

Prayer

Celebrating and Reflecting with Girls

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To my mother, Helen Kielbasa.
And to my aunt Regina Lennox.
Women of great wisdom.
Women of deep love.
Women of profound faith.

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Introduction

“You are made in the image of God.” That simple statement is the heart of spirituality—a profound statement about who we are and who we are becoming. There is no more important mantra for adults to communicate as they parent, teach, minister, and pray with young people.

The journey to adulthood has always been a time of transition. Those who walk with adolescents know that the journey is also unique for each person. In fact, recent studies confirm the age-old intuitive sense that girls and boys experience life in ways that are unique to their gender. If gender differences affect physical, emotional, and psychological development, then certainly spirituality is shaped as well by feminine or masculine perspectives.

For girls in this country at the turn of the millennium, opportunities for equality are greater than for girls in any previous generation. Still, psychologists, educators, ministers, and parents know that the risks and issues that confront young females seem rooted in a different reality than those that face young males. Brought up in the crucible of a media world, girls continue to receive messages that beauty and body are more important than mind and spirit. Told that they can do anything, they too often engage in behaviors that endanger them more than empower them. In the interest of “being nice,” they abdicate their voice to males, exhibiting a dramatic drop in self-esteem in their adolescent years.

Girls experience life in terms of relationships. While their male counterparts charge headlong into separation and independence, young women, by nature and nurture, seem predisposed to connectedness and intimacy. Psychologists like Carol Gilligan (*In a Different Voice*) and Mary Pipher (*Reviving Ophelia*) have brought attention to the life of girls, spawning an entire genre of literature aimed at addressing the phenomenon of the female adolescent experience. Addressing young women’s psychosocial world is a good beginning, but few experts in the field of girls’ development have ventured into the realm of spirituality.

Spirituality is about relationship—relationship with the One who created us. It is about loving and living out a call to become the kind of person God created us to be. Girls need to hear this message, embrace it, and live it. They need guidance to challenge a culture that contradicts their sacredness; they need adults who will listen to them, relate with them, and walk with them, reminding them of their destiny, reminding them, “You are made in the image of God.”

“Herstory” of the Voices Project

The Voices Project is the realization of the dream of a national team of female educators, youth ministers, parents, and mentors who have a special concern for the spirituality of girls. They envisioned a multifaceted initiative that would bring together the energy of the girls’ movement and the wisdom of women’s spirituality. Their dream was a convergence of the work of psychologists Mary Pipher and Carol Gilligan with the work of Catholic writers like Maria Harris and Elizabeth Johnson. As a result of listening sessions with girls from around the country, the team identified the need for resources for adults who work with girls in Catholic school and parish settings. One response to that need is the Voices series.

Overview of the Voices Series

The Voices series consists of six manuals that present strategies to use with adolescent girls in schools, parishes, and single-gender settings. The authors and consultants in the series have extensive experience working with girls in both coed and single-gender situations. The manuals they have produced are different from one another in content and focus, yet all share the same purpose: to help girls embrace the true meaning of the phrase “created in the image of God,” a profound statement about who they are and who they are becoming. This manual, *Prayer: Celebrating and Reflecting with Girls*, is one of the results; the other manuals are as follows:

- *Awakening: Challenging the Culture with Girls* offers a variety of activities to help girls critique the culture for both its negative and its positive influences.
- *Retreats: Deepening the Spirituality of Girls* presents seven retreats on themes such as friendship, media, and childhood myths. Also included is a retreat for mothers and daughters.
- *Church Women: Probing History with Girls* outlines strategies for discovering the richness of women’s contributions to the life of the church.
- *Biblical Women: Exploring Their Stories with Girls* suggests ways to help girls get to know the women in the Scriptures and examine the roles they played in communities of faith and the beginnings of the church.
- *Seeking: Doing Theology with Girls* offers methods for exploring and discussing theological and moral issues from the perspective of women.

