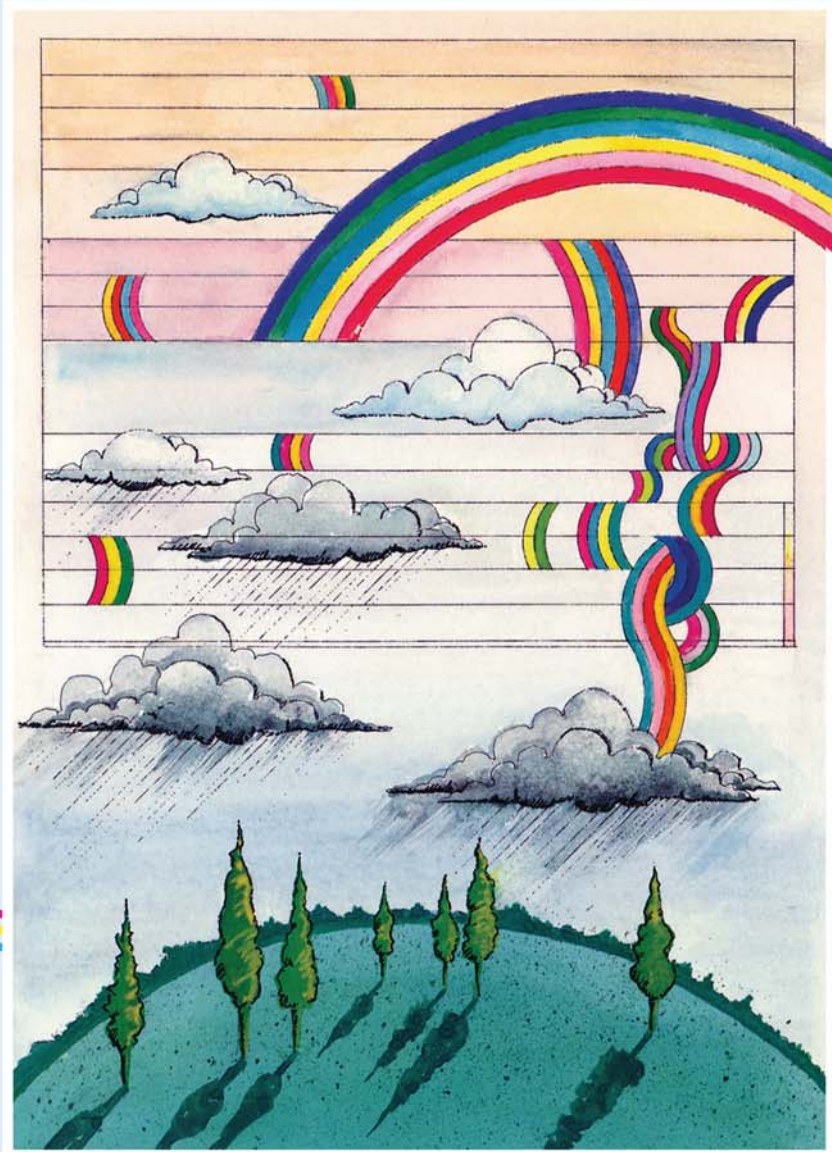


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Dreams Alive

Prayers by Teenagers



Edited by Carl Koch



Dreams Alive: Prayers by Teenagers



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The publishing team included Carl Koch, development editor; Cheryl Drivdahl, copy editor; Barbara Bartelson, production editor and typesetter; Carolyn St. George, cover designer; pre-press, printing, and binding by the graphics division of Saint Mary's Press.

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Preface

The prayers in this book touch on themes and feelings at the heart of teenagers' experience: the challenge of making important decisions, wonderment at creation, concern about the future of the environment, thanksgiving for friends, and so on. Students from Maine to Hawaii and Montana to Florida contributed to this collection. The prayers are honest and articulate. Some radiate optimism, some cast doubts. They reflect the depth of insight often overlooked in teenagers and also reveal the humor with which teenagers cope.

