

# Fostering Faith Catechist Formation Insert

## Prayer: 1 hour



Completion of this study entitles the catechist to one hour of credit toward certification.

## PRAYER: Ways of Prayer

### THEME

Traditional prayer forms, individual and family prayer, popular cultural forms of religious devotion, and multicultural prayer expressions.

### CATECHIST COMPETENCIES

As a result of this study, the catechist will be able to:

1. Describe some of the various forms of prayer in the Christian life.
2. Describe some popular religious practices and traditional devotions.
3. Demonstrate a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of the family in nurturing prayer life.
4. Explore some prayer traditions from many cultures.

### CATECHISM REFERENCES

#1174-1187; 2653-2724

### FOCUSING THE STUDY

Catechesis for prayer calls people to a strengthening of the covenant relationship with God in liturgy, sacramental celebrations and service to one another. The Liturgy of the Hours, paraliturgies, personal devotions such as the rosary and other forms of prayer help people to pray individually, as a family, and as a community.

### INTRODUCTION

How do our styles of prayer influence our faith life? Conversely, how does our theology affect the ways we pray? Prayer is more than the spontaneous outpouring of our interior needs and affections. We need to have the will to pray as well as the knowledge of what the scriptures reveal about prayer. Furthermore, we must learn how to pray, both as individuals and with others. Our prayer is always the prayer of the Church, even if it is done in secret. We are in harmony with Jesus our model of prayer, God the Father, the source of all prayer, and the Holy Spirit, the wellspring of prayer in our hearts. The Church retains a living tradition of prayer according to the historical, social and cultural expression of each of the faithful who employ a unique prayer style, utilizing a variety of words, gestures, music and movement.

### FORMS AND TRADITIONS OF PRAYER

Our first realm of prayer is that of personal conversation as part of our covenant relationship with our Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. Some of us may feel more comfortable with memorized prayers, which reflect the sentiments of our heart and also give us the comfort of familiar repetition. In addition to the well-known Sign of the Cross, Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be, Apostles' Creed, and Act of Contrition, many of us have our own forms of meal and night time prayers.

Once we are immersed in a personal spirituality, we can reach out in spontaneous prayer that more clearly interprets the deepest desire of our hearts. Meditation, contemplation, and journaling allow us to express ourselves in the intimacy and privacy of a faith journey that has transcended the searching phase to the owned phase.

Many of the saints have left us with prayer styles which have resulted in the founding of religious orders based on their spirituality and which attracted people who wished to follow this way of life. In turn, we may find a prayer form which appeals to us after a brief study of some of these holy predecessors.

St. Francis prayed constantly and developed a pattern of literal interpretation of the Gospel as well as a deep rejoicing in all aspects of nature. Never one to be retiring, Francis generated an enthusiasm in others by his own outgoing and generous loving communication with his God. He often prayed by example, once giving a homily by showering a bucket of ashes over his head and reciting Psalm 51 "Have mercy on me O God," then departing without further comment.

St. Benedict believed in the tradition of "work and prayer" which formed the framework for his religious community. The members faithfully prayed the Liturgy of the Hours known as the Divine Office to provide a structure to their daily life. He also introduced *lectio divina*, a specialized reading of scripture involving the reading of a scripture passage and a total memorization of and immersion in its meaning, often taking hours, until the power of God's word totally overtook the reader.

St. Dominic was a person of great compassion, one who wished to serve Christ with his every resource. He founded the Order of Preachers, who, from the thirteenth century onward, devoted itself to the spread of the gospel and the enhancement of the intellectual life of those who listened to their message.

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St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross modeled the contemplative lifestyle for us. They believed that prayer came from a heart that was on fire and went beyond words. They broached the “dark night of the soul” in order to find the illuminative way which lay beyond. John also made himself an “empty vessel,” stripped of all earthly possessions and desires.

Francis, Benedict, Dominic, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila and so many other holy men and women offer us touchstones for our own prayer style. As we explore a variety of individual and shared prayer moments, we can more fully appreciate their legacy.

### FAMILY PRAYER

For many of us, our family of origin has been the source of our prayer life. Our current family is the center of prayerful expression, in turn offering continuity to the domestic church. In our most cherished childhood memories, it is often a grandparent or parent who has imbued the individual with an example of religious practice, moral values and prayerful expression. It is thus that our prayer life is intimately connected with childhood emotions and becomes a powerful catalyst for our own generative spirituality as we mature. In our nuclear family, we create our own traditions and rituals, based on the rhythms of life, the seasons, and the events of the day. Morning, meal and night prayers introduce the young child to the graciousness of a loving God who blesses and protects us. Prayer services surrounding All Saints Day, an Advent Wreath, a Lenten Cross, and the new life of Easter take us beyond secular holiday celebrations to the deeper religious meanings which permit us to go beyond self-interest to ministry to, for and with others.

