

Praying All Ways

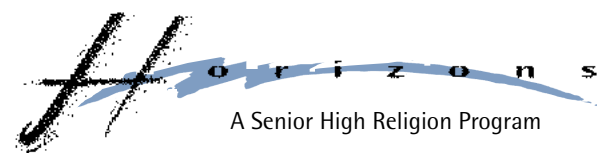


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Introduction



An Overview of This Course

Are we at all sure that God wants to hear our prayers? It seems that God has a terrible job. The way most people pray, God must feel like the complaint department in a store. The Almighty must get truly sick of it.

As a result, I no longer really pray to God; I hold conversations with God. Praying is too solemn; I'm sure the Creator prefers being treated as a friend . . . as someone we can trust and someone we can talk to, someone special!

(Jason Bujnosek, in Koch, ed.,
Dreams Alive, p. 67)

Jason Bujnosek, a teenager from Santa Fe, New Mexico, is beginning to discover what prayer is all about. He is wrestling with questions like these: What is prayer? Does God hear our prayer? When, where, and how should we pray? Jason's conclusion is that instead of praying he would rather converse with God as a friend. Without realizing it Jason has stumbled on the real definition of prayer: communication with God in a relationship of love. For many of Jason's peers, however, prayer is a mystery at best. Some young people even see prayer as boring, unnecessary, or ineffective.

Praying All Ways is a course to help young people explore different forms and styles of prayer. It presents prayer within the context of building a relationship with God, much like communication

within the context of developing a relationship with a close friend. Throughout the course the participants are called to think of prayer as intimate communication within this relationship of love. As such it is a response to God's invitation to a personal relationship with God, and essential to the Christian walk. With your guidance the young people can experience well-known forms of personal and communal prayer as well as experiment with prayer techniques that may be new to them. They also have an opportunity to examine the need that people have to pray both alone and together within a community of believers. To augment these experiences, optional take-home prayer exercises are available for sessions 1 and 2.

In the first session, "Communication Between Friends," the participants are encouraged to share their thoughts about friendship, God, and prayer. Through survey questions, sentence starters, discussion, and reflection time, they are given the opportunity to articulate their images of God and their expectations of a relationship with God. The participants also are asked to compare their relationship with God to other important friendships in their life and to discuss the basic requirements for building successful, life-giving relationships. The conclusion they may draw is that like any friendship, a relationship with God requires time, effort, communication, and commitment.

The second session is entitled "Too Big for Words Alone." During this session the young people have a chance to learn about the forms of vocal prayer as articulated by the church: blessing and adoration, petition and contrition, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise. They also are urged to explore a variety of ways to communicate without words, using art and other creative methods. After hearing about the necessity of *listening* to God as well as *talking* to God, the young people are invited to meditate on the Scriptures as part of a closing prayer. This session also addresses common difficulties in prayer, such as managing distractions, coping with dryness, and facing doubts.

"Alone and Together" is the title of the final session of the course. This session begins with a review of scriptural prayer, followed by an exercise offering three engaging and fun options for creating prayers. Then, after a re-examination of the results of the prayer survey from the first session, it introduces the prayer method known as centering prayer. The participants are invited to engage in a simple centering prayer as one step toward experiencing contemplative prayer. As you lead this exercise, keep in

mind that contemplative prayer is largely a gift of grace that is not granted at any particular age, and that the young people thus may not be developmentally ready to embrace it at this time. The session next focuses on the Mass as the primary prayer of the Catholic church community. This part of the session also becomes a summary of the entire course as the participants search for different prayer forms and styles in the liturgy. The session closes with a communal prayer experience that illustrates the power of individual believers who come together to pray.

The Scriptures exhort us to "pray constantly" (1 Thess. 5:17). This course invites the young people to see prayer as communication in a relationship of love. It encourages them to take the Scripture message to heart and pray *always* as they grow in their relationship with God. However, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* cautions that "we cannot pray 'at all times' if we do not pray at specific times, consciously willing it" (no. 2697). So this course also gives young people the tools to pray *all ways*, thus enabling them to build their relationship with God on a solid foundation. Keeping all these things in mind, we have developed *Praying All Ways* to be more than a study about prayer; it also *is* prayer.

Background for This Course

The Adolescent and This Course

The young people with whom you will be working will likely be at different points in their faith development. Most will be anchored firmly in what John Westerhoff calls the affiliative style of faith (see *Will Our Children Have Faith?* pp. 94–97). This style of faith is born out of the human need for relationships. Young people rooted in it want to know how to build relationships that last. They want to know what it takes to have a friend with whom they can be themselves. This course builds on these adolescent interests in relationships, with its focus on the young person's growing friendship with God as the context for understanding prayer.

Other adolescents may be moving into a searching style of faith. Some young people operating in this style of faith may be questioning the value of prayer and in some cases may even doubt the existence of God. Others may be eager to explore different images of God.

The young people will also bring to you different attitudes toward a course on prayer, which may reflect their experience of being part of a parish community. For some that experience has been positive; for others it has been negative.

Whatever their style of faith or their attitude toward a course on prayer, most adolescents will be open to hearing about prayer if it is explained in the context of a personal relationship with God, much like a relationship with a best friend. As the person guiding these young people for a short time in their faith journey, help them understand that regardless of where they are in that journey, God calls each of them to an intimate relationship and understands their needs and their longings.

Young people—like all of us—hunger for the holy. They hunger for intimacy, acceptance, love, joy, understanding, challenge, freedom, goodness, and peace. When these things are not present in their life, they may experience feelings of loneliness, fear, and isolation. *Praying All Ways* addresses this hunger for holiness. By teaching young people to pray, you can open for them a way to communicate on a deeply personal level with God, who is the source of all holiness. By inviting the young people to explore different forms of personal prayer, you will encourage them to expand their images of God and their expectations of prayer. You will also call them to take greater responsibility for their own spiritual growth. By challenging them to look at communal prayer, you will remind them that their role in building God's Reign as part of the Body of Christ is important, unique, and valued.

The Theology of This Course

The earliest followers of Jesus knew the power of prayer. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians said, "Keep praying in the Spirit on every possible occasion" (6:18). To the Thessalonians Paul wrote, "Pray constantly; and for all things give thanks; this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thess. 5:17–18). The modern church highlights the same theme of the ubiquitous need for prayer, in its compendium of official teachings, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The *Catechism* offers three facts of faith about prayer:

- "It is always possible to pray" (no. 2743).
- "Prayer is a vital necessity" (no. 2744).
- "Prayer and Christian life are inseparable" (no. 2745).

From the early Christians and the modern church, we come to know that praying is not simply something one does. Rather, it is an orientation to life. However, "in order to pray, one must have the will to pray . . . [and] one must also learn how to pray. Through a living transmission (Sacred Tradition) within 'the believing and praying Church,' the Holy Spirit teaches the children of God how to pray" (no. 2650).

From the Scriptures and Tradition, we come to know prayer as our response to God's invitation of covenant and communion. It is both a gift of grace and a determined effort on our part. Prayer involves our whole being—mind, body, and soul. Through constant communication with God, our entire life can become an act of faith, hope, and love as we respond to the invitation. We express our covenant relationship with God in our prayers of blessing and adoration, petition and contrition, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise. Through our prayers of meditation and contemplation, we respond to God's invitation to communion.

God knows us and loves us completely. When we turn to God in private prayer in any form, we share our deepest longings with the One who loved us first. When we come together in prayer as a community of believers, we experience a oneness in the Spirit as we worship the God who created us, walked with us, and empowers us to build God's Reign as the Body of Christ.