Where and When to Use the Voices Series

The Voices resource manuals can be used in a variety of settings, though they are intended for use with girls in single-gender groups. The rationale for meeting in single-gender settings is particularly compelling for young women. Numerous studies indicate that girls are much more likely to speak up, express their opinion, and be genuinely heard in “just girl” groups. Some topics related to growing up and finding one’s way in society are difficult for females to discuss in the presence of males. Imparting the particular wisdom of women to girls, and of men to boys, is a time-

honored practice that can be highly effective when used occasionally in educational, church, and social institutions.

Finding opportunities for single-gender gatherings can be a challenge; consider these suggestions:

- Offer gender-specific electives within a school or parish catechetical setting.
- Work with Scout groups, which are already gender specific.
- Form “just girl” groups that meet beyond the typical school day or parish youth night.
- Establish weekly or monthly sessions within the school or parish schedule, at which girls and boys discuss related topics separately. Subsequent discussion with both groups together can lead to greater understanding between the sexes.
- Create mother-daughter or mentor-mentee discussion groups.
- Organize diocesan days for “just girls” or “just boys,” or both.
- Arrange retreats and youth rallies that have gender-specific components or workshops.

Who Might Use the Voices Series

The six resource manuals in the Voices series may be used by coordinators of youth ministry, directors of religious education, teachers in Catholic schools, campus ministers, youth ministers in parish settings, Girl Scout and Camp Fire leaders, parents, mentors, and other adults who work with girls ages ten through nineteen. Flexible enough for single-sex groups in any setting, the manuals’ ideas are designed to engage girls in both headwork and heart work, challenging them to think while nurturing their spirit.

Overview of This Manual

Prayer: Celebrating and Reflecting with Girls provides ideas for community prayer services and suggestions for enriching girls’ personal prayer life. The manual contains twenty-three experiences that are rich in symbol and ritual and are designed to put the hearts and minds of adolescent girls in touch with the sacred. Included in the appendices are a number of short ideas to use as springboards for designing your own prayer experiences and a list of ideas for helping girls make prayer a part of their life away from church or school. The themes addressed in this manual include discernment, nature, wisdom, friendship, peace, the rosary, brokenness, heritage, life’s burdens, and saying yes to God.

How to Get Started

Know the Material

Read each prayer before you facilitate it, and use it creatively to meet the needs of your particular group of girls. In particular, look for ways to make the material most accessible for the girls’ ages and for the size of the group. Most of the prayers in this

manual can be used with girls ages ten to nineteen. Some material is most appropriate for a specific age-group within that span; in many cases, we have included recommendations for adapting such material for older or younger adolescents. Most of the prayers in this manual are designed for groups of twenty to thirty young people, but can easily be adapted for any size group.

Know the Young People

When you have a wide variety of ages together, keep in mind the following differences between young adolescents and older teens:

- Young adolescents think in concrete terms and may not yet be capable of considering some topics abstractly. For example: Older adolescents will probably not have any difficulty recognizing the connection between mixing, kneading, and baking bread and the relationship between themselves and God. They will probably be able to enter into the experience with prayerful solemnity. Young adolescents will more likely see the process of baking bread as a literal one and will not be able to make the connection without help. Also, they will likely consider it a fun experience rather than a deeply meaningful one.
- Young adolescents generally need more physical movement than older teens do. You can address that need through simple activities such as forming small groups for discussion, moving to different parts of the room as a prayer develops, and making sure that each girl has a role in the setup and the ritual.
- When they are working in small groups, young adolescents do better with an adult or older teen leading them. Groups of older teens can often be left alone with instructions for carrying on the discussion or ritual.
- Older teens can usually handle open-ended assignments, but young adolescents respond better to writing exercises and discussions if they are led. For example, a junior in high school can be expected to write a letter to God about a certain topic on a blank sheet of notebook paper, whereas a sixth grader will be more focused with sentence-starters to guide different parts of the letter.

Create a Prayerful Environment

Most of the prayers in this book begin with the girls sitting in a circle around a prayer table, mirroring the circles of women that have gathered around tables throughout history for the purpose of connecting with one another. Groups that meet regularly may want to create a permanent sacred space for ritual. The following are two important considerations for creating the environment:

Involve the girls. Encourage the girls to be involved in creating that space and keeping it special. For example, you might divide the girls into groups and give each group responsibility for setting up the prayer table for a different prayer theme. One group could set up the table for the friendship prayer, another could set up the space for the rosary prayer, and so on.

