

Prayer ideas and resources

Prayer can be an engaging and dynamic experience. In addition to the more traditional ways of praying together (silently or out loud, in small or large groups) we would like to offer you some alternative ways of praying that we hope will engage all ages. In addition, we have reproduced some of the prayers that are included in the 'All Age' resources for *On Our Knees Again*. Finally there are some suggestions about other sources of resource that you could use. Any of these ideas could be adapted or merged together in ways that most helpfully work within your church. Many of them were suggested for the original *On Our Knees* event, while others have been created for this event, particularly praise and thanks to God for the way in which he has heard our prayers and is answering them. Please do include this in your prayers!

Praying with all ages

✦ **Creating psalm 151**

Many of the psalms are wonderful expressions of worship that come from the heart and relate to every day experiences. Either create a psalm in advance, ask some of the children in the church to create a psalm, or create one within the service. The psalm could take several forms:

Psalm 23a – Psalm 23 took a familiar concept (that of a shepherd) and turned it into a way of reflecting on God's care and love. Think of some different people today and create a reflection on God based on their characteristics. For example, 'The Lord is my teacher', 'The Lord is my bus driver', and 'The Lord is my sports coach'.

Psalm 100a – this praise psalm has a global impact and is a call to people to praise God. What reasons could you give for people to gather together to worship God?

Psalm 148a – this psalm calls on all of God's creation to worship him. It is almost as if the psalmist is a conductor bringing the different parts of creation in to worship him as he would the different instruments and sections of an orchestra. You could ask people to let you have photos of their favourite views and animals and compile them into a PowerPoint show or print them onto acetate and use on the OHP. You could ask the children to create some actions that go with the psalm to represent the different parts of creation and get everyone to join in with them.

Psalm 150a – this psalm takes the instruments of the worship band and encourages people to use them to praise God. You could customise this to include the instruments in your worship band, or you could ask the children to make some instruments (shakers, elastic band guitars, tin lid cymbals...) and then use them in the psalm.

✦ **Psalm 8 reflection**

On the OOKA website there is a PowerPoint presentation that you can download and play alongside a reading of Psalm 8. You could offer this as a prayer of praise.

✦ **Pass the praise**

Wrap up a parcel as for pass the parcel, but in each layer have something for which we can thank God that the recipient is asked to turn into a prayer. It could be as simple as 'Thank you God for...' In the middle you could have something inviting everyone to pray the 'Lord's Prayer'.

✦ **Offering to pray for others**

In advance of 4 November, contact your local schools, pre-schools, parent and toddler groups, uniformed organisations, children's theatre groups and other groups working with children. Explain that BUGB is spending a day focusing on praying for children and ask them if there is anything for which they would appreciate prayer. After the day, contact them again and see how the prayers have been answered, and whether there is anything else for which they would like prayer. This might be the start of a relationship that grows. If the school is happy, they may have a school photo you could use so that people can visualise the children for whom they are praying.

Of course you could do the same for all the church groups!

✦ **Mapping prayer**

Get hold of a street map of your community and mark on it places where children gather or attend (eg play areas, schools, etc). Get people to mark on it where they live and then to 'adopt' one of the areas nearest to them. Ask them to visualise some of the children who go to those places and pray God's blessing and protection on them.

✦ **Sweet prayers**

Almost all children love sweets, so as a symbol of God's love for children give everyone a boiled sweet (it would be wise to get a range of sweets in case some people don't like a particular flavour). On a given signal, ask them to suck the sweet (no crunching is allowed!). As they suck, you could talk them through an imaginary journey around your local community and as you encounter children pray (quietly!) that they will grow to love God as much as they love sweets. Alternatives would be to ask people to look at the children in the church, or in church groups and pray the same. The praying stops as the sucking ends. You could give people a bag of sweets each and ask them to pray during the week ahead as they suck each one.

✦ **Drawing prayers**

Give out sheets of paper and ask people to draw on it a picture that represents a child or children for whom they have a concern. It could be a child in their family, a friend, a child in the church or that they know in another

context. As they draw, get people to pray aloud or quietly for that child or children. You might like to suggest this version of the priestly blessing from Numbers 6:24-26:

“May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord smile warmly towards you and be kind to you. May the Lord look gently at you and give you his peace.”

Gather the pictures together and put them on display at the front of the church.

