

saint mary's press

Prayer Ideas

for ministry with young teens

H E L P

Heads-up | Easy | Low-Cost | Purposeful

Joseph Grant

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To the Olive Branch Community,
a source of insight, inspiration, and aware prayer!

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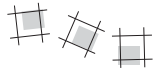
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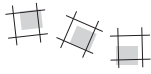
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Introduction

Prayer Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens is one of seven books in the HELP series—a collection of **H**eads-up, **E**asy, **L**ow-Cost, and **P**urposeful activities for young adolescents. These strategies are designed to be used as part of a comprehensive youth ministry program for grades six to eight. The strategies can stand alone or complement a religious education curriculum.

The other books in the HELP series are as follows:

- ☉ *Community-Building Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens* (available in 2001)
- ☉ *Family Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens*
- ☉ *Hands-on Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens* (available in 2001)
- ☉ *Holiday and Seasonal Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens*
- ☉ *Justice and Service Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens*
- ☉ *Retreat Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens* (available in 2001)

These books are helpful resources for anyone who works with young adolescents in a church or school setting. They can provide a strong foundation for a year-round, total youth ministry program whose goal is to evangelize young adolescents and support them in their faith journey.

Overview of This Book

Prayer Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens may be used by a coordinator of youth ministry, a director of religious education, catechists, teachers, a parish youth ministry team, or any adult who works with young teens. Ownership of the book includes permission to duplicate any part of it for use with program participants.

This book contains strategies to help young adolescents deepen their relationship and communicate with God in a way that respects their physical and emotional development and their unique spirituality. The collection includes ideas for active and reflective prayer, short prayers and longer prayer services, and

prayers that are self-focused as well as those that challenge young teens to draw on the power of prayer in service to the world. All the prayer strategies are rooted in the Scriptures as well as in the Tradition of the church.

Format of the Strategies

Each strategy begins with a brief description of its purpose. The next element is a suggested time for the activity. This is flexible and takes into account several variables, such as the size of the group, the comfort level of the participants, and whether you want to include a break. Use the suggested time as a starting point and modify it according to your circumstances. It is a good idea to include time for a break within the longer strategies.

Next is a description of the size of the group that the strategy was written for. Most of the strategies work with a range of group sizes. If your group is large, be sure to recruit enough adults to help with logistics and supervision. A good rule to follow is that for every six to eight young teens, one adult should be present.

In some strategies a section on special considerations follows the one on group size. It includes things such as notices about remote preparation requirements and cautions to pay special attention to a particular developmental issue of early adolescence.

A complete checklist of materials needed is the next part of the presentation of every strategy. A detailed description of the strategy's procedure is then provided, followed by alternative approaches. Those alternatives may be helpful in adapting the strategy to the needs of your group.

Frequently included is a list of scriptural passages that may be used with the strategy for reflection or prayer. The list is not exhaustive; a Bible concordance will provide additional citations if you want to add a more substantial scriptural component to a strategy.

The final element in each strategy offers space for keeping notes about how you might want to use the strategy in the future or change it to fit the needs of your group.

Programming Ideas

The strategies in this book can be used in a variety of ways. Consider the following suggestions:

- ⊗ The program coordinator, catechists, teachers, and coordinator of youth ministry may collaborate to plan youth meetings and special activities that use strategies from this and other books in the HELP series.
- ⊗ Some of the strategies in this book may be used anytime during the year, either as they are presented or with suggested adaptations. Those activities may be presented in the summer months, when most young adolescents are

less busy and may be open to a variety of activities. Youth ministers may use those strategies as part of a strong summer program for young teens.

- ⊗ Schoolteachers may use ideas from this and other books in the HELP series to supplement their day-to-day curriculum.
- ⊗ Many of the strategies in the HELP series can be adapted for use with multi-generational groups.

Standard Materials

Many of the items in the materials checklists are common to several strategies in the series. To save time consider gathering frequently used materials in convenient bins and storing those bins in a place that is accessible to all staff and volunteer leaders. Some recommendations for how to organize such bins follow.

