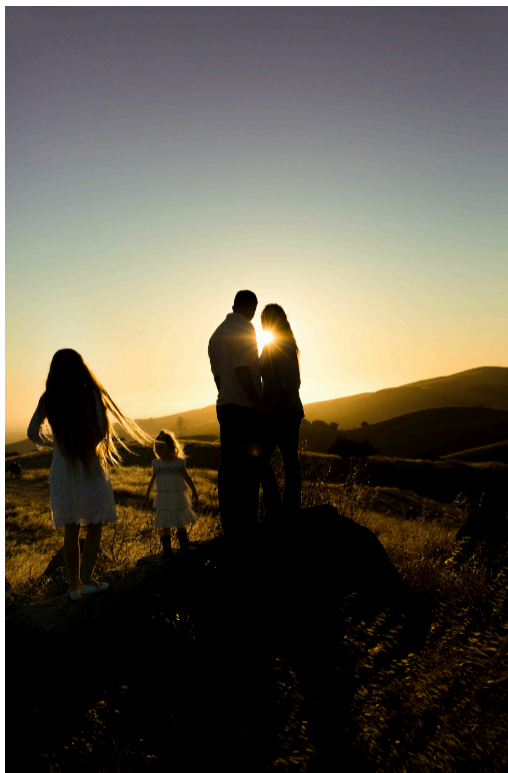




THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF
ARUNDEL & BRIGHTON



A Guide to Family Prayer

The Catholic Diocese of Arundel & Brighton
Marriage and Family Life Commission



TALKING TO GOD

Prayer is about **growing in relationship with Christ**. No one could expect to be close to a family member who lived the other side of the world and with whom we rarely spoke and only referred to when in desperate need. **Communicating directly and regularly** with Jesus will help us to grow closer to Him and remember that He is part of all we do in our lives.

Too many people think they have good reasons why they cannot have a better prayer life.

Some **common myths** are:

"I don't need to pray in any 'formal' sense. God knows I love him."

"I just can't find the time to pray."

"My faith isn't deep enough to get anything out of prayer."

"I've tried learning how to pray, but I just don't 'get it'. It's too hard."

The reality is God helps us if we invite Him.

St. Paul tells us, "**The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes with sighs too deep for words.**" (Rom 8:26)



Regular prayer times can help to support the **knowledge of God's presence in our lives**. If we can develop the understanding that God is **our loving father** who is with us always, we start to turn to Him naturally, acknowledging His presence in all that we are.

Pope John Paul II says family prayer is **not just saying prayers** but that it involves;

"joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments, births, wedding anniversaries, departures, separations; all of these mark God's loving intervention in the family."

Gradually we begin to recognise God's **presence with us always** and turn to Him spontaneously, in all our activities.



Start by taking the time needed to talk with each other about your **thoughts and feelings** surrounding regular prayer. If you agree this is something you want to do more explicitly in your family, try to be **open about your reasons**. Talk about your expectations and your worries. Decide how you will share this decision with your children, and what you hope the **outcome of praying as a family will be**.

Pick some specific times and **make a commitment** to each other to make that your prayer time. You might want to have a formal time every day; you might want to do it once a week. You might want to try to create more spontaneous moments.

Think about **what suits you**, your family, and your lifestyle best. By making it **part of your routine**, it is much more likely to be a successful part of your family life.

MORNING PRAYER



A time to acknowledge the start of a new day with all the **wonder and possibilities it holds**. Even in the busiest of lives it is useful to remember to turn to the Lord and **offer Him the day** with all it holds and ask for His support to live it well.

A short morning offering can **start the day well**; why not say it after cleaning your teeth to help you remember to do it!

DURING THE DAY

When we turn to God at passing moments of the day our prayer can happen spontaneously;

a **"thank you"** for the beautiful day,

a **"wow! Isn't God clever,"** for the glory of nature,

a plea for help in difficult moments, **"Oh Lord help me to make it up to him"**

a practical plea, **"God of all grace, find me a space!"**,
"Saint Anthony – please help me find it",

"St Jude, patron saint of hopeless causes, help me at this tricky moment."

