

Teaching Children To Pray

**Anglican
Fellowship of
Prayer (Canada)**



Teaching Children to Pray

Children can know and experience God and have faith to share. All of us, including children, are on a faith journey together and God is active in all our lives. Prayer is an essential part of any faith journey. Children need to pray, just like all of us.

Children learn in all sorts of ways—by example, by experience, and by education (i.e. being taught). They are primarily influenced by what their parents, caregivers and teachers do. They imitate them. If those who have the greatest influence over the children pray regularly, children will follow. One cannot start too early including prayer in the daily life of a child. Saying thanksgiving prayers before at least one meal each day as a family provides an ideal model for children. It is also recommended that a short prayer time before going to sleep provides an excellent model for children.



This booklet is intended to provide some guidance in teaching children to pray and helping them develop and maintain a relationship with God, through Jesus Christ.

In order to be able to guide our children, we must have an understanding of what prayer is for us. Put simply, prayer is being aware that God is present with us and that we are present to God. It is also useful to think about our image of God, or to put it another way, what kind of God is present with us. A useful image is that of a loving caring God who wants what is best for us—including our children.

The first part of this brochure outlines some suggested steps for parents, or other caregiver, in teaching their children to pray. The second part, which is in the form of a workbook, presents a suggested guide to prayer using the Hand Prayer as a way of teaching children to pray. There are several variations of the Hand Prayer, and we have selected one. Feel free to use it, or create a variation that meets the needs of the children.

Prayer Time With Children

In this approach to praying with children, the children are gathered together at a regular time and place for a period of about 15 minutes. The important thing is that, over time, the children begin to see that everything in their lives involves God.

Place

Pick a special place that is pleasing to both the children and the adult. For example, can the family fit on a couch? Do you have a porch? Once you have a special spot, put a special object there to indicate this is your place to pray—a Bible, a candle, a cross, a plant, or something the children are especially fond of.

Time

Select a time that fits with the family schedule. After a meal is a good time. Often the weekend works well, because families are less rushed.

Gather

To start, gather the children together, and remind them that you are together as a family to enjoy God being with you and your being with God. Welcome God's presence with you. After you do this several times, don't be surprised if the children don't pick it up and you hear them saying something like, "Hello God. We're glad you're here with us. We like being here with you."

Sing

If you like to sing, sing during your prayer. Be sure to sing a song that all present know or that you can learn from each other.

Talk

Talk about what is going on in your lives. Invite the children to do so, too. Nothing that happens to you, or the children, is foreign to your relationship with God. Thus, talk is appropriate for your prayer.

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Scripture

It is desirable to have scripture as part of the prayer. The Bible has many passages, especially stories that can be used. A useful thing is to read the passage or story from the Bible, using the words printed in the Bible. Then, re-say the passage in words at their own level of vocabulary and understanding. One doesn't need to water down scripture—children love it. Then one can talk about the passage: What does it mean to each of you and what does it tell us about God?

Silence

God talks to us in several ways: through others; through nature; through our hearts and minds; or through circumstance. Listen to what God wants to tell you. During the time together, try praying silently. This usually works best towards the end of the prayer time. You might want to say something like this: "Let's go into our heart and welcome God there. (Pause.) Now, let's tell God, in our heart, what we've been talking about. (Pause.) Let God know how things are going. (Pause.) Now ask God or tell God whatever you want. (Pause.)"

Share

After the quiet time, you might want a few moments transition time before speaking again. Then you might invite the children to share something from their quiet prayer time, or you might want to share something of your own. However, don't force this, as silent prayer is personal, intimate and sacred—all of which makes for difficult sharing.

End

End the prayer together in a definite way. It could be spontaneous prayer (young children often become very good at it). The Lord's prayer, said together is a fine way to end. You may wish to end with a song or hymn. If a candle is used, then blowing out the candle is a good way to signal completion.

Note: The length of the prayer time together might only be 15 minutes. There's no point in dragging the time out.