This Course and Evangelization

In *The Challenge of Catholic Youth Evangelization*, evangelization is described as "the initial effort by the faith community as a whole to proclaim through word and witness the Good News of the Gospel to those who have not yet heard or seen it, and then to invite those persons into a relationship with Jesus Christ and the community of believers" (National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, p. 3). Evangelization is also the ongoing witness of the community of believers and, as such, the basis and energizing core of all the ministries in the church.

The Horizons Program is grounded in a commitment to evangelize young people effectively. Each course reflects that commitment in both content and methodology. All the courses, even those on topics that do not appear overtly "religious," explore the connection between the lived experience of the young person and Jesus' proclamation of the Good News. All the courses employ strategies that

actively engage the whole person, demonstrating that religious education can be not only informative but life-giving and even fun! In other words the Horizons Program tries to be “good news” not just proclaim the Good News.

The primary strategies of evangelization include fostering a deeper sense of connectedness to God and providing opportunities to share personal experiences and stories. Because *Praying All Ways* incorporates both elements, it can be integral in helping young people to develop their relationship with God. It also challenges them to take responsibility for their own faith life by making a commitment to pray daily. Such a commitment can lead to a life-long and life-changing habit.

Teaching This Course

A Video Resource for Teachers

The information presented in this section identifies the elements requiring special consideration when leading *Praying All Ways*. The creators of Horizons developed an informative video to prepare teachers to lead any of the courses in the program. The video is accompanied by a guide that summarizes the content of the tape, offers additional tips for teaching adolescents, and invites the teacher to track her or his experience with the program.

Both the video for teachers and its companion guide are included in the resources developed for coordinators of the Horizons Program. Contact the program coordinator in your parish for further information.

Preparing Yourself

Before you begin teaching *Praying All Ways*, take some time to reflect on how your own prayer life has changed and grown over the years, particularly during your adolescence. Did you pray as a teenager? If so, how did you pray? Who taught you to pray? How did you feel about prayer? Did your friends pray? Did you ever discuss the experience of prayer with your friends? How did you feel about praying at Mass? Sometime before leading the third session of this course, reflect on your own appreciation of the Mass. Recall your high school experience with the liturgy.

As you progress through this course, spend some time in prayer yourself. When possible practice the prayer forms and styles covered in the sessions. You will probably feel more comfortable leading the young people through the course if you do so. Your commitment to teach *Praying All Ways* may help you to develop your own prayer life in addition to focusing the young people on building their relationship with God.

Finally, before teaching this course, read part 4 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, entitled “Christian Prayer.” The Other Necessary Preparations sections of the sessions in *Praying All Ways* suggest that you review pertinent portions of this material. Reading part 4 straight through in its entirety before you begin preparation for the first session can give you an overview of the church’s theology of prayer and also a sense of the emphasis that the church places on prayer in the life of the community and of its individual members.

Incorporating a Peer Ministry Option

Consider asking older adolescents and young adults to help teach *Praying All Ways*. High school students who have been through the Horizon Program’s level 2 minicourse *Christian Meditation for Beginners* or the level 3 minicourse *Jesus in the Scriptures* might be particularly suited for the task. They could lead some of the prayer activities and provide support. They could also share their own perspectives on prayer, the difficulties they experience in praying, their favorite forms and styles of prayer, and so forth.

If you choose to recruit older adolescents and young adults to help you teach *Praying All Ways*, meet with them before the start of the course, to discuss responsibilities and expectations. You could also engage them in a discussion of prayer and the role of prayer in their life. Their insights may be valuable to you and may enhance the experience for the participants.

Preparing the Learning Environment

Create a good physical atmosphere. You will need a physically comfortable space with sufficient room for the participants to move around. Some sessions require the participants to spend reflection time alone. It will be easier for them to resist the temptation to visit with other participants if they have enough room to separate from one another. Comfortable furniture and living-room lighting will

help create a homey feeling. A flip chart or an easel with a pad of newsprint will be helpful for many of the activities. The traditional classroom is the least desirable situation. If such a room is your only option, try using music, candles, icons, or other sensory devices to create a more inviting environment.

Special consideration for closing prayers. To enhance the sense of prayerfulness for the young people, consider moving to an area apart from the regular meeting space for the prayer time at the end of each session. Other prayer times during the session may also happen in this space if movement from one place to another is not too disruptive for the group. When choosing an alternative place for prayer, consider its proximity to the regular meeting space and whether the participants will be able to move around within it.

The parish church can be an ideal space for prayer times. Even though this course emphasizes that prayer can happen at any time and anywhere, it could make a lasting impression on the young people to be in church for something other than Sunday Mass. Being there to pray with their peers or alone may contribute to a sense of personal ownership of the community’s worship space. Before moving into the church for prayer, discuss with the young people the concept of sacred space. Remind them that the church is a place where people meet God and reflect on God’s presence in a special way. As such it is a holy place and should be treated appropriately.

Clarify expectations. At the beginning of the course, establish among the participants an atmosphere of mutual respect. Stress the importance of listening to one another and of refraining from hurtful remarks or put-downs. When necessary remind the participants of these rules. Even a brief cruel remark can ruin the experience for a young person with an already precarious self-image.

Preparing the Material

Before each session read through the session plan and try to picture the processes happening in your group. You may need to make some adjustments based on your knowledge of the participants and the physical setting. Some of the activities will require preparation. This could range from copying a simple list onto newsprint, to preparing grocery bags for a survey. Allow yourself adequate time to get ready.

All the sessions include brief periods of teacher input. Some of these presentations are informational, but most are intended to bring closure to a part of the session so that the participants might understand the connections between life and faith, between themselves and God. The session plans offer guidelines for these brief talks. Spend time putting these presentations together so that they are clear and hold the attention of the participants. Where it is helpful and appropriate, do not be afraid to share parts of your own story with the young people.

Sharing Your Own Story

Every course in Horizons connects elements of the Christian faith with the life experiences of young people. As an adult you have much to share from your personal life and your prayer life that will be of value to the young people. Your willingness to share your experiences will enrich this course. It will also send the message that telling one’s personal story in the group is okay. When you share your experiences with the young people, you show that you trust them enough to speak from your heart. And without saying it you also invite them to do the same.

Some commonsense guidelines can help you share your story in a way that adds to the understanding of the participants but does not distract them from their own life story:

- Be brief and to the point. Remember, the young people are there to learn about prayer and reflect on their own life story, not yours.
- Talk about your experiences as a teenager without preaching or moving into the fatal “When I was your age . . .” mode.
- Share only the things that young adolescents are emotionally prepared to handle.
- Be realistic. Talk about your struggles, triumphs, and growth over the years. This will let the participants know that self-knowledge is indeed a process, as is building a relationship with God and developing a prayer life. Do not mislead them into thinking that adults have all the answers or that every adult who goes to church has an active prayer life. It is also unfair to suggest or imply that adolescents have no answers or that adolescents have no prayer life.
- Be honest and sincere. The young people will see through you if you are not, and your effectiveness as a teacher will be diminished.

Incorporating Optional Take-Home Exercises

As a rule the courses in the Horizons Program do not include “homework” or any expectation that the young people will do any preparation between sessions. However, in some cases the experience of the course is clearly enhanced by the inclusion of such work. Thus, in a few courses, completing supplemental material is expected and becomes part of an agreement between the participants and the teacher at the beginning of the course. In other courses, such as *Praying All Ways*, a commitment to do extra work between sessions is strongly encouraged but optional.