Engage their senses. Praying involves our entire being—body, mind, and spirit. The senses are a window to that which lies deep inside of us. Whenever and however possible, create a multisensory environment for prayer. Some suggestions follow:

- *Sight.* Use banners, plants, candles, flowers, artworks, and seasonal symbols in the prayer space. Bring in a liturgical artist from a local parish or diocesan office to talk to the girls about the place of the visual arts in prayer. Provide an alternative visual experience by occasionally praying outside the normal meeting space.
- *Hearing.* Music can greatly enhance the experience of prayer. Reflective instrumental music is often suggested in this manual. Whenever appropriate, use liturgical music that is familiar to the girls or popular music that they recommend. Use bells, chimes, woodblocks, and other simple sound makers to call everyone to prayer. The word of God, when proclaimed well, is received through the ears as prayer. Train the girls in the proper way to read the sacred Scriptures.
- *Smell and taste.* Catholics are used to the smells of prayer—incense, flowers, burning candles, and so forth. The taste of prayer—as in the bread and wine—is also a common experience for Catholics. This manual also uses everyday smells and tastes, such as freshly baked bread, to help the girls enter into prayer.
- *Touch.* One of the ways babies learn about life is by touching things and people. We can also learn about God through touch. In the strategies offered in this manual, the girls finger rosary beads, handle candy worms, and explore one another's hands as ways of connecting through touch. We encourage you to find other ways to make touch a part of prayer.

Create a Safe Environment

When involving mothers, mentors, and other adults as prayer leaders with the large group or for small groups, provide written guidelines and even training in group leadership to help them understand the process of the prayer and the dynamics of the group. Consider the following guidelines for any adults who work with the group:

- To hear girls at the level necessary for meaningful interaction, adults need first to listen to themselves and to remember their own adolescence (Patricia H. Davis, *Beyond Nice*, p. 119).
- Girls need adults who are comfortable with prayer. An adult who is hesitant about praying aloud or entering fully into a ritual is not a good role model for the girls. Still, everyone has a personal style of prayer that must be respected and valued.
- Girls need adults who will listen to them and affirm them even when their questions and actions seem uncomfortably challenging, and adults who will allow themselves to be questioned at deep levels (p. 120).
- Girls need confidentiality in any group that engages them in deep thinking, feeling, and sharing. Yet they and the adults who lead them also need to know when to go beyond the resources of the group to seek help.
- Girls need adults who will help them be countercultural in ways that bring animation and love to their life, their community, and their world (p. 121).
- To help girls recognize and nurture their own relationship with God, communities of faith need to listen to and learn from them and take them seriously, with engaged hearts, minds, and souls (p. 121).

Resources for Praying with Girls

The following materials are available through Saint Mary's Press, Winona, Minnesota. Call 800-533-8095, or log on to www.smp.org. Though most of these resources are written for mixed-gender groups, they can easily be adapted for groups of girls.

Also included in the Saint Mary's Press catalog is a variety of resources based on the liturgical year and lectionary cycles. Another set of books that might be helpful with older teens is the Companions for the Journey series. Each book in the series is based on the life and works of a saint, a mystic, or a spiritual guide and includes fifteen meditations to help Christians discover the spiritual wisdom of a holy person.

