourishes and enriches our relationship with God and each other, has been demonstrated.	Sound consideration of how individual and communal prayer nourishes and enriches our relationship with God and each other, has been demonstrated.	Consideration of how individual and communal prayer nourishes and enriches our relationship with God and each other, has been demonstrated.	Limited consideration of how individual and communal prayer nourishes and enriches our relationship with God and each other, has been demonstrated.

Suggested Teaching & Learning Experiences

Focusing activity

Ask students to recall the most recent communal prayer they have experienced at school, either as a whole school community or at a year level. What was the focus of the prayer? Were the words familiar? Why/why not? What were the elements of the prayer? (singing, blessing, physical actions, symbols etc.) Why do groups at school come together to pray? Did this prayer experience speak to you? How/why?

Outcome 1: Recognise how prayer in our school/parish community nourishes and enriches our relationship with God and each other.

- Using the *think pair share* strategy, students reflect on their experience of times when people have come together as a community to pray. They consider the why and the how of these communal prayer experiences.
- Students prepare questions to present to family/friends about communal prayer experiences. Questions take into consideration the place, the time, the focus of the prayer and in some cases the frequency. Collected data is presented visually and displayed for a Gallery Walk.
- When have students seen people, for example sports people, pray? Why do they think these people are praying? Find interviews or examples of people for whom prayer is important.
- Individually, students write their definition of prayer in response to the question, '*What is prayer?*'. In triads, students share their responses and create a Wordle of their responses. Display these Wordles under the heading of '*Prayer*'.
- Students find definitions of prayer. Share and compare. Add these definitions to the class display.
- Invite the Parish Priest, or a representative of the parish (parish prayer group) into the class to speak about when and how the parish community prays. In response to what you have heard, consider the place of prayer

in human life, and how the practice and attitude of prayer can influence personal and communal relationships.

- Create a visual display to bring awareness to the community of the different times and ways the parish comes together to pray.
- Discuss the times when our school community comes together to pray in response to various issues, such as Aboriginal reconciliation, forgiveness, current issues eg. natural disasters, conflict, political upheaval, and communities touched by tragedy.
- Does the school have an official school prayer? If yes, students study the prayer, looking at the wording and the intention of the prayer. If no, in groups of three, students discuss and draft a possible official school prayer. Discuss why they think an official school prayer may be needed. When and where would this prayer be applied? Should the school patron saint (if applicable) and motto be included in the prayer?
- Where necessary, Christian prayers have been adapted in some cultural communities. Where has Christian prayer been influenced by culture? How have Aboriginal people adapted Christian prayers to their culture? e.g. the Aboriginal Our Father, Reconciliation Week Mass. What examples do we have in our parish? (e.g. message stick held up during the Gospel).
- Prayer is an act of communication by humans with the sacred or holy, found in all religions, in all times. Investigate prayer in other religious traditions present in your community. Students present their findings in a fact file.

N.B. Students complete journal entries in response to the learning experiences above.

Outcome 2: Explore examples of personal, communal and liturgical prayer from scripture and Church Tradition.

- St Paul, in his letters to various communities, emphasises the importance of prayer in our lives, to deepen our relationship with God and support us in discernment.
Read **Romans 8:26-27**. What is St Paul's understanding of prayer? Who does St Paul tell us knows our needs better than ourselves? What does St Paul mean by 'the Spirit intercedes'? How do you understand 'the Spirit'? Who are the saints in the text? (Teacher note: The 'saints' refers to members of the Christian community who lived their lives as God asks). Who are the saints in our lives?
- In Scripture, Jesus presents us with a wonderful model of prayer.
Mt 5:5-14; Mt 26:36-44; Mt 27:45-46
Mk 1:35; Mk 6:46; Mk 14:32-39
Lk 4:42; Lk 5:16; Lk 11:1-4; Lk 22:31-32; Lk 22:40-44; Lk 23:34a; Lk 23:46
Jn 17:1-9, 20.

Respond to three of the scripture passages above. Where, when and how did Jesus pray? What do these texts say to you about the meaning and purpose of prayer, ways of praying and places of prayer?

- The Lord's Prayer is a foundational prayer for Christians. Read Mt 6:5-15 (teachers refer to **Appendix 1** for detailed background to the Lord's Prayer - see also the YouCat pp 280-287). Students recontextualise the Lord's Prayer. Use "Praying the Our Father - A Journal Activity" (Teaching Resource p.7) from "Prayer Strategies - A Teacher's Manual" by Beth Nolen
<https://library.ceosand.catholic.edu.au/LBR01/#resources/searchresult>
- Students paste completed responses into their journals.
- Brainstorm the difference between personal, communal and liturgical prayer. Record student responses on

the classroom display.