Sessions 1 and 2 of this course each include a set of daily prayers for the participants to use between sessions. These prayers are designed to help the participants put into practice some of the things presented in the sessions. In addition, they might help the young people begin to develop the discipline of spending time with God on a regular basis.

Though you are strongly encouraged to make use of the supplementary take-home exercises in some way, how to use them is your decision. You may choose to make them an expectation of the course or to simply offer them as an option, or not to use them at all. Consider how open to supplemental exercises the young people in your group may be, based on your previous experience with them or on consultation with another teacher in the Horizons Program who has worked with them. Also consider your own availability and willingness to make the appropriate preparations.

Using Journals

Keeping a journal, or simply writing an occasional journal exercise, is a good way for young people to internalize learning, record the events of their life, keep track of feelings, or explore a topic further. Like most of the courses in the Horizons Program, *Praying All Ways* offers suggestions for including an optional journal component. In some cases journal activities are designed to be included in the session; in others they are intended for use by the participants between sessions.

Journal activities present an opportunity for one-to-one ministry to young people. A young person might write something in a journal that she or he would not feel comfortable sharing in a group or even talking about at all. If you do assign journal activities, take the time to read the young people’s

responses—with *their permission*—and then write in comments or words of encouragement or affirmation. Your personal attention might make a big difference to a young person who is struggling, searching, or just growing up.

Though we strongly encourage you to consider using at least some of the journal activities in *Praying All Ways*, they are not an integral part of the course. In fact, there are some practical reasons for not including the journal component. First, if *every* teacher of *every* course in the Horizons Program chose to include journal keeping, the young people would quickly tire of the activity. Second, journal keeping is a time- and energy-consuming process for teachers. Teachers of multiple courses could become frustrated, if not exhausted, by having to monitor a large number of journals. Finally, some people simply do not like to keep a journal. It is better to encourage journal writing as a form of personal exploration for young people, than to demand it of them.

Carefully assess whether the journal option is a good one in your particular situation. Consult the program coordinator and teachers of other courses. If you decide to incorporate journal activities into *Praying All Ways*, some nitty-gritty questions must be answered: What materials are required? How will the journal component coordinate with the supplemental take-home exercises if you choose to use them? Will you respond to journal entries, and if so, in what way? What will you do if a young person reveals in a journal concerns or issues that demand a response beyond your ability or your authority as a teacher? For helpful information on these and other issues related to journal keeping, consult your program coordinator.

Using Music

Some of the prayer activities in *Praying All Ways* suggest using music. No activities in this course require music or suggest specific pieces of music, because cultural preferences and individual tastes differ and specific tapes, CDs, or needed equipment may not be available. But music is a central part of the world of most adolescents, and you are thus encouraged to use it in the suggested places as well as in other activities where you think that it might be appropriate. The circumstances in which music can be used effectively include the following:

Popular music for prayer. Depending on the character of the group, the community environment, or even the area of the country, different types of music will be popular among young people. If you are not certain about what might work in prayer activities for your group, ask a few young people for their advice; ask them well in advance of the session, so that they can listen for songs that will be useful. Besides helping you, this experience can be affirming for young people, who are usually thought of as learners and are not usually consulted for their expertise.

You might even consider forming a music advisory group of class participants, whose job is to listen to popular music and point out some things that pertain to your topic. Each week this group of young people can suggest to the rest of the participants selections that can be used for prayer—and also for reflection or as a starting point for journal writing.

Background music for reflection. Some groups are easily distracted by the sounds around them. If your group has a hard time concentrating in silence, consider using background music to help the participants focus. Even for those who do not have trouble concentrating, music can alter the mood and contribute to a sense of peace and inner silence. For background music use slow, soothing instrumental selections with no words, preferably something that is unrecognizable to the group. Labels such as Windham Hill and Narada, which are known for their alternative adult-contemporary recordings, are particularly useful for this purpose. Some classical music can also help to create the type of environment you need. Or use recordings of natural sounds, such as those produced by an ocean surf, rain forests, or running streams.

Contemporary Christian music for discussion starter or prayer. Contemporary Christian music is produced by Christian artists and comes in styles for all tastes: rock, hard rock, country, alternative, rap, and easy listening. By using contemporary Christian music, you expose young people to an inspirational spiritual message in a form to which they may easily relate.

If you are familiar with contemporary Christian music, you probably can think of songs to introduce a discussion or to enhance a prayer service. If you are not familiar with contemporary Christian music, ask the young people in your group to help choose appropriate songs. Or visit a Christian bookstore.

Many of them have an extensive music collection and a previewing area. Often their sales staff can point you in the right direction if you tell them what you are looking for.

Using This Course as a Retreat

Praying All Ways is designed with young high school students in mind. A weekend or even overnight retreat on the topic of prayer is probably too intense for most younger adolescents. Also, offering the course as a retreat does not allow for the development of a daily prayer routine.

However, parts of *Praying All Ways* may be adapted for a day of recollection. You might also consider working some of the prayer experiences described in this course into other retreat formats for this age-group, perhaps based on another minicourse in the Horizons Program that is more readily adaptable for this purpose.

This Course and Total Youth Ministry

Additional Youth Ministry Program Suggestions

The Horizons Program includes a manual entitled *Youth Ministry Strategies: Creative Activities to Complement the Horizons Curriculum*. It contains a variety of activities and strategies organized into thematic categories and cross-referenced according to the courses in the curriculum. It includes suggestions for shortened and extended programs, off-site events, intergenerational gatherings, parish involvement, and prayer and liturgical celebrations.

This valuable resource can enhance the young people’s experience of the Horizons Program and help your parish fulfill a commitment to total youth ministry. Contact your program coordinator about the availability of the manual.

Parish Program Connections

A religious education curriculum is, ideally, just one component of a total parish program in which all those responsible for the formation of young people work together with the entire parish to meet the holistic needs of its youth. *Praying All Ways* can be a springboard for connections with other youth ministry experiences. You might develop these connections by doing the following:

- Use the techniques of prayer that are introduced in the course in other youth ministry settings, such as retreats, intergenerational gatherings, and mission projects.
- Start a prayer group for young people interested in gathering on a regular basis. Recruit other adults to lead the group, and work with the young people to determine the group's direction and focus.
- Help the participants design and conduct a prayer service for the parish's youth or for another parish group such as children or retired people. Or help the participants create and offer a series of weekly prayer services for the parish during Advent or Lent, featuring a different form or style of prayer each week.
- Alert the young people to other prayer opportunities in the parish, such as daily Mass, special prayer services, vespers, and special reconciliation services. Invite them to help plan these prayer times.
- Combine your group with a group from another denomination to discuss different approaches to prayer. Have the two groups design a prayer service to conclude the meeting.
- Have the young people compile a list of popular songs that can be used as prayer starters. Divide the list among the participants and have each person write a few sentences about why each assigned song is prayerful to him or her. Each week, publish in the parish bulletin one song title and the accompanying reflection.
- Have the young people create a number of prayer starters similar to those found in the optional take-home exercises for sessions 1 and 2. The prayer starters could be focused on one of the liturgical seasons, or they could be a collection of prayer ideas for families. Package them in some creative way and distribute them at weekend liturgies.

Goals and Objectives in This Course

Why Use Goals and Objectives?

Curriculums take on greater clarity, direction, and purpose if they are described in terms of their goals and objectives. This observation is based on a commonsense principle: We have a difficult time getting somewhere if we do not know where we are going. Educators who design learning experiences must identify their destination as a first step in determining how to get there. The statement of goals and objectives is a practical way to identify the desired outcomes for a program.