✦ **Open doors**

Give everyone a piece of paper with a picture of an open door on it (you could photocopy one or ask them to draw one). Start by asking them to think of children who used to be in the church but have left (the open door symbolising departure) – they may know them by name, or they might need to think more generally of children leaving church. Ask them to pray that wherever those children are today they will sense how much God loves them. Ask for God’s forgiveness for attitudes and actions that may have caused them to leave.

Now ask everyone to think of the open door as a way of coming into the church. Ask them to pray that those same children who left would come back in. Ask God to show your church what can be done to help them return. In addition, you could ask them to think of where the open doors are in your church (groups, activities, events...) and that God would help children to find them and come in.

✦ **Throwing prayers**

Get a large sheet of cardboard and stick duct tape on it back to front (bend over each end and stick it on) so that the card is covered with the tape and the sticky side is facing out. Give everyone a piece of paper and ask them to write on it a brief prayer for children in your community, or the names of children they know who aren’t a part of your church. On a given signal, get them to make a ball out of that paper and throw it at the sticky card so that it sticks. Pray a general prayer that God will help these children stick with him (or you could come up with a slightly less corny way of praying!).

✦ **Stand up!**

(If you have less mobile members of your congregation you could adapt this to putting a hand up). List a range of attributes that will be relevant to people and ask them to stand up if that is true of them. Examples would be to do with the colour of clothing, wearing glasses, lost teeth, anything really (although it is a good idea to prepare the list in advance so that you are not left groping in the dark for inspiration. Get people to clap out a simple rhythm and explain that after a set number of claps you will say something and if that is true for them, they are to stand (or raise a hand). When they are standing or have a hand raised, people around them say a simple blessing for them such as:

“God loves you and he thinks you’re great!”

Resume the rhythm and say a different attribute. It doesn’t matter if people stand up more than once, but try to ensure that you cover everyone in the church. You could always finish with “anyone who hasn’t stood up yet!” Now that the blessing is in their minds, encourage people to pray that blessing on other people they meet this week, quietly or out loud if they feel brave enough.

✦ **Prepared prayers**

Ask the children’s groups to write or draw some prayers for other children (friends and family) and bring them into the prayer event. The whole church could pray them together, or the children could read them aloud and explain the drawings. These prayers could be gathered together in a prayer display afterwards.

Ask people to bring something to church that reminds them of children they know. Ask them to put them at the front of the church and as they place them there, pray a blessing on that child or children.

✦ **Responsive prayers**

These are a good way of involving everyone in praying, especially if they don’t feel confident about praying extemporaneously. Give people a line to say in response to a phrase that the leader gives. An example would be:

Leader – O Lord, hear our prayer

Congregation – Come and listen to us

Between each responsive couplet you could pray aloud, show pictures or video footage from the local or national news, and get different leaders from the church’s children’s groups to pray aloud.

✦ **Graffiti**

Create a prayer wall by covering a surface with paper (wall-lining paper is ideal). Suggest that during the prayer time people can come at any time and write or draw on the wall anything that they want to offer to God in prayer.

✦ **Bookmarks**

Give everyone a slip of paper or card and ask them to write or draw on it something that will remind them of the needs of children in the local community. You could help them by providing some cuttings or news footage about children in your area. Alternatively they could draw the *On Our Knees Again* arrows to remind them that we need to be praying to God, listening to children and seeing things from their point of view, and asking God to show us what we need to do to reverse the decline. (If you would like to use the arrows, they are available to download from the website.)

Ask people to put the bookmarks in their Bibles and to pray about these things each time they come across them.

✦ **Body prayers**

Get some children together to come up with some actions that go with this part of the prayer known as St Patrick's Breastplate. The prayer expresses how Jesus should be a part of every aspect of our lives. You could try getting the whole church to do the actions, following the lead of the children!

Christ with me, Christ before me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me
Christ on my right, Christ on my left
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me
Christ in every eye that sees me
Christ in every ear that hears me

You could do something similar with the Lord's Prayer, or other prayers.

✦ **Mutual adoption**

Write the names of all the children in your church on bits of paper and distribute these to the adults. Ask the adults to covenant to pray for their child for the next month, and in particular they will need to find out who they are in order to ask them about particular prayer needs. The children can be encouraged to do the same for adults.

✦ **Planting seeds**

Put a large tub (or tubs) of earth at the front of the church and give everyone a seed (flower seeds are good, but make sure they are not too small to handle – your local garden centre will be able to advise you). Explain that each seed represents the potential that God has placed in children in your community, and that just as the seeds need soil within which to germinate and flourish, children need to be rooted in God in order to experience the fullness of life for which he created them. Ask everyone to think of a child who is not currently a part of your church and plant the seed on their behalf, asking that God will plant the seed of his spirit in their life and enable them to grow in their faith. You could put the tub(s) in a sunny part of your church and they will be a reminder of these prayers as the flowers grow.