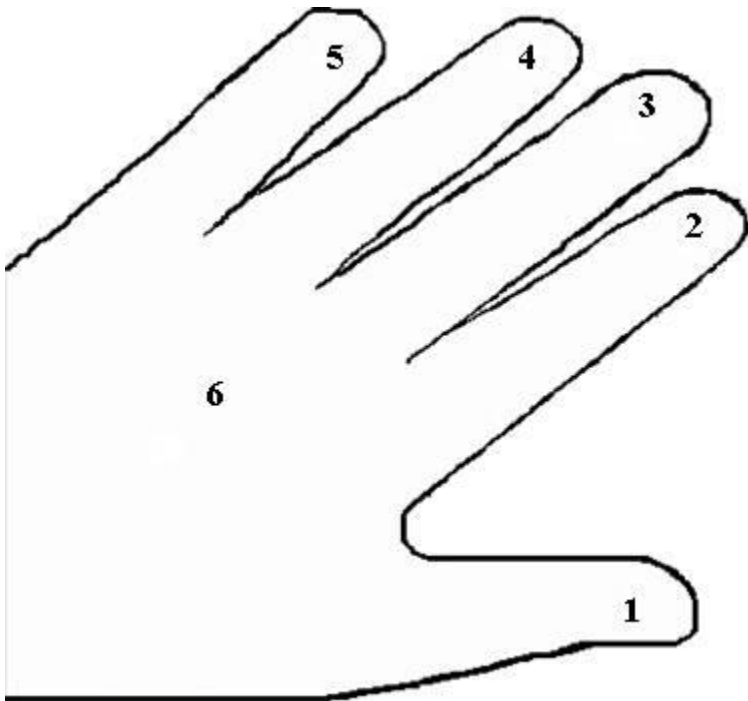
The Hand Prayer

The Hand Prayer is a way of teaching children to pray based on the idea that prayer is:

- † Talking to God;
- † Listening to God; and
- † Being Quiet with God.

It uses one hand to present prayers of different kinds—each finger, with the palm, represents one type of prayer.

1. I love you God—Praise
2. I'm sorry, God—Confession
3. I Thank you, God—Thanksgiving
4. Help others—Intercession
5. Help me, God—Petition
6. I'm listening, God—Meditation



I Love You, God

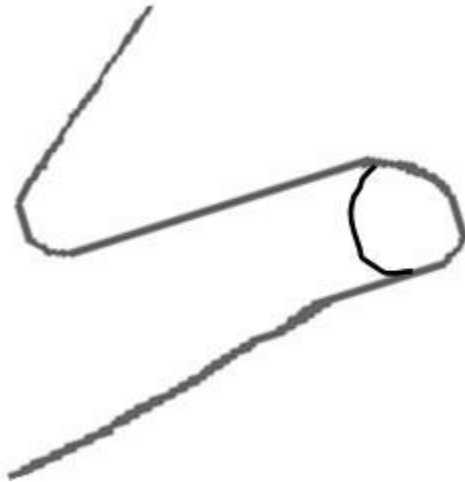
(Praise)

Trace/draw your hand below.
Colour the thumb red.

We look at our thumb to
begin our prayer time with
praise.

I love you, God.

Telling God we love Him is praise



*Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts
with praise; give thanks to him and praise his
name. (Psalm 100:4)*

I'm Sorry, God

(Confession)

Trace/draw your hand below.
Colour the index finger (pointer)
orange

We look at our index finger
(pointer) to pray.

I'm sorry, God.

We ask God to forgive us for all
the wrong things we have said,
thought or done.
He forgives our sins.

What is something for which you
want to ask God to forgive? Do
you need to forgive someone?

*I am he who blots out your transgressions (sins)
for my own sake, and I will not remember them.
(Isaiah 43:25)*


I Thank You, God

(Thanksgiving)

Trace/draw your hand below.
Colour the middle finger
yellow.

We look at our middle finger to
pray

I thank you, God.