In the Horizons Program, goals and objectives are used in the following ways:

Goals. Goals are broad statements of what we wish to accomplish—learning outcomes we hope to achieve. The coordinator's manual for the Horizons Program provides the goals for the entire curriculum. Each course within the total program also includes a statement of its goals. The goals often have an idealistic quality, inviting the teacher to reflect on how the course relates to the personal and faith development of the young people. At the same time, the course goals are realistic, measurable, and attainable. As a teacher, at the end of the course, you should be able to look back and determine if you have in fact achieved the course goals.

Objectives. Objectives are statements that define how to get to the goals. They name the specific tasks that must be accomplished if the goals are to be achieved. Each course supplies a clear statement of objectives for each session in the course.

The Goals and Objectives of *Praying All Ways*

Goals

This course has four goals:

- That the young people reflect on the changing nature and role of prayer in their life
- That they recognize their continually evolving and emerging images of God as the basis for a developing prayer life
- That they learn about and experience a variety of prayer forms and styles
- That they begin to see prayer as the basis for Gospel-centered action

Objectives

Each session in this course has its own objectives, which will help realize the four course goals. The objectives of *Praying All Ways* are as follows:

Session 1: "Communication Between Friends"

- To help the young people articulate their personal understanding of prayer
- To establish the idea that prayer is an essential way of building a closer relationship with God
- To explore the kind of effort needed to develop a solid prayer life and a strong relationship with God

Session 2: "Too Big for Words Alone"

- To help the young people experience and name various methods of nonverbal communication
- To introduce the church's five traditional forms of prayer: blessing and adoration, petition and contrition, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise
- To present the difficulties involved in praying and to discuss ways of overcoming these difficulties

Session 3: "Alone and Together"

- To continue to explore the Scriptures as a source of prayer
- To introduce centering prayer
- To explore the richness of the Mass as the highest form of communal prayer
- To help the young people understand that relating to God through prayer affects the way believers live every day

Suggested Resources

For Adults

- de Mello, Anthony. *Sadhana: A Way to God*. New York: Doubleday, Image Books, 1978.
- Fittipaldi, Silvio. *How to Pray Always Without Always Praying*. Notre Dame, IN: Fides/Claretian, 1978.
- Foster, Richard J. *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*. [San Francisco]: HarperCollins Publishers, HarperSanFrancisco, 1992.
- Glavich, Mary Kathleen. *Leading Students into Prayer: Ideas and Suggestions from A to Z*. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1993.
- Green, Thomas H. *Prayer and Common Sense*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1995.
- Hakowski, Maryann. *Pathways to Praying with Teens*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1993.
- Higgins, John J. *Thomas Merton on Prayer*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Image Books, 1975.
- Lawrence of the Resurrection, Br. *The Practice of the Presence of God*. Translated by John J. Delaney. New York: Doubleday, Image Books, 1977.
- Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Translated by the United States Catholic Conference (USCC). Washington, DC: USCC, 1994.
- Nouwen, Henri J. M. *The Way of the Heart*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1981.
- Pennington, M. Basil. *Daily We Touch Him: Practical Religious Experiences*. New York: Doubleday, Image Books, 1977.

For Young People

- Koch, Carl, editor. *Dreams Alive: Prayers by Teenagers*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1991.
- . *More Dreams Alive: Prayers by Teenagers*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1995.
- Littleton, Mark. *Fillin' Up: Daily Fuel for High Performance Living*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1993.
- Stephens, Andrea. *Prime Time: Devotions for Girls*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, Fleming H. Revell, 1991.
- Stephens, Bill, and Andrea Stephens. *Prime Time: Devotions for Guys*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, Fleming H. Revell, 1991.

SESSION 1

Communication Between Friends



Objectives

- To help the young people articulate their personal understanding of prayer
- To establish the idea that prayer is an essential way of building a closer relationship with God
- To explore the kind of effort needed to develop a solid prayer life and a strong relationship with God

Session Steps

- an icebreaker and course introduction (20 minutes)
- a personal prayer survey (25 minutes)
- a reflection exercise on God, relationship with God, and prayer with sentence starters (10 minutes)
- a break (10 minutes)
- a presentation and discussion on prayer as communication within a friendship with God (15 minutes)
- a guided meditation and discussion on past and present friendships (25 minutes)
- a closing prayer (15 minutes)

Background for the Teacher

Most people define prayer simply as talking to God using someone else's words or their own. To pray is to speak to the Almighty, to let God know who we are, what we think, how we feel, or what we need. Participants in this course have probably given little thought to defining prayer or understanding how it works in their life. Prayer is just something they do, forget to do, or choose not to do. In this session the participants are invited to look at prayer more carefully and to expand their definition of it. In the end they should know that prayer is a means of building a closer relationship with God, not just talking to God. They are also encouraged to view this relationship as one that requires time and energy, just as all significant relationships do.

In the opening exercise of this first session, the participants are asked to share information about themselves as they share some M&M's. You are invited to reveal a little about who you are, too, thereby modeling the process for them. The activity is a fun way to illustrate that we all need to risk sharing who we are, in order to discover more about ourselves, our God, and the deeper meaning of prayer.

As the session unfolds, the young people are encouraged to begin exploring the subject of prayer by completing a survey on the topic. Besides helping them focus on their own prayer life, this exercise also gives them an opportunity to find out what their peers think about the subject. A reflection period that follows the survey is designed to help them understand that their image of God affects their relationship with God. Using three sentence starters, they explore who God is for them, what their relationship with God is like, and the place of prayer in their life.

After a short break, the participants have a chance to review their sentence endings from the reflection exercise and to make a connection between building a relationship with God and nurturing a friendship. Then the young people are invited to examine their friendships, recognizing that a healthy friendship requires a willingness to take responsibility for sustaining and nurturing it and helping it grow. Every important relationship—including our relationship with God—demands a certain amount of energy, effort, and, above all, commitment. God invites each of us into an ever-deepening relationship. We decide whether to pursue God's invitation.

Finally, a closing prayer offers an opportunity to reflect on this personal invitation from God. The young people are challenged to make a commitment to nurture their relationship with God through prayer for the duration of the course. If you choose to incorporate an optional take-home prayer activity, the young people are encouraged before the close of the session to set aside some extra time between sessions to spend with God.

We hope that you, too, hear God's invitation and gift yourself with extra prayer time during the weeks ahead.

