

for parents

A LETTER FOR PARENTS

Dear Parents,

My name is Sarah Christopher and I serve as a parish catechist and I work at a Catholic Elementary School. I have worked with children ages 3-12 for the last 8 years.

These weeks at home are a challenge for all of us. You are trying to work, keep yourself calm, stay in touch with your schools and figure out how to balance it all... all while trying not to be too worried about the crisis happening in the world today and how it is affecting all of us. I, too, am trying to make sense of everything as I am home with my four children.

In my church and school, there has been much brainstorming and looking for ways to stay connected, and ways to encourage and support families as we navigate this moment in our history.

It was through this brainstorming that I developed this packet for families with young children. Their wonder-filled approach to life helps us remember how to have "faith like a child" - a perspective desperately needed right now in the world!

While we prayerfully remember the sick and all those affected by the events happening today, let us accept this time as a respite from our daily busy-ness. Let us all renew our own connection as a family and with God.

These activities are mostly something children can do independently (giving you some time to do what you need to do). They will request your support and participation only after they have done the work to prepare. I pray that these activities are a help and not an additional "to do" for you.

Peace and good health to you all,

Sarah Christopher

for parents

PRAYING AT HOME AS A FAMILY

- These weeks at home are a challenge for all of us. Our normal busy lives have come to a halt, and it's hard to imagine how to be calm, get our work done, and fill our days with activities to keep the children busy.
- How about starting a new tradition... **praying together as a family.**
- *Even if you have never prayed as a family before, it's not too late!* This is the perfect time to start a new family tradition.
- The best part is that this does not have to be another major item on your to do list... your children have all the tools they need to lead this themselves.
- Allow them to go on a scavenger hunt through the house to set up a family prayer table.
- Give them supplies to create prayer and song cards, labels for the prayer service activities, help them to print a few religious images off the internet... allow them to be creative and empower them to lead the family in prayer.
- If you give them some space to be creative with this, you might buy yourself some much needed time to get some work done too!
- The following sheets will give you an idea of what we strive to do in class each week and for some ideas of how to get started.

for parents

THE PRAYER TABLE

- Prayer is a central part of our faith and of all Religious Education classes.
- The **Prayer Table** is the gathering place where we start or end class by joining our prayers together as one. It's the place where we all gradually learn that even as Jesus calls us each by name as individuals, it's in community where we act as Jesus for each other.
- Your children will LOVE planning and leading a simple prayer service for your family.
- Elementary aged children especially love to be involved in the planning of a prayer service. *(In some classes, we keep a list of those that have had a turn in an effort to allow everyone to have a chance - it's that popular!)*
- The prayer service leaders can choose which prayer, song, or activity and the order it lands in our prayer service.
- They also choose what items are displayed on the prayer table.

THE CLASS PRAYER SERVICE

Explanation

- During our Prayer Services in class are where we practice common prayers (always per the children's choice)
 - Hail Mary
 - The Our Father
 - The Rosary (usually one decade)
 - Glory Be
 - Special blessings for birthdays
- We Proclaim the Word of God
 - they choose from prayer cards they make
 - or scriptures from the Bible
 - anyone who volunteers gets a turn to read
- We practice praying for others (*Prayers of the Faithful*)
 - this is where each child may pray an intention either out loud or silently in their heart
 - Then they say "Let us pray to the Lord"
 - All respond "Lord, hear our prayer"
- We practice praying in silence
 - the leader can ring a small bell to signify beginning and ending of silent prayer
- The children have many songs they enjoy singing, ask them to share them with you

for children

PRAYING TOGETHER

Hi children!

I hope you are all doing well. Looks like we will all be having a lot of time on our hands as we stay home to stay healthy.

If you are looking for something to do while your parents are busy working, I am sending some suggestions for creating your own prayer table at your house. It would be a great chance for you to start a new tradition in your house! You can lead your parents in a prayer service.

With permission, maybe you could go on a scavenger hunt in your house to look for items to place on your own prayer table. You could create a prayer service for your family by making beautiful prayer cards, and decorating the prayer table. You could teach them some of your favorite songs too. Be creative!

You know how much Jesus loves you. Help your parents to remember that he is there for all of us, even during challenging times. Stay healthy and take care of yourselves, and happy planning!

HOW TO CREATE A HOME PRAYER TABLE



Step 1: Gather materials

- Small table, coffee or end table, tray with or without legs
- Piece of cloth: could be place mat, cloth napkin, or larger... White or appropriate color for the Liturgical season (*purple for Lent*)
- Item suggestions (*all are optional*):
 - LED Candle
 - Bible
 - Religious statue or cross
 - Rosary
 - Religious photo or image*
 - Prayer card*
 - Song card*
 - Labels for designing their prayer service*
 - Silk flowers for decoration

Items with a * are great ideas for children to create their own pieces for their prayer service.

Step 2: Be creative in setting up the space for your prayer table. (*Take your time and make it special!*)

Step 3: Plan your own prayer service, just like we do in class.

Step 4: Invite your parents to join you for your prayer service.



HOW TO MAKE PRAYER CARDS

Step 1: Choose some verses or prayers

- **Suggestions for any age:**
 - Amen
 - Thanks be to God
 - Holy! Holy! Holy!
 - Glory to God!
 - Be still and know that I am God

- **Suggestions for Elementary** (*with some practice looking these up in the Bible*):
 - Psalm 23:1
 - Psalm 23:1-3
 - Isaiah 9:1
 - Psalm 33:20-22
 - Psalm 18:3
 - Psalm 3:5
 - Psalm 113:1-4
 - Psalm 121:1-2
 - Psalm 43:2a
 - Isaiah 11:6-9
 - Isaiah 40:3-5
 - Prayers, such as:
 - Our Father
 - Hail Mary
 - Glory Be

HOW TO MAKE PRAYER CARDS

Step 2: Write neatly on paper

- Use one page per verse (can use a lined page underneath to align words)

Step 3: Decorate

- Decorate around the verse to make a beautiful border
- - or - Use another page (could be cardboard or thicker paper if you have it) to create a beautiful border and then cut it out and glue around the verse
- When decorating, be creative!

Step 4: Show your parents how you can proclaim the word of God

- Stand up straight
- Speak clearly
- Speak loudly
- Speak slowly
- Use eye contact

Tutorial

BORDER TEMPLATE FOR PRAYER CARDS (NEXT PAGE)

The following sheets with lines and borders could be printed for the children's use or they could create their own.

Author bio:

Sarah Christopher has been teaching children in the method of *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* for 8 years. She is on staff on the Religious Education team at *St. Patrick-St. Anthony Church* in Hartford and is also the Elementary Catechist at *Enfield Montessori School*. When she's not working with children in the atrium, she is a Freelance Writer and Marketing Consultant. Sarah lives in Manchester, CT with her husband and four children. Sarah is available to lead catechist and faculty faith formation sessions for your parish/school.

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