

WRITING PRAYERS WITH YOUTH

This session is written to help youth write prayers. We invite the youth to submit their prayers and/or artwork for possible inclusion in God of My Heart, a book of prayers written for youth and by youth. You can find more information on submitting prayers and artwork at <http://godofmyheart.wordpress.com/>.

INTRODUCTION

There is a common misconception that writing a prayer is only done by “professionals,” or that you simply can’t sit down and write a good prayer. However, anyone can write a prayer and prayers written from the heart, from experience, or from your emotions speak to many people because our common experiences and emotions help us relate to one another. I hope that the following exercises and ideas will help you, your youth group, or any group with whom you are working write prayers from their heart that speak to their experience and relationship with God.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Supplies

Paper, pens, pencils, art supplies, markers, watercolors and watercolor paper, easel with paper or a board to write on.

Make sure you have enough copies of the “Create a Prayer” worksheet at the end so that each person can have one.

Set Up

Set up an art space, a silent space for individual prayer writing, and a space for people to work quietly in pairs. Having three distinct spaces will honor the way in which each person has chosen to construct their prayer. If you have enough adults to help and supervise, you may want to set these areas up in three different rooms. Think about using your chapel or church space as one of the options.

TO BEGIN

Join the group together in a circle. Tell them that today we are going to have the opportunity to write or draw their own prayers to God. But before you do begin invite them to name some prayers that they know or prayers they love. (Lords Prayer, Serenity Prayer, grace at meals, etc.)

Lead them in saying the Lords Prayer.

Invite them to find a seat.

What is Prayer?

Start the conversation by asking, “What is Prayer?”

(Invite their responses and record them on the easel paper and then wrap up the conversation by concluding with the following or by saying something similar in your own words.)

Prayer is a way of communicating and connecting with God. Prayers can be spoken. Prayers can be drawn. Prayers can be sung. Prayers are a way for us to express to God our concerns, joys, hopes, fears, and thanksgiving. Prayer is talking to God. Just like you talk to your friends or family about what is going on in your life, so, too, you can talk to God.

Today we are going to work individually or in pairs to create our own prayers, but before we begin, let’s do some brainstorming about how and when we might pray.

Brainstorming

1. Invite them to name all the ways in which a person can pray. (for example: standing, kneeling, with folded hands, with outstretched arms, walking, bowing, singing, grace before meals, before bed, as you wake up, etc.)
2. Once you have that list, invite them to name special times or places that we pray as individuals or as a group. (for example: church, youth group, at camp, at home before meals, before bed, before a

test, when a friend is having a hard day, when someone is sick, when they are sad, mad, angry, joyful, excited, anxious, etc.)

INTRODUCTION TO PRAYER

(Hand out paper and pen/pencil to each person so they can take notes as you discuss.)

Before we begin writing let's take some time to talk about the kinds of prayer that we usually use as a way of helping you decide what kind of prayer you would like to write and pray today. As we are discussing, make note of anything that excites you, interests you, or speaks to you so you can come back to it later.

ACTS of Prayer

ACTS is an acronym that helps us remember the different kinds of prayers. (Write ACTS down the side of the easel paper and then talk through each one with the youth.)

A = Adoration of God

Praying in adoration of God is to give praise to God for all God has done, is doing, and will continue to do. It is one of the ways in which we can fulfill the commandment to love God with all our heart, mind, and soul.

(Invite them to brainstorm when they might have a prayer of adoration, i.e. praise for creation, praise for God working in your life, etc.)

C = Confession

Prayers of confession are a way of “clearing the decks” with God. It is an opportunity to name those things that have come to separate you from God or others (your actions, objects like money or popularity that get in the way, resentments you hold, etc.) and ask for forgiveness and guidance for the future.

(Invite them to name times when they might want to lift up a prayer of confession, i.e. asking forgiveness for wrongs, for guidance to stop doing something destructive, confessing to God those things you want forgiveness for in your life.)

T = Thanksgiving

Prayers of thanksgiving might be the prayers that come most easily because many of us are taught from an early age to say thank you. Saying thank you to God is a way of holding up all that God has blessed you with and honoring God for all those blessings.

(Invite them to list things for which they are thankful, i.e. friends, family, talents they have, having enough money and food, etc.)

S = Supplication

Prayers of supplication are when we come to God asking to tend to our needs or the needs of others. Asking for God to tend to our needs or the needs of those around us is an important way of asking God to be a part of our lives – the ups and downs, the good and the bad, the joyful and the painful.

(Invite them to share those things for which they might pray to God to help them with in their life, i.e. helping those who are sick, helping you through a difficult situation, peace in the world, prayers for safety, etc.)

If you notice, we do each of these things in church every Sunday. We praise God, we confess to God, we give thanks to God, and we ask God to tend to our needs and the needs of others.