Preparation

✓ Materials Needed

- 1 pound of M&M's in a bowl
- raisins
- newsprint and markers
- masking tape
- seven paper grocery bags
- paper in four colors
- scissors
- seven pieces of 8½-by-11-inch paper
- an opaque bucket or plastic pitcher
- 2-by-3-inch self-stick notes (like Post-it Notes), one pad for every two or three participants
- pens or pencils
- pictures of yourself at about ages five and fourteen
- a 2- to 3-foot-long cloth or scarf
- a taper candle at least 12 inches tall, a candleholder, and matches
- white votive candles and holders, one of each for each participant
- business-size envelopes, two or three for each participant
- copies of handout 1-A, "A Letter from Jesus," one for each participant
- sheets of blank writing paper, one for each participant
- copies of resource 1-A, "A Prayer a Day, Session 1," one for each participant (optional)
- a tape or CD player, and reflective music (optional)
- scrap paper (optional)

✓ Other Necessary Preparations

Prepare to lead this session by doing the following things and checking them off as you accomplish them:

- ❑ For step A. Copy a candy color key onto newsprint as described in step A.
- ❑ For step B. Prepare question bags and response papers as directed in step B.
- ❑ For step C. Write three sentence starters on newsprint and prepare your own endings for them, as directed in step C.
- ❑ For step E. Prepare brief presentations on God, relationships with God, and prayer, as explained in step E.
- ❑ For step E. Post a definition of prayer as described in step E.
- ❑ For step F. Prepare to share some stories of yourself at ages five and fourteen.
- ❑ For step F. Write the questions listed in step F on newsprint.
- ❑ For step F. Prepare a talk on prayer, communication, and relationships, as outlined in step F.
- ❑ For step G. Prepare a prayer space, following the instructions in step G.
- ❑ For step G. Prepare two envelopes for each participant as directed in step G.
- ❑ For step G. Decide if you will use the optional take-home exercise for this session. If so, prepare a third envelope for each participant as directed on resource 1-A.
- ❑ Review the section on prayer in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, particularly numbers 2558 to 2565 and 2683 to 2696.
- ❑ Determine if you want to change this session by using one or more of the alternative approaches at the end of the session plan.

🕯 Opening Teacher Prayer

1. Find a comfortable space where you will not be disturbed for a few minutes. Take a few deep breaths. When you feel relaxed, read the following scriptural passage slowly:

I then said, “Ah, ah, ah, Lord Yahweh; you see, I do not know how to speak: I am only a child!”

But Yahweh replied,

“Do not say, ‘I am only a child,’

for you must go to all to whom I send you

and say whatever I command you.

Do not be afraid of confronting them,

for I am with you to rescue you,

Yahweh declares.”

Then Yahweh stretched out [a] hand and touched my mouth, and Yahweh said to me:

“There! I have put my words into your

mouth.”

(Jer. 1:6–9)

2. Read the passage a second time. Find a word or a phrase that speaks to you. Close your eyes, allow your body to relax, and slowly breathe in and out. Once you feel relaxed, focus on the word or phrase that you chose. Repeat it several times.

In your mind’s eye, see Jesus slowly approaching you. Imagine him gently anointing your head and your lips. When you feel ready, open your eyes. End your prayer time with the Glory Be or a simple “Amen.”

3. If you have time, spend a few minutes thinking about the following questions. You may wish to share your reflections with a friend or another catechist.

- How is my own prayer life? What can I share about prayer with these young people?
- How do I feel about my ability to minister to the needs of the young people I am about to meet?
- What about this course do I particularly want to bring to prayer?

Procedure

A Icebreaker and Introduction: Candy Exchange (20 minutes)

Though the candy used for this activity will undoubtedly be received enthusiastically, also have on hand some raisins in case your group includes young people who cannot eat chocolate.

If you have a large group, see the Alternative Approaches section at the end of this session plan for another way to do this activity.

Before the session. Copy the following list onto newsprint. Set the newsprint aside or cover it so that it is not visible to the participants when they arrive.

red—something about your family
green—something that is a favorite of yours
brown—something about a sport or activity you enjoy
orange—something about the music group or music you like
yellow—something you like about yourself
blue—something about your friends

1. Welcome the young people to this first session of *Praying All Ways*. If they do not all know you, briefly introduce yourself. You might tell them something about your family, your work, and how or why you came to be involved in the Horizons Program. Tell them that in a little while, they will have an opportunity to get to know one another better, but first you would like to offer them some candy as a sign of welcome.

2. Bring out a bowl of M&M’s. Tell the participants they may take as many candies as they like, but please to make sure they leave enough in the bowl so that everyone gets a few. Also tell them that they should not eat their M&M’s until instructed to do so. Take a small handful of candy yourself—no fewer than five pieces and no more than ten—and pass the bowl around to the rest of the members of the group.

3. Display the newsprint list you created before the session. Announce to the participants that they are to share one piece of information about themselves for every M&M’s candy they took, based on the color of the candy. Call their attention to the list and the topics associated with the candy colors. Begin the sharing yourself so that you can model the procedure. If the participants do not know one another, ask them to begin their own sharing by stating their name, and their school or other pertinent information. Keep the pace fairly quick so that everyone has a chance to go through the process.

4. When everyone has had a chance to tell the group about themselves, invite the participants to eat their candy, or to trade it in for a handful of raisins if they prefer. Then wrap up the exercise by explaining that this course will be a little like the activity they just finished. You will be sharing some good stuff, and they can take as much of it as they like. There is an element of risk in the taking be-

cause in return they will be asked to be open and honest with one another about their thoughts and feelings. However, the more they take from the course, and thus share about themselves, the more they will learn about themselves, about one another, about God, and about prayer.

B Personal Prayer Survey (25 minutes)

You may want to present the questions in this exercise in a certain order in case your group gets into lengthy discussions and you run out of time. Plan to discuss first the questions that you think are the most challenging or important for your group.

Before the session. Cut papers of four different colors into pieces that are approximately 2-by-3 inches. (For purposes of illustration, the colors designated here are green, yellow, blue, and pink. If you use colors other than these, make the appropriate changes in the responses listed below.) You will need six small pieces of each color for each participant. Each small piece of paper will be used to designate a different response to the survey questions. Place these papers in an opaque bucket or plastic pitcher.

Write each of the following questions and its possible responses on a separate sheet of 8½-by-11-inch paper. Attach each sheet to a separate paper grocery bag. (If you have a small group, you can use smaller sheets of paper and attach each sheet to a paper lunch bag.)

- Why do some people almost never pray?
 - They do not believe in God. (green)
 - They do not have time. (pink)
 - They do not think that prayer works. (yellow)
 - other (blue)
- What percentage of teens say they pray frequently?
 - 17 percent (green)
 - 28 percent (yellow)
 - 42 percent (blue)
 - 78 percent (pink)
- How often have you prayed over the last month?
 - daily (yellow)
 - weekly (blue)
 - seldom (pink)
 - never (green)
- Does prayer always get positive results?
 - yes (blue)
 - no (yellow)

- In what situations do you most often pray?
 - When I feel alone. (pink)
 - When I need help. (blue)
 - When I am scared. (green)
 - other (yellow)
- If people pray often, will it affect the way they live?
 - yes (green)
 - no (pink)
- How do you rate your experience of Sunday Mass at your parish?
 - terrific (green)
 - not bad (blue)
 - just okay (yellow)
 - totally boring (pink)

1. Introduce the activity by telling the participants that you would like to conduct a short survey to help them reflect on their own prayer life and what they think about prayer. Then explain the procedure in the following way:

- Hold up the paper grocery bag with the question you want to address first on it and read the question. Then read the possible responses and their respective color codes. Also show the participants the bucket or pitcher with the colored pieces of paper inside.
- Tell the young people that you will pass around the question bag and the bucket or pitcher. They are to reach in the bucket or pitcher and choose a piece of paper in the color that indicates their response to the question. With their hand still in the bucket or pitcher, they are to wad up the piece of paper. Then, trying to conceal from others its color, they are to put the paper ball in the question bag.
- Demonstrate the procedure by putting your hand in the bucket or pitcher; choosing a piece of paper and, with your hand still in the bucket or pitcher, wadding it into a ball; and putting the ball into the question bag.

2. After you are certain that the participants understand your directions, read the first question and its possible responses again and then pass around the question bag and the bucket or pitcher.