Supply Bin

The following items frequently appear in materials checklists:

- ⊗ Bibles, at least one for every two participants
- ⊗ masking tape
- ⊗ cellophane tape
- ⊗ washable and permanent markers (thick and thin)
- ⊗ pens or pencils
- ⊗ self-stick notes
- ⊗ scissors
- ⊗ newsprint
- ⊗ blank paper, scrap paper, and notebook paper
- ⊗ postcards
- ⊗ notepaper
- ⊗ envelopes
- ⊗ baskets
- ⊗ candles and matches
- ⊗ items to create a prayer space (e.g., a colored cloth, a cross, a bowl of water, and a vase for flowers)

Craft Bin

Many of the strategies use craft activities to involve the young people. Consider collecting the following supplies in a separate bin:

- ⊗ construction paper
- ⊗ yarn and string, in assorted colors
- ⊗ poster board
- ⊗ glue and glue sticks
- ⊗ fabric paints
- ⊗ glitter and confetti
- ⊗ used greeting cards

- ☉ beads
- ☉ modeling clay
- ☉ paintbrushes and paints
- ☉ crayons
- ☉ used magazines and newspapers
- ☉ hole punches
- ☉ scissors
- ☉ stickers of various kinds
- ☉ index cards
- ☉ gift wrap and ribbon

Music Bin

Young people often find deep and profound meaning in the music and lyrics of songs, both past and present. Also, the right music can set an appropriate mood for a prayer or activity. Begin with a small collection of tapes or CDs in a music bin and add to it over time. You might ask the young people to put some of their favorite music in the bin. The bin might include the following styles of music:

- ☉ *Fun gathering music that is neither current nor popular with young teens.* Ideas are well-known classics (e.g., *Overture to William Tell*, *Stars and Stripes Forever*, and *1812 Overture*), songs from musical theater productions, children's songs, and Christmas songs for use any time of the year.
- ☉ *Prayerful, reflective instrumental music, such as the kind that is available in the adult alternative, or New Age, section of music stores.* Labels that specialize in this type of music include Windham Hill and Narada.
- ☉ *Popular songs with powerful messages.* If you are not well versed in popular music, ask the young people to offer suggestions.
- ☉ *The music of contemporary Christian artists.* Most young teens are familiar with Amy Grant, Michael W. Smith, and Steven Curtis Chapman. Also include the work of Catholic musicians, such as David W. Kauffman, Steve Angrisano, Bruce Deaton, Sarah Hart, Jesse Manibusan, and Jessica Alles.

Other Helpful Resources

In addition to the seven books in the HELP series, the following resources can be useful in your ministry with young adolescents. All the books in the following list are published by Saint Mary's Press and can be obtained by calling or writing us at the phone number and address listed in the "Your Comments or Suggestions" section at the end of this introduction.

The Catholic Youth Bible, edited by Brian Singer-Towns (2000). The most youth-friendly Bible for Catholic teens available. The scriptural text is accompanied by hundreds of articles to help young people pray, study, and live the Scriptures.

Faith Works for Junior High: Scripture- and Tradition-Based Sessions for Faith Formation, by Lisa-Marie Calderone-Stewart (1993). A series of twelve active meeting plans on various topics related to the Scriptures and church life.

Guided Meditations for Junior High: Good Judgment, Gifts, Obedience, Inner Blindness, by Jane E. Ayer (1997). Four guided meditations for young teens, available on audiocassette or compact disc. A leader's guide includes the script and programmatic options. Other volumes in this series, called *A Quiet Place Apart*, will also work with young teens.

Looking Past the Sky: Prayers by Young Teens, edited by Marilyn Kielbasa (1999). A collection of 274 prayers by and for young adolescents in grades six to eight.

One-Day Retreats for Junior High Youth, by Geri Braden-Whartenby and Joan Finn Connelly (1997). Six retreats that each fit into a school day or an afternoon or evening program. Each retreat contains a variety of icebreakers, prayers, group exercises, affirmations, and guided meditations.

