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Ready-Made
Prayer Services

with **100** Extra
Prayer
Ideas

**Maryann M.
Hakowski**

Saint Mary's Press®



Dedication

In loving memory of Cecylia Fortuna Hakowski

May the angels bear you up;
give you to drink this holy cup.
May the Saints come welcome you;
Here is a life forever new.

(© Gary Hardin and James Hansen, "Farewell Blessing")



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Introduction

Making Room for God and Prayer

Teens today are very busy. They juggle school, jobs, sports, friends, extracurricular activities, and family responsibilities. Sometimes they see coming to church and being involved in youth activities as additional burdens.

Some say: “I give 45 minutes to God every week when I come to Mass. Isn’t that enough?” And some don’t even come to Mass. I encourage teens to find room for God in all they do, to find opportunities for prayer anytime and anyplace.

When I teach a Confirmation class on prayer, I always use the sponge and water illustration. I place a large empty glass on a table in front of the teens and ask, “What things in life keep you busy—fill up your life?” As they list things like work, homework, sports, and fun activities, I ask them to place a small piece of sponge in the glass. In no time, the glass is completely filled with sponges.

The teens easily agree the glass is full and their lives are even more full. I then invite a teen to pour some water into the glass. Though full of sponges, the glass holds quite a bit of water.

What happened? The water filled the spaces in and around all the sponges. Not only that, it transformed the sponges from flat and dry to soft and full.

There is always room for God and prayer in our lives, in our school, in our work, in our time with friends. Just as the sponges are changed by the water, pouring prayer into our lives will transform us as well.

Teens sometimes think prayer changes God. We can teach them that prayer actually changes the one who prays to God.

Be a Weaver of Prayer

A good storyteller is a weaver; an experienced pray-er is a weaver. You can start where you are. Look for opportunities to weave prayer into your personal life. Then, as you plan your classes or youth-group program, look for opportunities to weave prayer into all you do with youth.

You don’t want to treat prayer like a Post-it note. Some people plan their whole program, realize they forgot prayer, and then try to stick it in a few places. Prayer cannot be an afterthought in a well-balanced youth ministry program. There is room for prayer in religious education classes, youth-group meetings, outreach projects, and social events. For some events, prayer is the centerpiece, such as retreats or days of recollection.

Widen Your View of Prayer

It is a good idea to begin where your young people are in their spiritual journey. Help them name the forms of prayer they already experience, such as traditional prayer (the Lord's Prayer, the stations of the cross, and so on) or prayers of petition (found in the Prayers of the Faithful at Mass.)

When teaching about symbols and prayer, consider starting with prayer symbols the young people recognize, such as a crucifix or a candle, and then challenging them to see other symbols that can invite them to prayer, such as M&M's to represent diversity, or car keys to symbolize responsibility.

There are many different forms of prayer and different ways to encounter God, but it is important to choose a prayer form that reverences the group's comfort level. For example, if your group has never experienced spontaneous shared prayer, you would be wise not to try this form the first time the group meets. You might try it later, as the teens become more comfortable with you and with one another.

Identify the gifts the teens might bring to prayer. Perhaps one plays the flute and would be willing to play a piece for meditation. Another might be a talented artist and could design the cover of your prayer or worship aid. Yet another may be good at choosing contemporary songs that add to your prayer theme for the week.

Prayer is certainly found in a Catholic prayer book or at Sunday liturgy, but it can also be found in a sunset on the beach, in a set of keys, in a song on a favorite CD, or in a grandmother's story.

We must respect how each person prays. Some find great comfort in praying the rosary in a silent chapel. Others may feel more comfortable praying by singing at the top of their lungs at a Christian rock concert. God does not care *how* we pray but rather *that* we pray. Limiting prayer to one form limits how God can touch us.

How to Use This Book

This prayer resource book has been designed with twenty-two ready-to-use prayer services on a variety of themes. Choose prayer themes that speak to the everyday issues and experiences of teens as well as themes that challenge the teens to grow, especially in the area of social-justice issues. On the opening page of each chapter, you will find a list of themes and prayer forms that each prayer service uses.

The opening page of each chapter also contains a list of extra prayer ideas. You can use these ideas as a springboard in planning lead-in or follow-up activities, in leading additional activities on related topics, or in place of the full prayer service presented in the chapter.

On the second page of each chapter is a list of materials needed, what to prepare before the prayer service, and the order of prayer to guide you in leading the prayer service. Many of the prayer services incorporate song. Unless otherwise indicated, the teens are to sing the suggested songs. You can find most of the songs in popular hymnals or worship resources. A search of the Web sites of liturgical music publishers such as OCP Publications and GIA Publications, Inc., can help you locate CDs, sheet music, and lyrics. Most of the song lyrics can also be found on the Christian Lyrics Online Web site. It is up to you to determine what will work best for your group of teens. Most of the prayer services also incorporate readings, providing the opportunity for teens to serve as lectors and prayer readers. Parts for individual

readers or for the group as a whole are printed as handouts or resources at the end of each chapter. You can photocopy those and distribute them to your readers.