When the bag gets back to you, empty the contents, count the number of balls for each response, and write the appropriate number beside each response on the bag. Announce the results and ask the participants for their comments about them. Are they surprised? Why or why not? Two survey

questions include a possible response of “other.” If that response was chosen by anyone in your group, ask the young people what they think that person may have had in mind.

You may want to add your own comments. For example, for the first question, you could tell the group that according to recent Gallup polls, about 95 percent of the people in the United States say they believe in God. For the second question, you could explain that when Gallup surveyed teens around the country, 42 percent reported that they pray frequently. (See George H. Gallup International Institute, *The Religious Life of Young Americans*, pp. 22 and 38.)

Repeat this procedure until all the questions you selected have been asked, answered, and commented upon, or until you run out of time.

3. Close by telling the young people that you will be referring back to this survey at the end of the course.

Note: Keep the papers with the questions and possible responses, marked with your survey results, for step C in session 3.

C Reflection Exercise: Prayer Is . . . (10 minutes)

Before the session. On separate sheets of newsprint, write the following sentence starters:

- God is . . .
- God and I are . . .
- Prayer is . . .

Tape the sheets of newsprint on the wall, preferably a few feet apart so that a number of participants will have room to gather around each sheet and post responses at the same time.

Prepare your own responses to the sentence starters. In addition, be prepared to provide the following responses: “[God is] a friend” and “[Prayer is] our means of communicating with God in order to build a closer relationship.”

1. Distribute one-third to one-half of a pad of 2-by-3-inch self-stick notes to each person. Announce that the participants are to complete each sentence starter by writing their ending on a self-stick note and placing it on the appropriate sheet of newsprint. They may complete the sentences in any way they wish, using one word or many. They are to

complete each sentence starter at least once, and they may add as many responses as they can think of for each starter. Each response should be written on a separate self-stick note.

2. Ask the young people to begin. As they are working, add your own responses to the newsprint sheets.

3. When everyone has posted at least one ending for each starter, invite the group to take a short break.

D Break (10 minutes)

Announce the parameters for the break: available space, appropriate noise level, and so on. Make sure the participants know how much time they have and what signal they will be given to reassemble.

During the break read over the responses posted on the newsprint sheets. Decide how you might incorporate them into your presentations in step E.

E Presentation and Discussion: God, Me, and Prayer (15 minutes)

For the presentation portions of this activity, try to use the participants’ own sentence endings from the previous activity to define prayer as the means of communicating with God to build a closer relationship. Do not linger on any one sentence starter. Move through the material quickly, making a point to connect as many of the participants’ responses as possible in your comments.

Before the session. Prepare to give brief presentations on God, relationships with God, and prayer, using the information outlined in the three parts of this step and your own thoughts. Think about how you will incorporate the participants’ responses in your presentations.

Write the following definition of prayer on a sheet of newsprint: “Prayer is communication with a friendship with God.” Post the newsprint and cover it.

1. Invite a volunteer to read the responses to the sentence starter “God is . . .” Ask the participants if what has been posted seems to sum up what they have to say about who God is. Ask if they

would like to add anything. Make sure they understand they are not to comment on or critique what has been written, but only to supply additional statements about God. Suggest that they think about the phrase “Jesus is . . .” rather than “God is . . .,” and ask them if this phrase suggests other responses. Write their additional responses on self-stick notes and post them with the others, or simply write directly on the newsprint.

Refer to the statements on the newsprint as you talk about who God is and how our image, or picture, of God reflects our relationship with God. If a change occurred in the participants’ responses when you suggested they substitute the name Jesus for God, comment on how this illustrates what you are saying. Present information about who God is, using the following outline and your own thoughts:

- Let the young people know that you appreciate everything they wrote in response to the sentence starters. Their endings represent some of their deepest thoughts about their faith.
- If there are any negative statements such as “God is dead,” “God is very far away,” or “God is not real,” let the participants know that some of today’s most faith-filled Christians, as well as many of the great saints of the past, felt the same way at some time in their life.
- Refer to the words *God is* and remark that these two words—all by themselves—are an awesome statement of faith. If we truly believe that God is, we are saying something about who we are. The image that we have of the God who is can tell us a lot about how we see ourselves.
- Read some of the statements that you and the participants came up with to describe God, and demonstrate how those statements relate to the participants’ self-awareness. For example, if someone wrote, “God is the creator of all things,” they probably believe they are alive because God created them. If someone wrote, “God is the savior of the world,” they likely see themselves as needing God’s help to live a good and worthy life—or perhaps they see themselves as needing to be saved from something. (Note: Save the statement “God is a friend” for later in this presentation.)
- Tell the participants that the way people see God, or picture God, can change from year to year or even day to day. There are as many images of God as there are people, but no image is complete because no one can ever *fully* describe who God is.

- Now read the statement “God is a friend.” Tell the young people that you chose to leave this description for last because it best describes the relationship to which God calls us, particularly through Jesus. In fact, it may be easier to think about Jesus as a friend because Jesus is God with a human face. Remind them of these words attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of John:

“I call you friends,
because I have made known to you
everything I have learnt from my Father.
You did not choose me,
no, I chose you.”

(15:15–16)

2. Recruit a second volunteer to read the “God and I . . .” statements that are written on the newsprint. Ask the participants for additional ideas that may have been triggered when they heard the statements read. Remind them you are asking not for comments but only for additional ideas. Add these to the newsprint. When all additional suggestions have been added, describe the relationship between God and people, using your own words and the following guidelines. Incorporate the thoughts and ideas of the participants where it seems appropriate to do so.

- Explain that the way each person completed the sentence starter “God and I . . .” may be an indication of what that person’s relationship with God is like at this time. Make sure the young people understand that just as our image of God will change, so too will our relationship with God.
- Read from the newsprint some of the sentences that illustrate a range of feelings about the relationship between God and human beings. Again stress the point that the way a person feels today may not be the way she or he will feel tomorrow or next week. Even best friends have bad days and good days.

3. Recruit a third volunteer to read the statements on the last sheet of newsprint, “Prayer is . . .” Once again ask the young people if they have any additional suggestions or ideas that may have been prompted when the statements were read. Accept everything and expect anything, from “Prayer is talking to God” to “Prayer is a waste of time.” Record any additions on the newsprint.

Explain what praying is, using the following suggestions and adding your own thoughts to bring

this presentation to a close. Incorporate the statements written by the participants as appropriate.

- Read the definition of prayer that you posted on the newsprint. If possible connect some of the young people’s statements to this definition. For example, if someone wrote, “Prayer is talking to God,” you might explain that talking is one of the primary ways relationships begin. It is also one of the ways of maintaining a relationship.
- Try to be positive with all the young people’s comments. For example, if someone wrote, “Prayer is a waste of time,” you might say something like “One of the questions we will be asking during the course is Does prayer work, or is it just a waste of time?”
- Connect the last sentence starter to the first by noting that a person’s image of God is connected to his or her relationship with God. God can be described in many ways—for example, as father, mother, savior, creator, or friend. Each of these descriptions is different and suggests a distinctive relationship with God.
- Note that as with any friendship, it takes work to build a relationship with God. Prayer is one way of developing this relationship. Also, like any friendship a relationship with God will probably go through good times and periods of struggle. Announce that the next activity focuses on specific kinds of friendships in the young people’s lives and, in particular, on what they have learned about nurturing life-giving relationships.

F Guided Meditation and Discussion: Past and Present Friendships (25 minutes)

Session 4 of the core course *Growing in Wisdom, Age, and Grace* deals with relationships. If the young people have taken that course and you did not teach it, ask your program coordinator to share the material from that session with you so that you have a sense of what the young people have already heard and experienced.