- Ayer, Jane. A Quiet Place Apart series. Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press. A series of books containing guided meditations on a variety of themes, for young people and adults. Each volume includes a leader's guide and an accompanying recording.
- Baker, Johnny, Steve Collins, and Kevin Draper. *The Prayer Path*. Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2001. A unique devotional experience that helps people draw closer to God. Participants journey through a labyrinth with eleven stations. A CD and participant's guide make this an ideal tool for individual reflection.
- Calderone-Stewart, Lisa-Marie. Prayer Works for Teens series. Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press. A series of four books offering prayers for every kind of setting where prayer takes place. Each book includes four themes, and each theme consists of four prayer formats.
- Grant, Joseph. *Prayer Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2000. A collection of twenty prayer services and strategies to help young people communicate with God. The collection includes active prayer, reflective prayer, short prayers, and longer prayer services.
- Haas, David. *Prayers Before an Awesome God: The Psalms for Teenagers*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1998. The Psalms rewritten in language the teens can understand and identify with. This book contains helpful indexes for finding the right psalm for the right occasion.
- Hakowski, Maryann. *Pathways to Praying with Teens*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1993. A collection of exciting and meaningful ways to pray with teenagers, using symbols, music, scriptural drama, dance, mime, audiovisuals, and many other tools.
- Kielbasa, Marilyn. *Community-Building Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2000. Eighty ideas for forming groups with young people, helping them to get to know one another, building teams, and providing opportunities for them to affirm one another.
- Kielbasa, Marilyn, ed. *Looking Past the Sky: Prayers by Young Teens* (1999) and *Life Can Be a Wild Ride: More Prayers by Young Teens* (2001). Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press. Together, these books include almost five hundred reflections on all aspects of life written by young people ages eleven to fourteen.
- Kielbasa, Marilyn, and Janet Claussen, eds. *Listen for a Whisper: Prayers, Poems, and Reflections by Girls*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2001. Over two hundred pieces written by girls ages eleven to eighteen from parishes and schools all around North America.

- Koch, Carl, ed. *Dreams Alive: Prayers by Teenagers* (1991), *More Dreams Alive: Prayers by Teenagers* (1995), and *You Give Me the Sun: Biblical Prayers by Teenagers* (2000). Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press. Collections of prayers by young people ages fourteen to eighteen from schools and parishes throughout the United States.
- Singer-Towns, Brian, ed. *Bringing Catholic Youth and the Bible Together: Strategies and Activities for Parishes and Schools*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2000. A collection of articles by various experts on connecting young people to the Scriptures. Of particular interest is the article by Lisa-Marie Calderone-Stewart on *lectio divina* and teens.
- Singer-Towns, Brian, ed. *The Catholic Youth Bible*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2000. Includes several Bible reading plans and prayers from a variety of cultures that connect to specific scriptural passages.

Voices Internet Resources

Log on to the Voices Web site at www.smp.org/voices for ideas, activities, resources, and links. This Web site is updated weekly.

Your Comments or Suggestions

Saint Mary's Press wants to know your reactions to the strategies in the Voices series. We are also interested in new strategies for use with adolescent girls. 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; e-mail the editor through the "Contact Us" page at www.smp.org/voices; or e-mail the editor directly at mkielbasa@smp.org. Your ideas will help improve future editions of these manuals.



Weaving a Cloth of Goodness

A Reflection on Virtues

We are called to a life of virtue. This prayer service uses a metaphor of weaving to encourage the girls to consider how they will continuously weave the threads of virtue into their life. The prayer can work well alone or as part of a retreat experience, a meeting, or a day of reflection. It is best suited for older teens, ages fifteen through eighteen.

Suggested Time

35 to 50 minutes

Group Size

This prayer is appropriate for any size group.

Preparation

- Prepare the prayer space by setting out a Bible, a candle and matches, pieces of multicolored woven cloth, spools of thread, skeins of yarn, crochet needles, embroidery thread, and other items related to entwining thread. Hang a small rod in the front of the prayer space where everyone can see it.
- Cut apart the passages on resource 1, “Weaving the Scriptures,” and attach to each one a piece of yarn or embroidery thread in the appropriate color, as follows:

love: red	compassion: pink	respect: orange
peace: blue	honesty: yellow	hope: white
justice: green	wholeness: brown	faith: purple
- Recruit volunteers to read the scriptural passages related to each virtue. Give each reader a different one of the passages that you prepared with the thread or yarn attached. Be sure the readers note the number on their paper, which indicates the order in which they are to read it.
- Cut 24-inch strands of embroidery thread or yarn in each of the colors used for the scriptural passages on resource 1. You will need one of each color for each participant. Place the strands in a basket.

Procedure

1. As the girls gather, play reflective instrumental music. Invite them to a moment of silence, centering themselves in God’s presence. Light a candle and remind them of Jesus’ words, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matt. 18:20).