The Family Bible, the picture of a guardian angel and the spontaneous blessing of a child when they leave the house all give a child the opportunity to ask and to learn more about prayer forms and to imitate the adults who are living out their own faith in the context of family holiness.

### POPULAR DEVOTIONAL PRACTICES

St. Dominic is also remembered for giving us the devotion of the rosary. Mary is said to have appeared to him during his campaign of preaching against the Albigensians and their heretical beliefs. Mary instructed Dominic in the prayers (The Angelic Salutation and the Our Father) and the mysteries accompanying each ten Hail Mary’s or decade. Dominic gave a short instruction on one of the mysteries before the recitation of each ten Hail Mary’s. He succeeded in converting the Albigensians through the power of this devotion. During the Middle Ages, the largely illiterate population could use the fingering of the beads (Middle English word “bede” means “prayer”) as their means of meditative and repetitive prayer. In more modern terms, we may think of the repetitions as a type of mantra that leads us beyond the meaning of the words to a unitive relationship with Jesus through Mary.

#### THE MYSTERIES OF THE ROSARY

##### *Joyful Mysteries*

The Annunciation  
The Visitation  
The Nativity  
The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple  
The Finding of Jesus in the Temple

##### *Sorrowful Mysteries*

The Agony of Jesus in the Garden  
The Scourging at the Pillar  
The Crowning with Thorns  
The Carrying of the Cross  
The Crucifixion and Death of Jesus

##### *Glorious Mysteries*

The Resurrection of Jesus  
The Ascension of Jesus into Heaven  
The Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles  
The Assumption of Mary into Heaven  
The Coronation of Mary



Another popular devotion by members of the Franciscan Order is the “Way of the Cross,” also known as the “Stations of the Cross.” In the fourth century, St. Helena visited the Holy Land and identified the sites of key events in the passion and suffering of Christ. She had churches or shrines built at those locations and soon Christian pilgrims would come to retrace the steps of Jesus on his journey of suffering toward Calvary.

The Crusaders brought this practice to Europe where it was translated into images depicting each of the stations. The faithful walk from station to station to reflect and pray at each significant moment, whether based on scripture or on legendary accounts. Most Catholic churches today have depictions of the Stations of the Cross; in some cases a fifteenth station portraying the Resurrection has been added. Lent is a traditional time to pray the stations, especially in communal services. Prayers accompanying the stations can be a meditation on the life of Jesus, prayers of adoration and petition, or contemporary prayers relating Jesus’ suffering to modern injustices.

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### The Stations of the Cross

1. Jesus is Condemned to Death
2. Jesus Takes up His Cross
3. Jesus Falls the First Time
4. Jesus Meets his Sorrowful Mother
5. Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus Carry his Cross
6. Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus
7. Jesus Falls the Second Time
8. Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem
9. Jesus Falls the Third Time
10. Jesus is Stripped of His Garments
11. Jesus is Nailed to the Cross
12. Jesus Dies on the Cross
13. Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross
14. Jesus is Laid in the Tomb



### LITURGY OF THE HOURS

The main components of the Liturgy of the Hours are the psalms, prayers from the Bible that were written to be sung. The psalms are poems, reflecting many different emotions and attitudes: joy, praise, laments, wisdom, thanksgiving, suffering, as well as epics of history, kingly proclamations and prayers to be recited in the temple. This book of the First Testament of the Bible is attributed to the authorship of King David, though many others contributed to its makeup. The Divine Office or Liturgy of the Hours is at the heart of communal religious life. But all Catholics are encouraged to pray in this form of liturgy, either privately from one of many books (called breviaries) available at religious bookstores or publicly. The following format may be useful for an informal recitation of the liturgy of the hours:

- ◆ Meditate on a psalm that expresses your feelings and desires
- ◆ Reflect on a related scripture passage
- ◆ Pray a Gospel Canticle (Luke 1:46-55 or Luke 1:68-79)
- ◆ Express your petitions and needs from the heart
- ◆ Conclude with an “Our Father”

These prayers are recited at various set times of the day by religious communities in union with the whole church: matins, lauds, prime, terce, sext, none, vespers, and compline. These “hours” reflect not only the passage of the times of day from dawn to dark but also the rhythm of a person’s life and daily tasks done in reliance on God.

### CULTURAL PRAYER EXPRESSIONS

In the Archdiocese of Chicago, we have been enriched by the inclusion of many diverse cultural forms of prayer and worship. Although individual ethnic backgrounds are too numerous to detail here, the following cultures have created a distinct influence: African-American, Hispanic, Asian and Eastern European (Polish).