Sometimes the best prayers come when least expected, **embrace them** and acknowledge them as God present in your life. When we recognise Him as always being with us it becomes **easier to act lovingly**.



NIGHT TIME PRAYERS

Bedtimes for small children have always been a special moment to **share a reflection** on the day and to talk to God together. You might want to think about things you **need help** with or something you are particularly **grateful** for.

That **closeness and loving bond** you have with your children demonstrates perfectly the love God has for us. We can acknowledge His presence and **thank Him for His gift to us of life and love.**

Blessing your children, **making the sign of the cross or laying your hand on their heads** is a powerful message. You might want to say your own words **"may Jesus bless you"** or use a favourite scripture passage, Numbers 6:24-26 is a good one to memorise:

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace."



JOURNEYING



Setting out on a journey when everyone is strapped safely into the car is a **good time to turn to God**. It is a **moment to pause** and recognise His presence, ask Him to **keep you safe** and get you wherever you're going in good time. Some people choose this moment to say a **decade of the rosary** others may have a more formal prayer;

**"Lord, be our guide and our protector on the journey we are about to take.
Watch over us.
Protect us from accidents.
Keep us free from harm to body and soul.
Lord, support us with Your grace when we are tired.
Help us be patient in any trouble which may come our way.
Keep us always mindful of Your presence and love.
Amen."**

You might decide to **write a prayer together as a family** and use that.

If you are on the way to Mass you can take some time to stop and prepare. Are you **frazzled, harassed, and irritated** with each other? Take some moments to try to be calm, perhaps someone could look at the day's readings and share them or, more simply just **recall that you are all going to meet Jesus** in a specific way and to **be at peace** with each other.

GRACE BEFORE MEALS

This is a good time to **stop and take stock** - what have we got to be grateful for? What about those who have nothing?

Depending on the age of your children you can encourage them to **give thanks** for the farmers who grew the food, those who shipped it etc. As they get older you can encourage them to be thankful for other gifts and to be **more aware of the needs of others**.

Share leading the grace amongst you all, even the smallest child can say thank you.

It might be that before a meal is the time to say **sorry for hurts** during the day and to **make peace** with each other or to reflect on family members that **need our prayers**.

Again by bringing Jesus to your mealtime in this way, you are reminding yourselves that **He is with us in every aspect of our lives**.

Grace dice are popular and families can take turns rolling. You could even **write your own** and stick them onto the original.



FAMILY PRAYER TIME



Choose a **comfortable** moment of the day when everyone is ready to spend some time in this activity, with God. Find somewhere **away from all distractions**, a place that is family-friendly, cosy, and somewhere you all enjoy.

Pope Francis says:

“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.”

Create something that helps you to **focus**; you might have a favourite Bible that you want to use, or perhaps **a special religious object**: a statue, crucifix, photograph. Put these **somewhere prominent**, perhaps with a beautiful piece of material, flowers or greenery as a way of showing reverence. You might want to **take turns creating this**, each person bringing his or her own character to the prayer focus. **Light a candle** as a sign that Jesus the light of the world is with you.

All these things help to create a **sacred space**, a place where we can **be still and feel the presence of God** as we recognise the love we have for each other as a family.

ACTIVITIES

You might start by **making the sign of the cross**.

Perhaps you could listen to a **story from the Gospel**; one of you could read it slowly, meaningfully and thoughtfully, allowing the words to really sink in. Spend some time **reflecting on the story** and perhaps think “what message is Jesus trying to give me through that reading?” Sometimes it is helpful to **read it again** to have another opportunity to listen.

You could have a **prayer table or jar** and whenever you hear of **someone in need** or a particular event, write a message and put them together, or add a photograph or a picture. At your **special time** of prayer pull out the messages and pray them aloud. Shared prayers are always helpful but remember to give people the **opportunity to offer their prayer silently** if they wish.