Gathering the Prayers

Much of the motivation for compiling this text came from educators who, upon visiting with the Saint Mary's Press staff, would ask if we had a book of prayers to use with youth groups, high school classes, youth retreats, or other programs for teenagers. These requests persisted. Finally, when I proposed that we publish a book of prayers for teenagers, the staff agreed and also recommended that the prayers should be written by teenagers themselves.

Consequently, in November 1989, I sent out a letter to all religious education chairpersons in Catholic high schools and parish religious education programs throughout the United States, inviting them to collect prayers and reflections of their students. The letter read: "The topics

the students choose to write about can be virtually anything that deals with concerns or themes of high interest to young people. The selections may be funny or serious, focused on themselves as individuals or on other people, perhaps even reactions to national or world affairs. Most important, we are looking for writing that reflects honesty, authenticity, and an awareness of the real world of young people." I believe you will find that the prayers we selected have all these qualities.

To ensure spontaneity, I asked that the students not be told the prayers were being written for possible publication. Because many teachers ask students to write prayers and reflections as a regular part of their class, following this request presented no problems. When teachers had selected prayers for submission, the writers were given the opportunity to attach their full name, initials, or first name, or to remain anonymous. All the prayers were identified by the school or parish from which they came.

By 15 May 1990, the stack of prayers I had received looked about a foot high. The sheer number, the quality, and the diversity stunned me. I began reading, sorting, and selecting, but by the end of the summer, I still had nearly three hundred typewritten pages of prayers that had made it through the first cut. At this point, I knew I needed help.

I asked two students at Saint Mary's College of Minnesota, Mary Beaner and Bernie Buehler, to help in the selection. Also, I requested that Leiha Bowman invite four of her Cotter High School students to help; Annessa Piper, Cassandra Lambrecht, Colm Fitzmaurice, and Jayson Gerth consented to assist me. This team of students studied the prayers and helped select the ones that appear in this book. Their contribution was indispensable and is greatly appreciated.

Using the Prayers

Teenagers, religious educators, youth ministers, and retreat staff may find the prayers useful in a variety of settings and situations: to start a class, to give focus to a prayer session, and so on. Many of the prayers could also trigger discussions about topics important to teenagers.

Before starting a prayer, you may wish to recall God's presence for your group. Such a reminder calms people and prepares them to attend to the prayer being read. To assist you, three different calls inviting God's presence are listed at the beginning of each part of the book (see pages 11, 28, 40, and 60).

Most of the prayers have final lines that finish them off nicely. However, after reading a prayer, you may wish to invite those praying with you to share insights or petitions related to the prayer. Or you may want to give people a moment to pray silently.

This book of prayers could also be a helpful gift to parents of teenagers. The prayers can remind adults that despite appearances sometimes to the contrary, teenagers have a unique and lively perspective on faith, the world, and themselves. The prayers may open avenues of much-needed teen-parent communication.

A Final Word of Thanks

Great thanks are due to all the students who allowed their prayers and reflections to be submitted for consideration. The only unpleasant aspect of editing this book was having to eliminate so many wonderful prayers. They just could not all go into the book. So, thank you all for your contributions and understanding.

Thanks also go to all the religious educators throughout the United States who sent in the hundreds of prayers received. Your cooperation made the book possible.

I hope all you who pray these prayers find consolation, inspiration, and great hope.

Carl Koch
Editor

1



Personal Matters

Recalling God's Presence

- Let us remember that God is with us now.
- God, be with us now as we pray.
- Gracious God, we stand in your presence to pray.

Prayers



Oh, my God, I beg of you, grant me
food in my stomach,
a roof over my head,
a shirt on my back,
a smile on my face,
warmth on my shoulder,
the truth on my tongue,
the light in my eyes,
the love of God and humankind in my heart.
And, God, most of all,
just when I think that the world has turned against me,
then reveal how much
I am truly loved by you and your children.
Through Christ our Savior. Amen.