- Identify the liturgical prayers in the Eucharistic celebration.
Sign of the Cross; Penitential Act; Gloria; Collect (Opening Prayer); The Creed; The Prayer of the Faithful
The Offertory; Prayer over the Offerings; Preface; Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy); The Eucharistic Prayer; The Lord's Prayer; Lamb of God; Prayer after Communion

Who says each prayer? What form does each prayer take? (e.g. in the Penitential Act we may acknowledge our sins, seek forgiveness)

- Six common types of prayer include: Blessing; Adoration; Petition; Intercession; Thanksgiving; Praise. Distinguish between the purpose of each type of prayer (see pp 112-113 of *To Know, Worship & Love – Yr7* for guidance). Choose one of these types of prayer and write your own prayer of this type. Combine with other students to collect a prayer of each of the six types and write them in your journal.
- Research some of the main prayers to God through Mary (eg Hail Mary, Memorare, Hail Holy Queen). Why do you think the Catholic Church has a special devotion to Mary?
- Find recent statements about prayer from Pope Francis, for example from his audiences or his Twitter feed. What does he say about prayer? What lessons can we learn?
- Discuss the following statements from Part Four (pp 257-287) of the YouCat (Ignatius Press, 2011) **Appendix 2**. What do these statements tell you about prayer and its importance in our lives?
- Using the YouCat Youth Prayer Book (Ignatius Press, 2013), (i) complete the "Little school of prayer" on pp 12-15; in Part Two (pp 87-167), identify the different prayer forms included there and one example of each; (iii) find one quote about prayer that you particularly like and explain why it resonates with you.

Outcome 3: Understand the importance of different mediums of expression in prayer.

- Prayer can be through a range of different mediums, such as music, photos, artworks, movement, journal writing. Students choose a song, a photo and an artwork that speaks to them of prayer, or could be used in prayer. Students place these in their journals and write a comment about each. Teachers are encouraged to use any of these examples in class prayer during the unit.
- Develop a prayer roster for the students to take turns preparing for and delivering prayer at the start of class. Encourage them to pray in different ways.
- Students design prayers using music, artworks, photos. **Refer to 'Prayer Strategies' by Beth Nolen, Chapter 7 Prayer Through Art, Chapter 9 Other Ways of Praying.**
<https://library.ceosand.catholic.edu.au/LBR01/#!resources/searchresult>
- Discuss the importance of the environment in praying within different settings. Why is the environment important? Does your school have a specific place for prayer and contemplation? In what ways is it conducive to prayer and contemplation? What other environments are conducive to prayer? e.g. outdoors. Have class prayer in one of these other places in your school.

Teacher's Box

Meditation (from Latin *meditor* = to practice or think over) is a spiritual exercise practiced in various religions and

cultures. In meditation a Christian seeks silence so as to experience intimacy with God and to find peace in God's presence. The essence of meditation is a prayerful seeking that starts with a sacred text or image and explores the will, signs and presence of God. In this way we lift our hearts to God and say that we are quite open to what God wants to say to us. Meditation techniques that promise a direct experience of God however are false - God cannot be compelled to show up by any means. (Youcat, pp275-6)

- Research a variety of meditation techniques (e.g. Christian, guided, silent). Identify those that are Christian and why. As a class, participate in different forms of meditation. Reflect afterwards on your experiences and how they made you feel.
- Make Christian Meditation a regular and ongoing practice with your class (e.g. once a week). Begin with 2/3 minute sessions; you may be able to extend this time in the weeks that follow up to a period of 10-12 minutes. Various resources exist to support you and your students including this introductory video <https://wccm.org/meditate/how-to-meditate/> (see also below).
- "Christians bring their life before God through the language of the body." Investigate the different postures Christians adopt in prayer and what each signifies (see YouCat, p268), including: standing, sitting, kneeling, prostrating oneself, folding one's hands.

Liturgical celebrations/sacramental celebrations provide opportunities for connection with the prayer life of the Church, for reflection and resonance. Such celebrations should be an integral part of every unit and should be linked to the liturgical year whenever possible.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Teacher background on the Lord's Prayer

Appendix 2: YouCat Prayer statements.

Resources

Church Teaching

"YouCat", Freedom Publishing 2011

<https://library.ceosand.catholic.edu.au/LBR01/#!/resources/searchresult>

Prayer in General

"Prayer Strategies: A Teacher's Manual" by Beth Nolen

<https://library.ceosand.catholic.edu.au/LBR01/#!/resources/searchresult>

Christian Meditation

"Coming Home: A guide to teaching Christian Meditation to Children" by Ernie Christie

<https://library.ceosand.catholic.edu.au/LBR01/#!/resources/searchresult>

"Children Love to Meditate" by Ernie Christie & Catherine Day