Eucharistic liturgies are offered in Spanish, Polish, Tagalog, and in the specialized idiom of the African-American community. People feel most comfortable when they can pray in the language of their birth. At significant moments in the worship life of a parish, liturgies are offered in two or more languages simultaneously. More than just an experience of another language, we are being invited into the realm of another culture and its various expressions. For example, the Christmas season and the time preceding it bring us the Filipino custom of “Simbang Gabi” or night Mass, a novena of Masses held from December 16-23, featuring beautiful star lanterns called “parols” and delicacies such as rice pudding wrapped in banana leaves, egg rolls, and beverages of chocolate or ginger tea. Songs and prayers of thanksgiving accompany these joyful celebrations.

**“Communion with Jesus Christ leads the disciple to assume the attitude of prayer and contemplation which the Master himself had. When catechesis is permeated by a climate of prayer, the assimilation of the entire Christian life reaches its summit.”**

The General Directory for Catechesis #85

Another ritual of Christmas Eve is “Las Posadas” or the Hispanic tradition of re-enacting Mary and Joseph’s search for shelter in Bethlehem. After going from house to house (or area to area if done inside) and being rejected at each place, the young couple is finally welcomed into the last location where feasting and celebrating take place. Lanterns called luminarias light the way for the holy couple, often accompanied by Christmas carolers.

Earlier in December, on the twelfth, special prayers and liturgies proclaim the gratitude of the Hispanic community to our Lady of Guadalupe, Patroness of the Americas. Her picture is displayed prominently, usually surrounded by flowers and, early in the morning, the faithful gather to “wake the Virgin” and serenade her, while enjoying pastries and hot chocolate.

Worship and prayer in the African-American tradition is often characterized by joyful praise and thanksgiving and is expressed by engaging one’s body, mind and spirit in responding to God’s goodness. African-American prayer acknowledges the awesome power of God as witnessed throughout times of oppression and confidently calls out in joyful petition for God’s continued blessing. Most recently, African-Americans have reached into their rich heritage to draw forth themes and principles such as the seven themes of *Kwanzaa* to serve as a framework for joyful and prayerful celebrations of God’s goodness manifested in a rich cultural heritage.

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Our Polish brothers and sisters bring us great devotion to the Blessed Mother (especially Our Lady of Czestochowa) as well as prayerful customs and traditions such as the opłatek, a decorated wafer shared by participants in a Christmas Eve or Christmas day dinner. As one person breaks off a piece of the wafer, he or she passes the wafer to the next diner with a wish of blessing and good health for the coming year.

It is easy to see how some of these prayers and rituals have become integrated into the universal prayer of the church. It is up to each individual to take advantage of opportunities to participate in the fullness of such cultural traditions and to embrace the moments when communal prayer experiences reflect our diversity.

### **CONCLUSION**

Prayer, then, is not an isolated activity, but a movement, which pervades our deepest selves through all time until we are joined to its Source. We conclude with the wise sayings of two holy women. Mechthild of Magdeburg said “Prayer is naught else but a yearning of soul...when it is practiced with the whole heart, it has great power.” Julian of Norwich realizes “And so the soul by prayer is made of one accord with God.”

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Mechthild of Magdeburg

**“And so the soul by prayer is made of one accord with God.”**

Julian of Norwich

### **REVIEW/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

In order to complete this study and earn one hour of credit toward catechist certification, you must respond to the reflection/discussion questions in either of the following ways:

1. Write/type your responses (20-40 words each) and submit them to your catechetical leader;
2. Engage in a formal discussion of the questions (at least 30 minutes) in some forum approved by your catechetical leader; e.g. a catechist meeting, level meetings, team meetings, catechist pairings, etc.

### **Review Questions**

1. Name some memorized prayers and tell how they have influenced your own prayer life.
2. Of the various saints mentioned in this study, whose spirituality comes closest to your own prayer style and why?
3. Name the joyful mysteries of the rosary.
4. What is the importance of family prayer in the life of the Church?
5. Describe the origins of The Way of the Cross.
6. What is unique about the psalms?
7. Give details of one of the cultural forms of prayer described in this study.

### **Practical Application/Critical Thinking**

1. How can you enrich your personal prayer life by the application of what you have learned in this study?
2. Reflecting on both the introduction and conclusion, what aspects of this module will lead you to further study and exploration?
3. Which cultural prayer forms have you experienced and what has been your reaction?
4. How will you use what you have learned in this module in your catechetical setting?

**About the author:** *Marilyn Peters Krawczyk* is coordinator of leadership and placement at the Office for Catechesis. She had been a parish DRE for over twenty years. Her Masters in Religious Education is from the Institute of Pastoral Studies of Loyola University of Chicago. She is the author of the monthly “DRE Data” column for *Catechist Magazine* and an adjunct faculty member for Loyola University of New Orleans.