Prayers with Pizzazz for Junior High Teens, by Judi Lanciotti (1996). A variety of creative prayer experiences that grab young teens' attention. The prayers are useful in many different settings, such as classes, meetings, prayer services, and retreats.

ScriptureWalk Junior High: Bible Themes, by Maryann Hakowski (1999). Eight 90-minute sessions to help bring youth and the Bible together. Each session applies biblical themes to the life issues that concern young teens.

Catechism Connection for Teens collection, by Lisa Calderone-Stewart and Ed Kunzman (1999).

That First Kiss and Other Stories

My Wish List and Other Stories

Better Than Natural and Other Stories

Straight from the Heart and Other Stories

Meeting Frankenstein and Other Stories

The five books in this collection contain short, engaging stories for teens on the joys and struggles of adolescent life, each story with a reflection connecting it to a Catholic Christian belief. Each book's faith connections reflect teachings from a different part of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Connections to the Discovering Program

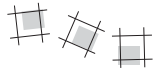
The Discovering Program, published by Saint Mary's Press, is a religious education program for young people in grades six to eight. It consists of fourteen six-session minicourses. Each session is 1 hour long and based on the principles of active learning.

The strategies in the HELP series cover themes that are loosely connected to those explored by the Discovering Program, and can be used as part of a total youth ministry program in which the Discovering curriculum is the central

catechetical component. However, no strategy in the series presumes that the participants have taken a particular course in the Discovering Program, or requires that they do so. The appendices at the end of this book list the connections between the HELP strategies and the Discovering courses.

Your Comments or Suggestions

Saint Mary's Press wants to know your reactions to the strategies in the HELP series. We are also interested in new youth ministry strategies for use with young teens. If you have a comment or suggestion, please write the series editor, Marilyn Kielbasa, at 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1320; call the editor at our toll-free number, 800-533-8095; or e-mail the editor at mkielbasa@smp.org. Your ideas will help improve future editions of these books.



The Mixed Bag Prayer

OVERVIEW

We do not need words to pray. This prayer uses symbols and ritual to enable the young adolescents to share prayer without having to speak. It is ideal for groups that are newly formed and whose members are unfamiliar with one another. It can be used as an opening ritual for a catechetical session or a retreat.

Suggested Time









10 to 20 minutes, depending on the size of your group

Group Size

Because this prayer requires the collection of a significant number of objects, it is easier to organize it for smaller groups, ideally with fewer than thirty individuals.

Materials Needed

- ☀ tissues, one for each person
- ☀ wheat berries or mustard seeds, one for each person
- ☀ pennies
- ☀ small rocks, one for each person
- ☀ small gift bows, one for each person
- ☀ wooden matches, one for each person
- ☀ Life Savers candies, one for each person
- ☀ Band-Aids, one for each person
- ☀ assorted jigsaw puzzle pieces, one for each person
- ☀ rice or dried pasta, one piece for each person
- ☀ a copy of resource 1, "Object Passages and Prayers," cut apart as scored

-  small, resealable plastic bags
-  a scissors
-  ten sheets of letter-size paper
-  a glue stick (optional)
-  permanent markers
-  a tape or CD player, and a recording of reflective music
-  a candle and matches
-  a box or a basket

PROCEDURE

Preparation. Place one of each of the objects listed on resource 1 in a plastic bag. Photocopy or glue each of the ten sections from resource 1 onto a separate sheet of letter-size paper.

Create a focus area by placing the ten papers in a circle on the floor or a table. Beside or on top of each paper, stack enough of the object featured on that paper for each participant to have one. In the center of this prayer space, put a box of small, resealable plastic bags and some permanent markers. Make sure that you have set out at least one plastic bag for each participant and that you can still read the words on the paper at each of the ten stations after all the objects have been laid out.