*Chuck
Saint John's High School, Shrewsbury, MA*



Loving God,

Please help us all to realize how important we all are in this great big world. Never let each of us forget our individuality as one of your children. When the times get tough and our life seems to be headed in no definite direction, let us realize that if we turn to you we will once again find meaning to our life and a path to follow. Through your divine wisdom and strength we can find meaning in the things that really matter, such as our friends, our parents, and our faith in you. Help us to let you enter into our life. Amen.

Mary Peterson
Eastside Catholic High School, Bellevue, WA



A Lamentation

Oh, God, do you hear me calling
in the darkest part of night?
I look to you for guidance
but cannot feel your presence.
Oh, help me to overcome this hell
that I am living.

I sit and cry in confusion.
What have I done to deserve this?
Is it what I have done
or what I have not done?
Oh, God, please help me to find
the cure for evil in my world.

Even if I see just a light in the distance,
to know you are there,
I will feel motivation to continue my journey.
Give me the strength to travel my path,
but, God, don't make me walk alone . . .
for I am a heart with loving intentions.

Jennifer Filkins
Gabriel Richard High School, Riverview, MI



God, you've accomplished many wondrous deeds and blessed us countless times with your gifts, but now I especially thank you for Fridays. My brain is mush, my girlfriend is sick, and next week is beginning to look like a bummer. I really need a vacation to prepare for future events and to collect myself mentally and spiritually. I pray for strength and guidance in all my daily tasks, that I may serve you better day by day. For this and everything else in an otherwise beautiful life, I thank you.

Lumen Christi High School, Jackson, MI



God, help us to have peace of mind and a sense of moral confidence to know in our heart what is right and wrong. Give us strength to make wise decisions and the courage to stand by our convictions—even in the face of adversity or pressure from our peers. Help us to be happy with ourselves and the path we have taken. And love us when we stray from what is right, so that your love may be our guide. Amen.

*Kay Doane
Cardinal Gibbons High School, Raleigh, NC*



Dear God,

My studies in school have been steadily decreasing. I've become awfully lazy and can't seem to do any homework or study for any tests. I don't seem to be able to concentrate as well as I could in the beginning of the year. Why is this? I was wondering if you could possibly give me the strength to overcome this laziness and begin to concentrate again. This would greatly improve my self-confidence and make me know that no matter how boring or hard something may seem, it still can be accomplished.

*Mark Kubashigawa
Saint Louis School for Boys, Honolulu, HI*

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Dear God,

When confusion sets in about the purpose of my life, like that which Jesus went through, send me help in the form of patience and wisdom to sort it through.

Mark W.

Holy Cross High School, Marine City, MI

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Dear God,

I would like to ask your forgiveness of my sins, especially the greatest sin of taking a life through abortion. Please don't take this as a confession. It's more of a prayer.

I also ask that through my mistake, others will learn not to take intimacy lightly and that they will respect life. Please give them the strength and conviction to do what's right. Help them realize what true love really is.

Don Bosco Technical High School, Boston, MA

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

God—

Keep me from being sandwiched by two huge semis, being taken hostage by suburban terrorists, getting my head squashed by one of those hospital beds, getting killed by a swarm of killer bees, and getting kidnapped by the same aliens who took the King of Rock and Roll. But, God, most of all, keep me from drifting into the absurd. Amen.

Jerome Nicolas

Saint Anthony High School, Wailuku, Maui, HI

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Tell me, my God, why my life is a street without light. I fight off loneliness and depression. Why, God, must I be burdened with these hardships, in my already hard life?

Must I live and die alone? May I never share with another? What is my destination? What have you planned? Guide me, God, with your loving hand, because your love and kindness are unmatched.