2. Introduce the prayer by making the following remarks in your own words:

- ☉ Life is a tapestry, and we weave it each moment, learning from the most skilled weaver of all, God. We learn what colors to weave into our life in the greatest handbook of all, the Bible.
- ☉ Each color of thread in a multicolored fabric becomes part of the whole, giving the fabric a vibrant, integrated look. In the same way, each virtue that we weave into our life brings us one step closer to wholeness and holiness.

3. Invite the first three readers to share their passage, one at a time. As each passage is read, pass around the basket of thread or yarn and tell the girls each to take a strand of thread or yarn in the corresponding color, that is, red for the love passage, blue for peace, and green for justice. When each reader finishes her passage, have her tie it to the rod in the prayer space.

After the third reading (justice), lead the girls in a braiding ritual with their three pieces of thread or yarn. Set the mood by comparing the words of the Scriptures to the threads of a tapestry. Invite the girls to think about how they will weave the virtues they heard about into their own life.

Tell the girls to tie the three pieces of thread or yarn at the top, slowly braid them, and tie a knot at the bottom. Provide the girls each with a paper clip, bag tie, or other item with which to hang their braid, and direct them to attach the item at the top of the braid.

4. Invite the rest of the readers to share their passage, passing the basket of thread or yarn as before and leading the girls in the braiding ritual after the sixth (wholeness) and ninth (faith) passages. By the end, the girls should have three tricolored braids.

5. When all the braiding is completed, tell the girls to hold all three braids in their hands and close their eyes as you lead them in a guided meditation. Read the following meditation slowly, pausing at the ellipses:

- ☉ “Our hands wove these braids of many colors to remind us that Christian virtues must be woven into our life if we are to live as whole and holy followers of Jesus. . . . Let your fingers feel the strands of your braids. . . . Feel the texture as the strands twist over and above . . . under and through . . . and all around the other strands. . . . How might love wind its way through your relationships? . . . How can peace twist over the conflicts you experience in life? . . . Will you let faith work its way through the tough decisions you face? . . . What virtues do you most need to weave into your life?”

6. Invite the girls to quietly attach their braids to the rod in the prayer space. When all the braids are attached, make the following comments in your own words:

- ☉ We are each our own person, yet we come together and form a community of prayer. The woven pieces represent our individual lives. When we hang them all together, we see a pattern emerge from the different colors, textures, and lengths. Some braids are tight, others are loose; some are short, others are long.
- ☉ The virtues of love, peace, justice, compassion, honesty, wholeness, respect, hope, and faith can be seen in the braids hanging on the rods. How these virtues color our life is up to us.

7. Close the prayer by gathering the girls in a circle around the prayer space. Lead with the sentence-starter, “Today we pray for love” and invite the girls to mention any particular prayers they have that are related to the virtue of love. Do the same for each virtue. End the prayer time with a sign of peace.

Additional Activities

- Begin or close this prayer service with the prayer “Weave for Us a Garment” on page 1,391 of *The Catholic Youth Bible*, edited by Brian Singer-Towns (Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s Press, 2000).
- Read the Scripture readings without stopping after each group of three. Invite the girls to choose the three virtues that they feel are needed most in their life and to make one braid instead of three.
- Instead of inviting the girls to hang the braids in the prayer space, invite them to create one braid by combining all three braids created in the ritual. Suggest that they hang their braid in their room or in their locker as a daily reminder of the challenge to live virtuously.
- If time is limited, eliminate the sentence-starters at the end of the prayer. Invite each girl to name one virtue she needs in her life. Then read Eph. 4:1–6.

Notes

Use this space to jot ideas, reminders, and additional resources.

Weaving the Scriptures

1. Love

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. (1 Corinthians 13:4–8)

2. Peace

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” (Luke 24:36)

3. Justice

Let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

(Amos 5:24)

4. Compassion

Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth;
break forth, O mountains, into singing!
For the LORD has comforted [the] people,
and will have compassion on [the] suffering ones.

(Isaiah 49:13)

5. Honesty

Then Jesus said . . . , “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” (John 8:31–32)

6. Wholeness

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. (Ecclesiastes 3:1)

7. Respect

I . . . beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. . . .

. . . Each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift. (Ephesians 4:1–7)

8. Hope

We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered. (Hebrews 6:19–20)

9. Faith

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 3:14–15)