1. Pass around the bag that you prepared. Invite the young people to examine the contents. Explain that the bag is a prayer bundle and briefly discuss the role of symbols in prayer by making the following comments:



Symbols can speak louder than words. People have always collected objects as images and signs of prayer and faith. When we pray with symbols, ordinary things are transformed and filled with new and deeper meanings.

2. Divide the participants into small groups of three or four individuals and describe the ritual in these or similar words:



Each group will be given 2 minutes at the prayer place to examine the symbols, read the reflections and prayers, and choose objects for their own prayer bundle. You each may take one plastic bag and write your name on it with a marker. The groups will then move slowly around the focus area twice. On the first circuit, touch the symbols and read the reflections at all ten stations. On the second trip, choose six different objects for your prayer bag. Before putting an object in your bag, silently pray the prayer on the corresponding sheet. After filling your bag, return to your place with bag in hand.

You may need to reaffirm that this activity is a prayer ritual and to request silence from the group members. Use quiet background music to enhance this activity and to help maintain a prayerful atmosphere.

3. After all the groups have visited the prayer place, light a candle, place it on a desk or table, and set a box or a basket beside it. Invite the young people, one by one, to bring their prayer bundle forward and place it in the box or basket.

Conclude the ritual by lifting up the basket and reciting the following prayer or saying words of your own:



Dear God, accept these mixed bags, the prayers of _____ [insert the names of the young people]. With these prayer bundles, we call to mind our needs and those of your people: people who are sorrowful but are trying to grow faithfully, people who are struggling to share wealth and forgiveness, people who are reaching out to be a light that brings friendship and healing. We offer these prayers in Jesus' name. Amen.

4. Invite the young people to take their prayer bundle home and add it to their own altar or prayer place.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

- ☉ Make as many copies of resource 1 as there are young people in your group, cut apart the copies as marked, and set out the appropriate scriptural reflections with the objects so that the young people can include them in their bag.
- ☉ Substitute a variety of different objects and reflections to modify this prayer. Items such as rubber bands, toothpicks, and paper clips make excellent icons for a mixed bag.
- ☉ After the prayer let the group make a series of different prayer cards with the leftover items. Direct them to glue an object to an index card and add the corresponding reflection prayer. Let them take this prayer resource home or suggest that they pool all the cards they create and share them with the school or parish.
- ☉ Arrange a similar prayer service around the theme of the corporal works of mercy. Giving drink to the thirsty, visiting prisoners, and visiting sick people can be symbolized by drinking straws, segments of a chain necklace, and a thermometer.
- ☉ Do the ritual in reverse. Prepare a variety of mixed bags in advance. Pass out the bags to the participants. Invite everyone to approach the table to discover what the symbols refer to and how to focus their prayer.

**SCRIPTURAL
CONNECTIONS**

- ☉ Ps. 104:24 (Earth is filled with the wonderful works of God.)
- ☉ Ps. 105:4–5 (Seek God's face and call to mind the great things God has done.)
- ☉ Isa. 40:18 (To whom can God be compared? What image is like God?)

NOTES

Use the space below to jot notes and reminders for the next time you use this strategy.



Object Passages and Prayers

Make a photocopy of this handout and cut apart each section as scored.



Tissues

Matthew 5:5

Blessed are the sorrowful for they shall be comforted.

Dear God, may we bring comfort to those who are sorrowful. I offer you, God, my own tears for the people or things I have lost.

Rocks

John 8:7

Let the one who has not sinned be the first to throw a stone.

Dear God, may your forgiveness bring families, people, and nations back together. I pray for the courage to forgive those who have hurt me.

Seeds

Matthew 17:20–21

With faith the size of a mustard seed, nothing will be impossible for you.

Dear God, help us to reach out to those who are struggling to believe. God, I ask you to help me grow up strong in my own faith and trust in you.

Gift Bows

Luke 6:38

Give and there will be a full measure of gifts for you.

Dear God, may we all come to understand that everything is a gift from you. I pray in thanksgiving for the many blessings and gifts I have already received.

Pennies

Luke 18:22

Sell what you own, give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.