Before the session. Write the following questions on newsprint:

- Who was your best friend when you were five?
- How did you spend most of your time together?
- Are you still friends today?
- If not, why not?

On a second sheet of newsprint, write these questions:

- Who is your best friend today?
- How do you spend most of your time together?
- Do you think you will still be good friends in five years?
- What might prevent you from remaining friends?
- What can you do to increase the chances of your friendship’s growing stronger?

Prepare to present information on prayer as outlined in part 5 of this step. You might try to anticipate what the participants’ responses to the discussion questions will be and work them into your thoughts. However, you may need to adapt your talk while you are giving it, based on their actual responses.

1. Divide the participants into small groups of three or four and ask them to sit together in those groups. Introduce this exercise by sharing with the participants pictures of yourself as a child and as a teenager and briefly telling them a few interesting things about yourself at those ages. You might mention things like what you and your friends enjoyed doing together, where you liked to go, what you liked or did not like about your best friend at that time, secrets that you shared, and so forth.

2. Ask the young people to get into a comfortable position, close their eyes, and relax their body. If they seem overly animated, you may need to lead them through a simple relaxation process by telling them to take deep, quiet breaths and let the air out slowly.

When they are calm and focused, begin to read the following meditation. Pause for a few seconds at the ellipses (. . .).

- In your mind’s eye, picture yourself when you were five years old. . . . Picture the place where you lived, . . . the room where you slept. . . . Where did you keep your toys? . . . What were your favorite toys to play with? . . . Who were the friends that you played with? . . . Who did you consider your best friend? . . . What did you and your friends like to do together? . . . What did you fight about with your friends? . . .

Now move ahead a few years and think about your life today. . . . Imagine yourself at school with a group of close friends. Your very best friend is there, too. . . . How did you and your best friend first meet each other, and how did you get to know each other? . . . What kinds of things do you talk about? . . . What kinds of things do you do together? . . . Have you ever had a serious conflict?

It’s time for class to begin, and time to say good-bye to all your friends. . . . When you are ready, open up your eyes.

3. Display the questions about friends at age five that you wrote on newsprint before the session. Ask the participants to discuss their responses to the questions with their small groups. Allow about 3 or 4 minutes for discussion.

After time is up, ask the young people how many of them are still friends with the same children they knew when they were five. Challenge those who do not have the same friends to identify what happened to the relationships. List their responses on newsprint. If everyone still has the same friends as they did at age five, tell them to imagine what might separate friends in the years between kindergarten and high school, and write their responses on newsprint.

4. Display the sheet of newsprint that lists questions relevant to the young people’s present friendships. Once again allow about 3 or 4 minutes for discussion in small groups. When time is up, ask the participants to call out their answers to the last question, about what it takes to keep a friendship growing. Write their responses on a separate sheet of newsprint.

5. Summarize the results of the discussions, add your own thoughts, and connect it all with basic information on prayer, as follows:

- Comment on the difference between friendships at the age of five and friendships during adolescence. For example, note that the older people get, the more responsible they can be for keeping a friendship going. If teens move away, they can phone, write, or e-mail their friends.
- Refer to the list of ways to maintain a relationship that the participants generated. Elements such as communication, honesty, trust, and making time for one another should be on it. If not, add them.

- Emphasize that a commitment of time and energy is necessary for healthy relationships. Remind the young people that now that they are older, it is up to them to take greater responsibility for the relationships they would like to develop or deepen. These include their relationship with God. Note that almost everything that is said about human relationships can also apply to a person's relationship with God. God continuously invites each of us to deepen our relationship with God. One response to this invitation is prayer.
- Close your presentation by emphasizing that God is and that God is always available to us. God is a constant and eternal presence. Even if at times we do not accept God's invitation to be in relationship, it takes only a prayer to get back in touch.

G Closing Prayer (15 minutes)

This step contains an optional take-home exercise. Read through the step and decide if you will use the optional exercise. If you choose to do so, make appropriate preparations.

Before the session. If it is possible to do so before the session, prepare a prayer space by spreading a 2- to 3-foot-long cloth or scarf on the floor. Place a taper candle that is at least 12 inches tall, in a candleholder, in the middle of the cloth. Note: If your prayer space is the same as your meeting space, you may have to wait and prepare it just before the closing prayer.

Find enough white votive candles for each participant to have one, and a holder for each candle. The candleholders may be short glasses or jelly jars, glass or plastic. Caution: Plastic candleholders might melt if the participants are not careful; you might want to use glass if some of the young people in your group like to "experiment."

White out or cover the title on handout 1-A, "A Letter from Jesus," and make a copy for each participant. Write each participant's name on the outside of a business-size envelope. In each envelope insert a copy of the handout. Seal the envelope.

If you choose to use the optional take-home exercise, prepare a third envelope for each person, using copies of resource 1-A, "A Prayer a Day, Session 1," and following the instructions on the resource.

1. Gather the young people around the cloth and candle in the prayer space. Call the group to silence as you light the candle. You may choose to play some reflective music during this time.

Give each participant a votive candle, a candleholder, and a pen or pencil. Ask the young people to use the pen or pencil to carve into the candle their name or initials, followed by a cross and the name Jesus or the initials J. C. You might give each person a piece of scrap paper to catch the wax. Ask the group to do the carving in silence.

2. When everyone has finished carving their votive candle, ask the participants to come forward one by one and light their candle from the taper candle, place it in its holder, and put it on the cloth near the taper candle.

3. Distribute the sealed, personalized envelopes with the letter from Jesus, that you prepared before the session. Also give each person a blank envelope and a blank sheet of writing paper. Tell the participants not to open the sealed envelope until instructed to do so.

Explain that you would like them each to find a private spot near the prayer space. If possible they should be far away from other people so that they are not distracted by them. However, make it clear that you should be able to see them, and they should be able to see and hear you. Ask them to remain quiet while they walk slowly to their selected spot.

4. Once they have all found their spot, tell the participants they can open the sealed envelope and read the contents. Allow 2 to 3 minutes, including some time for silence after everyone finishes reading their letter.

Ask the young people to write a short letter back to Jesus on the blank paper you handed out. The letter can be anything they want it to be—for example, a reaction to the letter they just read, a pledge to work on their relationship with Jesus, or reflections on personal questions and concerns. Assure them that no one else will read their letter. Tell them that they have 4 to 5 minutes to write a response.

When time is up, ask the young people to put both the letter from Jesus and their response in the blank envelope, seal it, and write their name on the outside of it.

Alternative Approaches

After reading the session plan, you may choose to do some things differently or to make additions to an activity. Consider your time limitations first and then these alternative approaches:

For step A. By this time in the Horizons Program, the participants are likely to be familiar with the basic rules for ensuring that each session runs smoothly. However, if you feel that it is necessary to establish or restate rules, do so as part of the welcome and introduction, before you begin the ice-breaker.

For step A. If your group is large, the Candy Exchange activity as described in step A may take a long time. Consider modifying it by putting the candy in a paper bag and passing the bag around the group, instructing the participants to take one piece of candy when the bag comes to them, without peeking to see what color it is, and to then announce its color and share the appropriate information. Keep passing the bag as time allows.

