

The Teacher as Catechist: Prayer Leader

Introduction

This segment is meant to help you reflect on your role as a leader of prayer during religion classes and to what that entails. Begin by reflecting or journaling on the *first question*. Then read the article “Prayer Leader” and jot down your responses to the *reflection questions*.

First Question

- How would you know if you were a good leader of prayer?

Article: Prayer Leader

As a prayer leader, your goal is not to teach, but to lead prayer, and to provide both formal and informal experiences of prayer for your group. You will notice in *Alive In Christ* that all the sessions begin and end with some kind of formal prayer. Children begin the session with the Sign of the Cross and a Psalm Prayer. At the conclusion of the session there is a prayer to be sung and a variety of different prayers including prayers of blessing, praise, thanks, intercession, and petition as well as some short celebrations of the Word. The Seasonal sessions all center on a celebration of the Word.

These formal prayer experiences call for a prayer space. Consider an area in your classroom that can remain permanent. For the prayer space, you will need a small table or desk, tablecloths or fabric in the liturgical colors: green, white, purple and red. Ordinarily have a Bible,

a candle, and a clear bowl of water on the table. Depending on the lesson, you may choose to use other symbols that will integrate with your session. For example, you might use pictures of nature if your session and prayer are centered on creation or the environment, or a statue of the Blessed Mother when you are teaching about Mary.

Even though the prayers are short, become familiar with them before the class. When you do that, you will find you can more easily enter into a spirit of prayer. Before you begin, spend a little time centering children. Don't use the Sign of the Cross as a method for quieting children. Quiet them and then pray the Sign of the Cross. At times you may choose to use quiet instrumental music for centering. Communicate with good body language. Stand erect. Use expansive hand and arm gestures and be aware of your facial expressions. Body language is as informative as the words you speak and pray.

Welcome and respect silence during prayer. It is not necessary to fill prayer time with words or song. Silence is prayer. For example, pause after you say, "Let us pray," and allow a moment of silence. Music and song are also prayer. They also play an important role in the religious formation of children. Music evokes, forms and provides a sense of the transcendent. Liturgical music gives voice to what we believe; it echoes God's Word and action in our lives and is a specific form of prayer. That does not mean that as a leader of prayer you have to lead the song if you cannot sing, but you do need to provide a way to lead children *to* sing. Use a CD as accompaniment, ask someone from the school to lead singing once in a while, or have a musically-gifted child to lead.

Besides formal prayer, there are always times for informal prayer. When a child comes to the class and shares some good news it may be a time to have the children pray a prayer of thanks or praise. When a child shares that someone close to them has died, take a minute to offer a spontaneous prayer for the person and his or her family. Unexpected natural disasters offer an opportunity for children to offer spontaneous intercessory prayers for those affected and for those who are helping people recover. As a good prayer leader, you will give children a gift that will last a lifetime.

Reflection Questions

- What do you see as an obstacle for being a prayer leader?
- What are two differences between formal and informal prayer?