Dear God, teach us to share our wealth with those who are poor and needy in our world. I pray that I might grow to be generous with the gifts you have given me.

Matches

Matthew 5:14

You are the light of the world.

Dear God, teach us to bring your light to the places where people are struggling in the darkness of despair. I pray that I can share my light with those around me who need love and warmth.



Life Savers

John 15:13

There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.

Dear God, may we become the friends of those who are the last and least in our world. I pray in thanksgiving for the friendships that give me life.

Puzzle Pieces

Matthew 25:35

I was a stranger, and you welcomed me.

Dear God, show us how we can open our hearts and homes to those who are alone, outcast, or strangers. I pray for the people in my life who do not fit in. Help me to be a friend who brings people together.

Band-Aids

Isaiah 61:1

God has sent me to bring good news to the poor and bind up broken hearts.

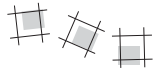
Dear God, show us how we can bring healing and hope to your suffering people. I pray for the people in my life who are living with pain and suffering.

Rice or Pasta

Matthew 25:35

I was hungry, and you fed me.

Dear God, open our eyes that we may be moved to share with those who are hungry. I pray that I might become more aware of the needs and hungers of others.



Unbound!

OVERVIEW

Praying for forgiveness sets us free. In this prayer the young people experience this message through a ritual of reconciliation. This strategy, which is ideal for a retreat or as a conclusion to a session on forgiveness, allows the participants to dramatically ritualize both the paralysis of sinfulness and the release brought about by reconciliation.

Suggested Time

20 to 30 minutes

Group Size

This activity works best with groups of fifteen to thirty young people. Larger groups will require greater attention and the assistance of additional adults.

Special Considerations

This prayer requires a good deal of space because it attempts to demonstrate the change that occurs when forgiveness is experienced, by having the young people move from one location to another. With a large group, this process works well in a hall, a cafeteria, or a school gym. If such a room is not available, use hallways or adjacent rooms.

Ideally, you should have four adults or leaders to help conduct this prayer activity. It is important to affirm to the group that this is a ritual, intended only to be a symbolic exercise.

Materials Needed

- ☀ a pillar candle and matches
- ☀ other faith symbols
- ☀ a Bible
- ☀ 2-by-30-inch strips of white or light-colored fabric, one for each person (for use as blindfolds; use old sheets or other material—thin materials such as cotton or flannel work best)
- ☀ washable colored markers, at least one for each participant

PROCEDURE

Preparation. Place a pillar candle in a central or prominent part of the room and create a focus area by placing around the candle other faith symbols, such as a crucifix, a bowl of water, a blanket or cloth, and an appropriate picture, poster, or statue. Place strips of white or light-colored fabric, one for each participant, in four separate bundles around the focus area. Place a set of washable colored markers on or beside each bundle. Identify four locations, either the corners of the room or adjacent rooms or hallways, where the young people can be sent to be bound.

1. Attention to the environment can help you maintain a prayerful atmosphere for this active prayer. Darken the room, light a pillar candle, and gather everyone around the focus area. Begin by reading Mark 2:1–12 (Jesus forgives and cures a paralytic).

2. Take a few moments to discuss the Scripture story. The following comments may be helpful:



In Jesus' time people believed that illness and disease were punishments for sins committed by individuals or their family, and that God alone could forgive sins or remove curses.

There are many ways that we can be paralyzed in life: being unable to care, unwilling to listen to someone, or reluctant to see clearly, or feeling powerless to reach out and help.

Jesus healed as a way of demonstrating that the power of God's love and forgiveness sets us free.

3. Using the following questions or similar ones of your own, invite the young people to reflect quietly on the message or meaning of this story:



How could the paralyzed person symbolize you or your life?

Have you ever felt cursed, punished, held back, or kept down in life by something that has happened to you?

How have your sins, or the sins of others, paralyzed you, or stopped you from reaching out to, making peace with, or caring about other people in your life?