For step B. Consider circulating all the question bags before initiating any discussion. As the first person finishes each bag, hand them the next bag. Or, if you have a large group, pose two questions at a time and get the bags moving around the group in opposite directions. To do this, you will need two buckets or pitchers with colored papers. As participants finish the last bag, ask them to volunteer to tally the results of a bag that has completed the circuit. When all the responses have been tallied, ask the volunteers to present the results to the rest of the group. Lead the group in a discussion of the results, beginning with what you consider to be the most challenging or important questions.

For step C. This activity can be simplified by brainstorming sentence endings in the large group. Print the sentence starters "God is . . . ," "God and I are . . . ," and "Prayer is . . ." on separate sheets of newsprint. Ask the participants to call out whatever comes to their mind, and record their responses on the newsprint sheets. Post the newsprint sheets on the wall and ask the participants to come forward and put a check mark next to each comment with which they agree.

5. Ask the young people to gather again in a large circle around the prayer space. When they are settled, invite them to come one by one to the center of the circle, place their envelope near the taper candle, and take their votive candle. They should hold on to their candle until the end of the prayer.

When all the young people have placed their envelope in the appropriate place and retrieved their candle, end your prayer time by reciting together the Glory Be or the Lord's Prayer. At the end of the prayer, ask the young people to extinguish their candle and leave it at their place. Tell them that you will return their envelope at a later time.

Note: Later, after the closing teacher prayer, collect the participants' votive candles and envelopes and store them in a safe place. You will need the candles for the closing prayers in sessions 2 and 3, and you will return the envelopes to the participants during the closing prayer in session 3.

Optional Take-Home Exercise

If you choose to offer this take-home exercise, explain it to the young people when they return to the large circle after their reflection time. Remind them that growing in any relationship takes a commitment of time and effort. Talking to someone is a good way of beginning a relationship and of helping a relationship to grow. God is always present to us, inviting each of us to a deeper personal relationship. It is up to us to respond.

Encourage the young people to make a commitment to take a little time each day to pray. They should choose a specific time of day when they will not be preoccupied or distracted. They should also choose a place where they can spend about 10 minutes undisturbed.

Note that each person will receive an envelope containing seven slips of paper that have been taped closed. During their prayer time each day, they should open one slip of paper, read it, and do as instructed.

Invite the participants to place their envelope containing the letters from and to Jesus on the cloth and to retrieve their votive candle. As each young person comes forward, give them one of the envelopes that you prepared before the session using resource 1-A.

For step G. If your group is small and you have time, write the letters from Jesus in longhand on stationery. If you think the participants would recognize your handwriting, ask a few friends to write the letters for you. Personalize each letter by using the individual's name. If you do not know the young people well and have questions about preferred names and nicknames, ask someone who taught them before.



Family Connections

- Send home a note describing the course and outlining its goals and objectives. Let the parents or guardians know that you will be encouraging their young person to share part of what he or she has done during your time together. Tell them that after the next session, you will be sending home some ideas for family prayer. End the note by suggesting that the parents or guardians say an extra prayer for their child each day during this course, asking that their child will become more aware of God's presence in his or her life.
- Tell the young people to ask their parents and grandparents to show them any prayer books they have and to tell them the story behind each book. The participants might ask questions about the age of the prayer book, the circumstances under which it was received, and important memories involving the book or the prayers inside. Ask the young people to get permission to bring the books for the next session.



Journal Options

Within the Session

To make time for journal writing within the session, consider using the quicker procedure for step C listed in the Alternative Approaches section. Then choose one or both of these journal options:

- Before doing the prayer survey in step B, ask the participants to write in their journal a paragraph stating how they feel about taking *Praying All Ways*. You might suggest that they start with the sentence stem "I'm taking this course because . . ."
- The participants' letter to Jesus in step G can be written directly in their journal.

Between Sessions

- Encourage the young people to write in their journal their reaction to this first session, including any new thoughts they might have regarding prayer.
- If you are using the optional take-home exercise, suggest that the young people use their journal occasionally during the week, writing their thoughts about the questions in their daily prayer envelope. Also encourage them simply to spend some of their prayer time thinking rather than writing.

Closing Prayer and Evaluation

Before doing the closing teacher prayer, you may want to complete the evaluation at the end of this session.



Closing Teacher Prayer

1. If possible go back to the space the group used for prayer during this session. Take with you a list of the participants, as well as the pictures of yourself as a youngster that you used during the session.
2. Calm yourself by taking a few deep breaths. Then read the first name on your list. Close your eyes and picture that person. Hold that person's votive candle and say a short prayer. Your prayer does not need to be more than one or two phrases. Repeat the process for each young person in your group.
3. Study for a few moments the pictures of yourself as a child and as a teenager. Close your eyes and say whatever short prayer comes to mind.



Evaluation

Spend a few moments evaluating your experience while the session is fresh in your mind. Answer the following questions, and below them jot down anything you would like to remember for the next session or for the next time you teach this course.

1. What part of the session worked well for you?
2. How would you change this session to make it better?
3. Do you need to make any adjustments to your own expectations or preparations before the next session?
4. What was the general reaction of the young people to this session?
5. Did any members of the group seem to have difficulty with the material? If so, what kind of follow-up with them would be helpful?

A Letter from Jesus

●	<p>My Friend,</p> <p>I am so glad that we have this time together. It gives me a chance to tell you how important you are to me. I wish you could truly understand how much I love you. I love you just the way you are. There is nothing you could do that would change the way I feel about you.</p> <p>Don't get me wrong. There may be some things you do or say that I don't like, but I will always love you. I will never leave you, and if you choose to turn away from me, I will still be close at hand, always ready to walk more closely with you.</p> <p>I would like to invite you to spend some time with me over the next few weeks. Do you think you could put aside a few minutes to spend with me? Even five minutes a day would do. If you can't do it, I'll understand. But I would appreciate it if you would give it a try.</p> <p>You know that candle in the prayer circle? Every time you look at it, remember me. Some people have called me a light in the darkness. I would like to be that light in your life.</p> <p>Love always,</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Jesus</p>
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A PRAYER A DAY

SESSION 1

For each participant in your group, prepare a set of daily prayer starters as follows: Cut apart the sections of a copy of this resource, along the broken lines. Paste the daily closing prayer on the front of a

business-size envelope. Fold each of the seven daily prayer starters in half, tape it shut, and put it in the envelope. Do not seal the envelope.

DAILY CLOSING PRAYER

Holy God, you are all good; I praise your name. I thank you for today, and for yesterday. I am sorry for the things that I have done or said that have made life more difficult for me and for others. I ask that you bless me with the gifts of faith, hope, and love. I also ask that you make me aware of your presence all through the day. Help me to know that you are always with me, to love me and to guide me, and bless those who do not feel your loving presence in their life. Amen.

DAILY PRAYER STARTERS

What is the best thing that happened to you in the last twenty-four hours? Talk to God about it.

Close your prayer time by saying the words on the front of the envelope.

Is there anything you did or said in the last twenty-four hours that you are sorry for? If so, talk to God about it.

Close your prayer time by saying the words on the front of the envelope.

What is your biggest worry right now? Talk to God about it.

Close your prayer time by saying the words on the front of the envelope.

When was the last time you were really happy? really sad or hurt? Talk to God about those times.

Close your prayer time by saying the words on the front of the envelope.

What is the best thing that could happen to you in the next twenty-four hours? Talk to God about it.

Close your prayer time by saying the words on the front of the envelope.

Think about your best friend. Picture that person in your mind. Talk to God about your relationship with that person.

Close your prayer time by saying the words on the front of the envelope.

What are some things you wonder about, are confused by, or are awed by? Talk to God about them.

Close your prayer time by saying the words on the front of the envelope.