✦ **Lord's Prayer**

Get people to write an adaptation of the Lord's Prayer and then pray it. The version below may help you get started.

Heavenly Dad, You are beyond our wildest dreams.
We pray that people will put You first in their lives and that they will do what You want, just as the angels do in heaven.
Please give us the things that we need each day, and meet the needs of those who do not have enough.
We are sorry for things that we have said and done which have upset You; please forgive us in the same way that we forgive people who have upset us.
Please help us not to do bad things when we are tempted to, and keep us safe from all that could harm us.
We ask this because we know that there is no-one more powerful than you, there is no-one more incredible than you, and that you are in charge of everything. This will always be true.
We have prayed this prayer because we all want these things.

✦ ***Praying for the leaders***

It is important too that we pray for those who lead the children's groups and activities in our churches. You could ask all of them to stand where they are seated, and those around them could gently lay on hands. Or you could ask them to come to the front and ask them to sit down so that the children can put their hands on their shoulders and heads. You might ask one or two of the children to pray out loud for their leaders. Use the prayer below as a church.

Jesus, we understand how important children are to you. We feel incredibly blessed to have children* in our church. Thank you so much that they are part of our church community.

Because we think they are so important we have set aside these people** to help our children get to know you, understand more about you, and follow you. We pray that you will help them to feel your pleasure as they serve these children. You have said that whoever welcomes a child in your name, welcomes you!

We pray that you will enable these leaders to continue to be strong in their faith, to keep going when they are struggling and feel like giving up, to find the resources they need and to experience the joy of seeing our children's faith flourish, and like Jesus to grow in wisdom and favour with God and people.

We commit ourselves to praying regularly for them. Help us to be regular in our encouragement for them, to be enthusiastic in our support for them, and generous in the resources we provide.

As a church, we share your passion for children – those who are already a part of our church and those who are not yet. Help us to take them seriously, to consider their spiritual growth a priority, and never to be those who cause them to stumble.

Amen

* if you have time and accurate records you could name all the children in your church at this point. Make sure you don't miss out anyone!

** at this point you might like to name all of those who work with children in your church. Once again, make sure you don't forget anyone!

✦ **Lament**

An aspect of praying that we sometimes neglect is lamenting – this is something that we see a lot in the Psalms. Below is a lament that has been written for the day, but perhaps you could use some of the Psalms or adapt them for your own use.

Lament

Heavenly Father, we cry out to you for children known to us and unknown: all of them known to you by name. Our hearts break with yours...

For children who have left us because they considered that they had grown out of church...

For children who have left us because they find other things more attractive than church...

For children who have left us because we have somehow made being a Christian into a boring routine...

Together: We cry out to you for mercy

For children in our community who consider home to be a place where they live rather than where they are loved...

For children in our community who get into trouble because they have nothing else to do and nowhere to go...

For children in our community whose lives are blighted by neglect, violence and fear...

Together: We cry out to you for mercy

For children in our church who feel unwanted by the adults, even though we love them and are thrilled by their presence...

For children in our churches who want to express their faith in ways that we find awkward and uncomfortable...

For children in our churches who are learning about you and for whom we long that come to know you...

Together: We cry out to you for mercy

Father who waits for us, Son who brings us home, and Spirit who calls to us be present in their lives today.

Amen

Listening prayers

Prayer is a two-way conversation and we need to be waiting on God as well as asking him for action. Explain that God speaks to us in different ways that we might describe as 'nudges from above'. It may be that as we pray a thought will occur to us, or we may see a picture in our imagination, remember a Bible verse or words from a song or hymn, or it may even be simply a feeling that God has spoken but difficult to put into words. This will be true of all ages – after all, God spoke to Samuel!

✦ *Hearing a pin drop*

To prepare for a time of silence you could see how quiet everyone can be and whether they can hear a pin drop onto a plate or tray. You could turn over an egg timer and ask them to be aware of the sounds around them. What could they hear? Now repeat the exercise and ask them to think about the prayers that have been prayed – does anyone have anything that God might be saying in response? If silence is difficult in your church you could play some instrumental music and ask people to concentrate on it.