Praying through the church year

The Episcopal Church calendar is set up to reflect the seasons of the church year. Our seasons reflect where we are in the story of Jesus' life and the life of the church. Praying through the church year is an important part of what we do as it helps us remember the story of Christ and our part in that story. Is there a special time of year that you may want to focus on as you write your prayer?

(You can walk through the seasons of the year, or you can simply hand them the sheet provided for you at the end.)

- *Advent* is a time of waiting for the birth of Christ. It is a time of expectation and preparation.
- *Christmas* is the celebration of the birth of Christ.
- *Epiphany* is the time when we remember the coming of the Wise Men, the baptism of Jesus, and other times in which there are “a-ha” moments as people realize that Jesus is the Messiah.
- *Lent* is the time when we give extra thought about how to change our lives in order to live more in accordance with Jesus’ teachings. This is a time when people usually take on special disciplines or give up something as a discipline. It is often a special time of confession in the hopes of realigning ourselves with God and others.
- *Holy Week* is a week in which we remember and walk the story of Jesus’ final days to remember the whole story of Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection.
- *Easter* begins with the resurrection and the season of Easter is a time in which we continue to hear stories of Jesus appearing to disciples and friends. This is a time of remembering that Jesus broke the cycle of death and rewrote what death means for all of us.
- *Pentecost* begins with the story of Pentecost (where the gift of the Holy Spirit is given to us by Jesus) and the season after Pentecost is a time for us known as the green, growing season or the season in which we hear stories of Jesus, his life, and his ministry while here on earth. This is a time for us to reflect on what these stories have to say to us and about us.

Prayer and Listening

Like a conversation you have with friends or family, it is not a one-way conversation. Prayer means talking and listening. There is a time to speak and a time to listen. As you write your prayer, think about how you are called to listen to God and how you invite others into that holy silence.

Meditate

Part of praying can be meditating on an object or word or phrase. Meditation is a form of focusing and it is a form of letting go. It invites the person to let go of what is swirling in their head and in their heart and instead to focus on God and God’s word. Is your prayer a prayer of meditation that helps to lend focus?

Envisioning

Throughout scriptures, God calls us to be a part of creating the Kingdom of God. God calls us to a new way of life, to a new way of treating each other, being with one another, and caring for the least of these among us. As you create your prayer, take a moment and envision the world that God is calling you and your community to be a part of and write a prayer that reflects that vision. How can we pray for that world to come into being? How do we pray for one another, for world issues, and for things that seem bigger than we are?

CREATING THE PRAYER

We have discussed prayer, and now it is time to experiment.

Take a moment and think about what stood out for you in our conversation. Words, thoughts, ideas, types of prayer, seasons of the church year...what drew you in? What interests you?

Where is your heart and mind at this moment. Take a few minutes of silence to reflect and jot down whatever comes to mind.

- Give them about 5 minutes of silence.
- Ring a bell or find a creative way of gathering them back together.
- Invite them to share briefly, if they choose, what struck them or what they are thinking about at this moment.

Instructions

We are now going to give you time to create your own prayer to God and before I send you off, I want to share a few words that might be helpful.

- Address God in a personal, inclusive way.
- If it is helpful, use scripture or a worship service that is meaningful to you.
- If it is helpful, you may want to write for a specific time of year or speak to a specific feeling or situation.
- Write from your own experience. Write from your heart. Write something you would want to hear or say or read. Write something you would give to a friend or family member as a prayer.

I'm going to pass out a sheet that has much of what we have talked about and a few ideas to help you begin or focus. (Hand out the Creating a Prayer sheet from below)

- Invite them to go into one of the three spaces - a quiet space for individual writing, art space for drawing or painting, and quiet group space if they want to work in pairs.
- Let them know how much time they have to work.
- When you are 5-10 minutes from the end of your time together, gather them back together.
- Invite them to briefly share what they have written.

Remind them that they can send in their prayers and artwork for possible inclusion in the book, *God of my Heart*.

RESOURCES

<http://godofmyheart.wordpress.com/>

<http://episcopalprayer.org/>

CREATING A PRAYER

- Address God in a personal, inclusive way.
- It might be helpful to start with a scripture or a worship service that is meaningful to you, write some thoughts worth sharing with others, and then write your prayer from those notes.
- You may write a prayer for a specific event or time of year, such as Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, Summer, Winter, Fall, Spring, Graduation, Mission Trip, Beginning of the School Year, Birthday, etc.
- Write from your own experience. Write from your heart. Write something you would want to hear or say or read. Write something you would give to a friend or family member as a prayer.

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SUBMITTING YOUR PRAYER AND ARTWORK

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<http://godofmyheart.wordpress.com/submissions/> for more information. You can also email us at GodOfMyHeart@cpg.org.