If you are new to youth ministry or are short on planning time, you will probably want to use the prayer services exactly as written. If you are an experienced youth minister or have ample planning time, you might want to choose individual parts of the prayer services and put them together into your own prayer experience.

Plan Ahead

Prayer can be so much more than starting your meeting with the Lord's Prayer. Plan ahead to make the experiences more meaningful. Check the teaching manual for your class, this book, and other prayer resource books to add prayers on a variety of personal, liturgical, and real-life themes.

Prepare your environment to make it appropriate for prayer. If you need quiet, choose a place more removed. If the teens need a place to spread out, choose a larger space for prayer.

Make sure those assisting with prayer understand their roles and have time to practice their readings. Check the sound system and other electronic devices you will be using to make sure they are working properly before you begin prayer.

Be Open to the Spirit

Despite all your planning, events will happen in the lives of the teens and the world around us. When someone or something calls your group to prayer, run with it and trust the Spirit. Some world events that have led to spontaneous prayer in my experience are the 9-11 terrorist attacks; the 2004 tsunami that hit many parts of Asia and East Africa; the death of Pope John Paul II; and Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Ivan. The teens might be dealing with the death of a coach, supporting a friend who is suffering from cancer, trying to be there for someone who is dealing with an unplanned pregnancy, or perhaps struggling with the transfer of a popular pastor.

Give teens a chance. It is my experience that when I stereotype a group and say, "Oh, these guys can't handle shared prayer," more powerful prayer is born. Do not be afraid to try something new. Shared prayer can mean passing a candle around a circle and giving everyone a chance to pray, but it could also mean starting a youth-group prayer blog where teens are welcome to add their prayers anytime.

Involve Teens in Leading Prayer

Look for opportunities to involve the teens in leading prayer. The prayer services in this book offer many opportunities for them to lead and participate in prayer. We can teach teens that prayer is not a spectator sport by inviting them to get off the bench.

As you model a variety of prayer forms and styles, encourage the teens, with your guidance, to plan and lead their own prayer services.

Prayer Takes Practice

The more you lead prayer with teens, the more comfortable you will become. No one is an expert after a first piano lesson. No one can dunk every basket when first handed a basketball. If you are a little nervous about praying with teens, that is okay. Give it your best, and give it time.

Prayer Brings Balance into Our Lives

Why pray? There are many reasons, each as different as the teens you encounter in your ministry. But as I gift this prayer resource to you and your teens, allow me to share one more illustration . . .

At the end of my Confirmation class on prayer, I ask all the teens to stand on one foot for as long as they can. They may not hold on to anyone or anything, and one foot may not be supported by the other leg. It must stay off the floor. We laugh. They fall down. Some hop. Some get frustrated. Some wave their arms. Some can do it longer. When we are done, I ask, "What can this activity teach us about prayer?"

Some say that prayer takes practice or concentration. Others say prayer requires the support of others. What I hope to share is that prayer helps us keep our life in balance. Like the pole that a tightrope walker uses, a healthy prayer life helps us keep our personal and spiritual life in balance.

This book of prayer is my gift to you. God bless you in your ministry. You can be sure that I am praying for you.

1

W

elcoming God and Others

- Themes**
- All are welcome
 - Be open to God and others
 - Ask, search, knock

- Suggested Uses**
- At a youth-group meeting when new members are being welcomed
 - As a prayer service for incoming freshmen
 - At a youth-group meeting on hospitality or avoiding cliques

- Forms of Prayer**
- Symbolic prayer
 - Scripture
 - Music
 - Reflection
 - Petition
 - Traditional prayer
 - Liturgical prayer
 - Storytelling

- Extra Prayer Ideas**
- A. The Scriptures contain many examples of times when Jesus welcomed those whom no one else would welcome—lepers (see Luke 17:11–19), tax collectors (see Luke 19:1–10), sinners (see John 8:1–11), Samaritans (see John 4:7–30), and even Roman soldiers (see Matthew 8:53). Include one of these Scripture passages in your prayer.
 - B. Invite the teens to attend the rite of welcome for the catechumens in the RCIA program. The teens could be part of a welcoming reception after the liturgy.
 - C. Decorate a large jar with the words *Ask*, *Search*, and *Knock*. Keep it in your gathering space with paper and a pen or pencil nearby. Invite the teens to add petitions to the prayer jar whenever they feel a need.
 - D. Take time to pray for those who feel lost, lonely, and outcast.
 - E. Invite an older teen, perhaps a high school senior, to give a witness talk on how it feels to be excluded versus welcomed. The teen could describe a time when he or she felt shunned and a time when he or she felt welcomed and accepted by others.