Gabriel Richard High School, Riverview, MI

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Dear God, please help me to keep my life in balance. Let me allow enough time for everything that is important to me. Don't let me neglect the things and persons that should be appreciated most in my life. When I am busy before, during, and after school, let me leave my frustrations and tiredness behind, so that I won't take them out on those closest to me. I make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Jerry Vogt
Lumen Christi High School, Jackson, MI*

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Jesus, give me the conviction to believe in myself, to love myself, and to give of myself. I have many good qualities, so help me not to envy the qualities of other people or friends. Instead, help me to admire and respect those qualities, as I respect my own.

Jesus, give me the confidence I need to be the best I can be to myself and to others.

*Lisa Alef
Bishop Foley High School, Madison Heights, MI*



Dear God,
 Let your light shine
 down upon my face.
 Scatter my sins
 across the sun without a trace.
 Enlighten the road
 that I must follow.
 Fill my heart and soul,
 sometimes hollow.
 Take me to heart again,
 once and forever,
 and give me strength
 to face all endeavors.
 You gave me life to love,
 so I may love to give life.
 Help me through my pain and strife.
 Hold me close,
 never let me go.
 Give me love,
 that I might show it to all.

Don Bosco Technical High School, Boston, MA



Today is here. Help us not to worry about what happened yesterday or what will happen tomorrow, but to make the most of today. Help us to live one day at a time and not to force ourselves to be so caught up in the past or the future that we cannot enjoy today. Amen.

Cathedral High School, Indianapolis, IN



God, please help me to deal with people who do not understand me, and forgive me for the times that I do not understand others. You understand everything and everyone.

*Randy Mc Nally
 Saint Catherine of Bologna School, Ringwood, NJ*

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

“Anyone who is trustworthy in little things is trustworthy in great. . . .” (Luke 16:10)

In this passage, Luke is saying that either you are always faithful, or you are never to be counted on to be faithful. You can’t just say that it is a little thing, and it doesn’t matter. Everything counts; nothing is without consequence. The little things build character and strength to follow what you believe.

*Teresa Griffin
Notre Dame High School, Batavia, NY*

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

God, I’ve noticed that the more I believe in you, the better I become at believing in myself.

Thank you for the things that you have given me. I express my gratitude by not taking for granted what you have given me.

God, please forgive me for the stupid things I do. I’m just fifteen years old, and I don’t know everything. So please forgive me. I always try my best to be good. One thing I always try to use is the gifts of life that are there but unused.

God, please help those people who have problems, who are not happy in life, and who are suffering. Help me make a change in people’s life, and please help my family and me stay by you. I’ll be good today.

*Angela
Paramus Catholic Girls Regional High School, Paramus, NJ*

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

God, grant us the strength we need to overcome the difficulties we face each day. Let our disappointments become opportunities for growth. Through evil, help us seek good, and through you, we may find eternal peace. Amen.

Cathedral High School, Indianapolis, IN



O God, I think I need your help right now. My patience is running thin. There always seems to be a problem, whether it is school or family or personal. Just give me a little strength to pull through. Lack of patience seems to cloud common sense, as anger slowly rises. So patience, anger, and common sense run almost hand in hand. All I ask is a little more of the first, and I'll work on the other two. Amen.

David Polesky
Archbishop John Carroll High School, Radnor, PA



God, you have made a ton of average people; motivation and perseverance are what will set us apart in the end. I ask you to help me persevere, through the troubles that always steer me away from your love.

Please help me to overcome the disappointment when a goal is just too far out of reach, and help me realize that defeat is always a two-way street. Please don't let failure ruin my hope, because any average person can mope. But instead, help me rise to new heights and challenges, being set aside from the individual who simply "threw in the towel." I can only do so much, but in that is a whole world of potential. I just ask for your guidance and nourishment, because when it's time for the true test, no one will be able to put down my best!

Mark Orler
Billings Central Catholic High School, Billings, MT