We thank God for all the blessings he has given us—our families, friends, pets, teachers, the food we eat, our church, fun times, for laughter, and hugs. We can think of many things to thank Jesus for.

For what are we thankful?

I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart.
(Psalm 9:1)

Help Others, God

(Intercession)

Trace/draw your hand below.
Colour the ring finger **green**.

Looking at the ring finger reminds us to pray for others. This is called in-ter-Ces-sion.



Help others, God.

Do you know anyone who has a problem, or is sick, hurt, lonely or sad? We can ask God to help others. Maybe a friend with a hurt arm, a teacher or coach, a stranger on the street, or a grouchy person in the store.

Our parents, brothers and sisters need our prayers too.

Pray for one another. (James 5:16)

Help Me, God

(Petition)

Trace/draw your hand below.
Colour the little finger blue.

Looking at our little finger we are reminded to pray for ourselves. Praying for ourselves is called petition.



Help me, God.

We can ask God to help us with any problem or concern we may have. We can ask God to help us be kind to others, or to help us do our best in school, sports, or activities, or to help us get over sickness or hurts.

Hear my prayer O Lord. I will call to you and you will answer me. (Psalm 86:6-7)

I'm Listening, God

(Meditation)

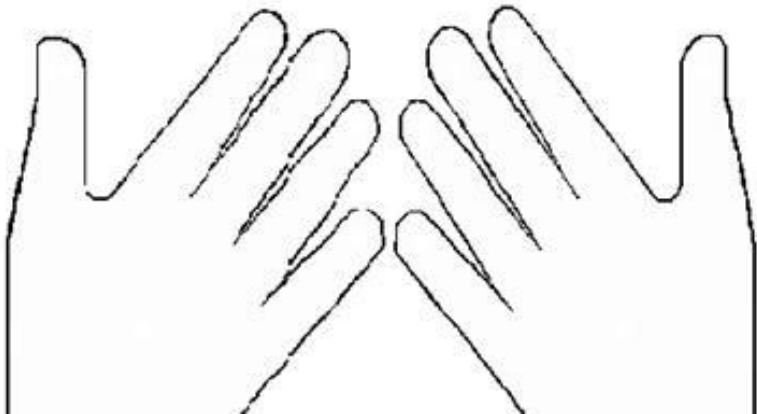
Trace/draw your hand below
palm side up.

Colour the palm purple.

We turn our palms upward and
pray by listening to our spirit.
Praying without speaking is
called meditation.

I'm listening, God.

A good listener is quiet. God
wants to talk to us. In order to
hear God and feel his presence,
we must be quiet.



Be still and know that I am God. (Psalm 46:10)

When we open our hands and hearts in prayer, God is able to work and paint a rainbow in our lives. When we rest both hands on our laps, palms up, we can see a rainbow form. Try it. The thumbs form the outer arch, or semi-circle, and the little fingers form an inner arch

Trace both hands, palms up, on these two pages. Connect the rainbow arch from the two little fingers and colour it blue. Continue connecting the arches—finger to finger. Colour each arch the same colour you used in the Hand Prayer. Do you see the rainbow?

Additional Resources

1. Fairley, Cathy. *Piece by Piece—Prayer*. Burlington: Piece by Piece Resources.
2. Bays, Patricia. *Anglican Learning Centres—Prayer*. Toronto: Anglican Book Centre.
3. Bel Geddes, Joan. *Children Praying: Why and How to Pray with your Children*. Notre Dame: Soren Books.



Acknowledgements

1. The contents of the Prayer Time With Children section have been adapted from the ideas presented by Marlene Halpin in an article, “Teaching Children to Pray” in the Sept./Oct. 1988 edition of the periodical “Praying”.
2. The section on the Hand Prayer is taken by an unpublished brochure written by Kathy Allday Timberlake.

For further information or pamphlets please contact your AFP Diocesan Representative or the AFP Canada Resources Coordinator.
Internet Web Site: www.anglicanprayer.org

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