✦ *Lord hear our prayer*

Following a time of praying aloud, sing the Taize song, 'O Lord, hear my prayer'. Play a verse without singing and then sing it again as:

O Lord, hear our prayers
O Lord, hear our prayers
When we call, answer us
O Lord, hear our prayers
O Lord, hear our prayers
Come and listen to us

Play another verse without singing and then sing:

O Lord, speak to us
O Lord, speak to us
As we call, answer us
O Lord, speak to us
O Lord, speak to us
We are waiting to hear

You could then play the music a few times and ask people to think about the prayers that have been prayed and whether God is saying anything in response.

✦ *Prayer charades*

Ask for some volunteers and give them some actions to do that relate to children. One might mime nursing a child in their arms; another might mime

cuddling a child; someone else could mime teaching (writing on a board); some could mime activities that children do. Get them all to explain their actions and then to do them silently. Ask everyone else to choose one action and copy it. Once everyone has an action, ask them to close their eyes and imagine that they are an adult or a child actually doing those activities. What words or images come to their minds as they are doing this? Write these down on a flipchart or ohp slide. Is God saying anything significant through these words and pictures?

✦ **Prayer anagrams**

Put up some anagrams of names that describe God on a screen or board. Make some easier than others. Ask people to work them out in silence and try to think about what each one means. Alternatively you might like to ask them to work out the anagrams in small groups and then discuss what each name means. As they think about what God is like there may be things that God says about his character and how he wants to relate to children in your community. You can find an online anagram generator at www.wordsmith.org/anagram/

Other prayer resources

There are great ideas and resources for prayer in these books at websites:

✦ ***Tiddlywinks: pray and play***

Play is key to healthy development, especially if you are under 5! Here is a fun collection of 101 imaginative and stimulating ideas to meet a young child's needs through play, and present spiritual truths in a way that they can understand and enjoy.

As well as details of the preparation needed and a tried-and-tested activity with a group of children, there is a prayer connected with the activity (you'll be relieved that most of these are only a sentence long!).

The book also includes a useful introduction covering different types of prayer, practical tips for praying with the under 5s, indexes of the Bible readings used, and the activities grouped into subjects. Fully photocopiable.

Author: Kathy Cannon £8.99

ISBN: 1 85999 600 0

Publisher: Scripture Union

✦ ***Multi-Sensory Prayer***

What on earth have candles, autumn leaves, magazines, sandpits, pebbles, seeds, mirrors and DIY labyrinths got in common? Well, the answer is they can all help you pray. Sue Wallace presents a tried-and-tested collection of fresh and inspiring ideas to help this generation meet God in active, experiential prayer. Here are hands-on, step-by-step tips on everything from

innovative new techniques to meditations and rituals borrowed from across Christian traditions.

Author: Sue Wallace £8.99
ISBN: 1 85999 465 2
Publisher: Scripture Union

✦ ***Massive Prayer Adventure***

A personalised prayer scrapbook for children aged 8-11, to help them get started on the adventure of talking and listening to God. Packed full of creative prayer ideas, quizzes and puzzles. Real answers to the difficult questions such as 'Why isn't God answering my prayers?' With space for the reader to personalise their scrapbook and record their thoughts and discoveries

Author: Sarah Mayers £4.99
ISBN: 1 84427 211 7
Publisher: Scripture Union

✦ ***101 Creative Prayer Ideas For Children***

Children are made in the image of a Creator God, and they enjoy being creative themselves! So it makes sense to use a variety of ways to stimulate children to develop their prayer lives. That way they can build a meaningful friendship with him that will last a lifetime.

Jan Dyer has provided an array of tried and tested ideas, divided into ten areas of a child's life. And a host of 'Additional Ideas' provide even more ways to make prayer a creative and rewarding activity for the children on your care.

Author: Jan Dyer £8.99
ISBN: unknown
Publisher: Children's Ministry

✦ ***Learning to Pray***

Reprinted by popular demand this practical workbook offers a straightforward introduction to a variety of fresh and enjoyable approaches to prayer. Focusing on topics including Celtic and Ignatian prayer, Taizé and meditation, the authors offer practical, Bible-based resources to help groups and individuals as they explore new and exciting forms of prayer.

Authors: Various £6.00
ISBN: unknown
Publisher: CPAS



✦ **Children Matter!**

Children Matter! is a consortium of Christian agencies that are working together to help to bring children back to church and to Christ. The website has a wide range of news, resources and links and is well worth a visit. You can sign up for their weekly email newsletter from the website. From this site there are links to Scripture Union, CPAS, Kingsway and Crusaders who are all part of the consortium, as well as other resources:

http://tahilla.typepad.com/children_matter/