4. Invite the participants to come forward one by one to select a fabric strip binding and a colored marker from one of the four piles. Lead the group through the following brief reflection exercise:



Marked by the sins of the past, we can be paralyzed by those who have sinned against us. Yet we have the power to forgive those who have hurt us. As you listen to the questions that follow, call to mind a person who has hurt you:

Has someone said words against you?

Has someone done something to cause you pain?

Have people ignored you or turned their back on you?

Do you find it difficult to forgive or care about someone?

With the marker write on the binding strip a name or a set of initials that symbolize a sin committed against you.

5. After the participants have marked their binding strips, ask them to reflect on the second part of this examination of conscience:



We are bound by what we have failed to do.

By refusing to care, to listen, to speak up, or to notice others, we can become paralyzed, bound by the things we have failed to do. As you listen to the questions that follow, let your mind reveal how you have been bound.

Have you failed to help someone because you have allowed your hands to be tied?

Have you ignored someone or chosen to be blind to others?

Have you failed to speak up for someone because you have let yourself be gagged?

Have you refused to listen to someone because you have let yourself be deaf to others?

Which of those scenarios brought a situation or a person to mind immediately? Which of the four bindings fits most tightly with the things you have failed to do?

6. Send an adult or a leader to each of the four locations you have identified. Challenge the young people to select one of the four forms of symbolic binding: to be blindfolded, to have their hands tied, to have their mouth covered, or to have their ears covered. Indicate one location for each form of binding and direct the group members to move to the location of their choice, taking their fabric strip with them.

Have the leader at each location carefully use each participant's fabric strip to loosely bind him or her. Affirm to the group that this is a ritual, intended only to be a symbolic exercise.

7. When all the participants have been bound, instruct the leaders to bring their group back to the central area or main room. Read the following paraphrase of John 20:20–23:



Though the doors were closed, Jesus came and stood among them and said: "Peace be with you. As God has sent me, so I am sending you. Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; and those whose sins you retain, they are retained."

8. Have each leader invite one bound group member to come forward to the candle, where while removing the binding, the leader recites the phrase, "You are forgiven, now go and do likewise!" Then have the leader give the fabric strip to the person who had been bound and challenge the young person to turn to a neighbor and, using the same words, to release that person from his or her binding. Guide this process until everyone is released.

9. Encourage the young people to examine the cloth they are holding. Recite the following line from the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us," and challenge the young people to forgive the people involved in the sin they had marked on their binding. Invite the young people to take their strip home and carry it until they find a way to forgive those who have hurt them. Suggest that after they extend forgiveness, they can wash out the strip of fabric until the name or initials they had written on it are removed.

Conclude the prayer service by inviting everyone to recite the Lord's Prayer together.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

- ☉ With the proper permission, set this activity inside the church, beginning in the gathering area and ending in the sanctuary.
- ☉ Extend this activity by adding a concluding reading and reflection on the parable of the unforgiving debtor, Matt. 18:23–35.

**SCRIPTURAL
CONNECTIONS**

- ⊙ Invite the participants to return at a subsequent session with their washed fabric strips. Have them tie together the strips to form a chain of forgiveness. This chain of knotted fabric can be displayed in the youth room or classroom or even draped around a large crucifix or cross.
- ⊙ Adapt this ritual and use it to prepare the young people to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation. It also fits well with the themes of Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.
- ⊙ If this activity takes place at a camp, it can be effective to have the participants burn their fabric strips in a pit or bonfire.

- ⊙ Psalm 130 (From the depths I cry to God, where forgiveness and mercy are found.)
- ⊙ Isa. 61:1–2 (The Spirit of God has anointed me to bring good news and to proclaim liberty to captives.)
- ⊙ Matt. 18:18 (What you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.)
- ⊙ John 8:31–32,34–36 (The truth will make you free. Those who sin are slaves, but Christ will set you free.)
- ⊙ Gal. 5:1 (Christ freed us and meant us to be free.)

NOTES



Use the space below to jot notes and reminders for the next time you use this strategy.