With Jesus the Door Is Always Open

- Materials** Gather the following items before beginning the prayer service:
- a sheet of newsprint
 - the song “Seek Ye First,” by Karen Lafferty
 - The Catholic Youth Bible*® or another Bible
 - seven copies of resource 1–A, “Prayers of Petition for Welcoming Others”
 - a wooden or cardboard door on a stand
 - fine-tipped markers
 - a CD of reflective music
 - a CD player

- Preparation**
- Make a small wooden or cardboard welcome door with a doorknob and a stand for the door. Place the door in a central location where it will be easily seen and accessible. Have markers nearby for the signing ritual.
 - Ask several teens to be involved in preparing for the prayer service. Some can work together to choose a Christian rock or contemporary liturgical song to be used in the service.
 - Ask one teen to prepare the Scripture reading:
 - Luke 11:9 (Ask, Search, Knock)
 - Ask seven teens to prepare the petitions on resource 1–A, “Prayers of Petition for Welcoming Others.”
 - Ask an adult youth leader to prepare a short reflection focused on the Scripture passage or the theme of the prayer service.
 - Display on newsprint the following responses:
 - “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you” (Luke 11:9).
 - “Lord, help us to be open to you.”Introduce these responses and explain to the teens how they will use them throughout the prayer service.
 - Teach the song “Seek Ye First.”

Order of Prayer

- Call to Prayer** **Prayer Leader:** The door is open. Come in. Meet new people. Stay awhile. Let us open ourselves to Jesus in prayer. We pray for ourselves, our youth group, and our parish community (or school) that we may be open to God and to one another.
- Opening Song** Invite the teens to sing “Seek Ye First.”

Reading *[Direct the Scripture reader to read Luke 11:9.]*

Prayer Leader: Our response is, “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you” *[Luke 11:9]*. **All respond.**

Prayer Leader: Please take a few moments to reflect on this question: How would Jesus greet you if you ran into him today? *[Pause for quiet time.]*
[Direct the adult leader to read his or her prepared reflection.]

Prayer Leader: The door is always open; let us pray to be open to God and others.
All respond.

Prayers of Petition *[Direct the readers to read their assigned prayers from their copies of resource 1–A, “Prayers of Petition for Welcoming Others.”]*

Petition Reader: *Our response is, “Lord, help us to be open to you.”* **All Respond.**

Petition Reader: We pray for our Church, as it struggles through difficult times, that the Holy Spirit guide our bishops and priests. We pray to the Lord. We pray for our parish, that we welcome all people—young and old, rich and poor, people of all nationalities—with open arms and hearts. We pray to the Lord. **All Respond.**

Petition Reader: We pray for the senior-high youth group of our parish, that we make everyone feel welcome at every meeting and activity. We pray to the Lord. **All Respond.**

Petition Reader: We pray for all the teens, those present and those who cannot be with us tonight, that they are able to find God in their everyday lives. We pray to the Lord. **All Respond.**

Petition Reader: We pray for all the teens, those present and those who cannot be with us tonight, that they are able to find God in all their relationships. We pray to the Lord. **All Respond.**

Petition Reader: We pray for all the teens that are sick, and all the friends and family that are sick, that God bring them God’s healing presence and touch. We pray to the Lord. **All Respond.**

Petition Reader: We pray for all the teens that have recently moved here or are starting at a new school, that they make new friends and feel comfortable in their new environments. We pray to the Lord. **All Respond.**

Petition Reader: “Ask and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you” *[Luke 11:9]*.

Signing of the Welcome Door *[Invite the young people to come forward and sign the welcome door as a promise to be open to God and others. Play a reflective song while the participants are signing the door.]*

Prayer Leader: “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you” *[Luke 11:9]*.

[Close by leading the group in the Lord’s Prayer.]

Prayers of Petition for Welcoming Others

- Reader 1** Our response is, “Lord, help us to be open to you.” **All Respond.**
- Reader 1** We pray for our Church, as it struggles through difficult times, that the Holy Spirit guide our bishops and priests. We pray to the Lord. We pray for our parish, that we welcome all people—young and old, rich and poor, people of all nationalities—with open arms and hearts. We pray to the Lord. **All Respond.**
- Reader 2** We pray for the senior-high youth group of our parish, that we make everyone feel welcome at every meeting and activity. We pray to the Lord. **All Respond.**
- Reader 3** We pray for all the teens, those present and those who cannot be with us tonight, that they are able to find God in their everyday lives. We pray to the Lord. **All Respond.**
- Reader 4** We pray for all the teens, those present and those who cannot be with us tonight, that they are able to find God in all their relationships. We pray to the Lord. **All Respond.**
- Reader 5** We pray for all the teens that are sick, and all the friends and family that are sick, that God bring them God’s healing presence and touch. We pray to the Lord. **All Respond.**
- Reader 6** We pray for all the teens that have recently moved here or are starting at a new school, that they make new friends and feel comfortable in their new environments. We pray to the Lord. **All Respond.**
- Reader 7** “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you” [*Luke 11:9*].

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