The church is rich with **special reasons to pray**, it could be the feast day of a saint whose name is in your family, or someone to whom you as a family have a special connection. It could be a **particular time of year** when we focus on Mary or a **particular season** such as Advent or Lent.



FIVE FINGER PRAYER

from Pope Francis

Using the fingers on your hand, start with the thumb and pray these intentions in this order:

1.) The thumb is closest finger to you. So start praying for those who are closest to you. They are the persons easiest to remember. To pray for our dear ones is a "Sweet Obligation."

2.) The next finger is the index. Pray for those who teach you, instruct you and heal you. They need the support and wisdom to show direction to others. Always keep them in your prayers.

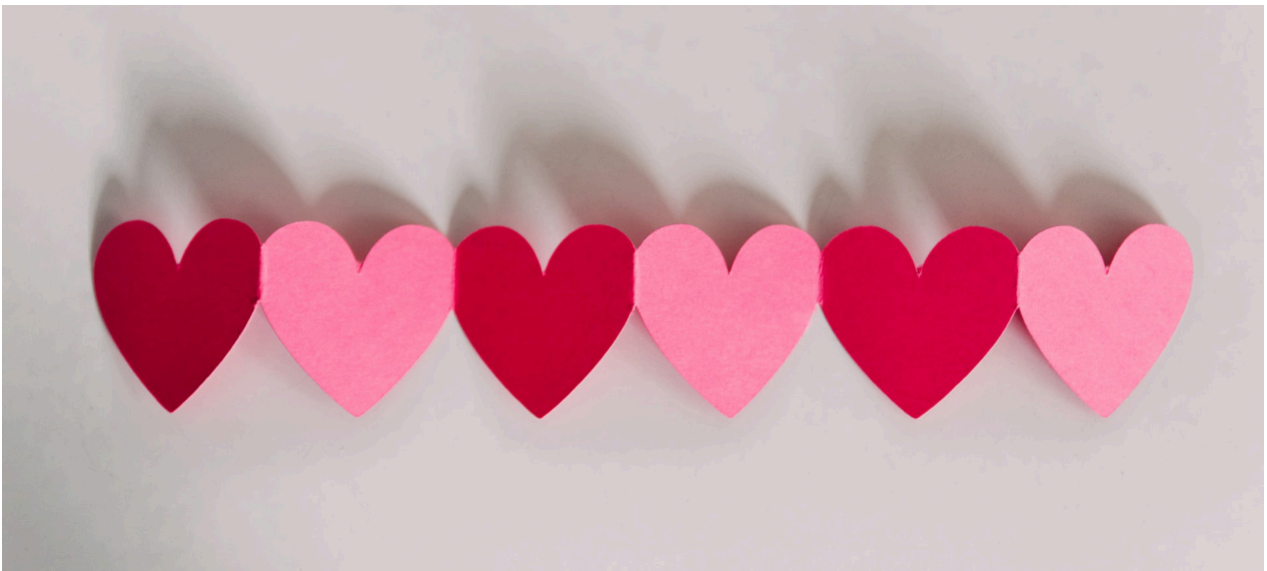
3.) The following finger is the tallest. It reminds us of our leaders, the governors and those who have authority. They need God's guidance.

4.) The fourth finger is the ring finger. Even though it may surprise you, it is our weakest finger. It should remind us to pray for the weakest, the sick or those plagued by problems. They need your prayers.

5.) And finally we have our smallest finger, the smallest of all. Your pinkie should remind you to pray for yourself. When you are done praying for the other four groups, you will be able to see your own needs but in the proper perspective, and also you will be able to pray for your own needs in a better way.



In your new prayer life, remember it should be a joy, a moment of communication with our God who loves us beyond all compare. It's about building a relationship and like all relationships it has easy and tricky moments, the joy for us is that God is always waiting for us. Like the Father of the Prodigal Son He stands searching, waiting for us to just turn back towards Him where he can welcome us with open arms.



“For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.” – St. Therese of Lisieux