

Weave prayer right through your service. **Songs** are prayers. **Passing the Peace** is a prayer. The **offering** is a prayer. Reading the **Bible** is prayer – in which God gets a really good turn at speaking – and which it makes sense for us to contribute to the conversation.

Announcements can be prayers, as we speak out what concerns our community, what is going on, and our hopes for God to be in it all and shaping it all.

Arrow Prayer

One of the best kid's songs around is Colin Buchanan's Arrow Prayer Song, "You can tell the Lord that you love him any time."

It's full of everyday examples for families of times when prayer is just the thing (and it has actions!).

This is a very common teaching with our children, that we can talk to God anytime, and it is especially effective if we actually practice that in our gatherings. After all, our children will follow our habits, more than our words.

Jelly Baby Prayer:

This works really well if you introduce it with your children first and then allow it to spread to the whole congregation.

Provide a bowl of Jelly Babies.

Invite people to

- Choose a Jelly Baby don't eat it!
- Look around and choose a person to pray for. Let the Holy Spirit prompt you in your choice.
- Pray quietly for that person.
- Go and give them the Jelly Baby as a sign that you have prayed for them.
- They eat the Jelly Baby!

This spreads rapidly in a group, as those who are prayed for then pray for others.

PRAYER IN THE AIR

Prayer Flags

Prayer Beach Balls

Prayer-o-planes*

There are lots of ideas for "launching" our prayers tangibly – remembering the great value there is for our children, watching to see how discipleship is done, in externalising what is happening on the inside for us.

During a time of praise and worshipful singing, set a space with colourful fabric flags, attached to light poles, and permanent markers. Keep alerting people to the opportunity to come and write (or draw or hieroglyph) their sense of praise for who God is on the flags. When the flags have some contributions a couple of volunteers can wave them. Similarly, pass a brightly coloured plastic ball or two around the congregation with a permanent marker for prayer/praise contributions.

*Prayer-o-planes. Roslyn Wright (Faculty of Whitely College) contributed this idea, and assures me that older men love making paper planes out of their prayers and launching them into the air.

Confession Prayer

What We
have done
What You
have done

This confession prayer uses the simple repeated line "what we have done and what you have done."

Combined with some strong images on screen, this can be an effective way of including children in confession. The repetition makes participation accessible.

The mood of the confession moves towards the end into the assurance of the power of God's grace. This prayer can be framed within the fairly upbeat song 'For all you've done' (Reuben Morgan, Hillsong). Allow the focus to move from the positive affirmation of what Jesus has done - around through the recognition of what we have done and need to confess - and back full circle to the ultimacy of the work of the Cross.

What We have done
What You have done

Lord Jesus,
we come to you
thinking about
what we have done
and said and
what we have done
and thought.
We know that some of
what we have done
has been wrong, hurtful,
destructive, unjust, unhealthy,
unlike you.
We say sorry for
what we have done...
we give you our burdens of
sin, hurt, pain, fear, anger,
selfishness.

What you have done...

Lord Jesus,
we come to you
and think about
what you have done,
dying for us,
What you have done,
Jesus;
taking our burden of sin,
our hurt,
our wrong,
our pain.

What you have done
on the Cross
is more powerful than
what we have done.
We thank you
for the power of your
forgiveness,
the power of your life.
We thank you for
what you have done.
Amen.

Confession

There are two dangers in inviting children into spaces of confession. One is that we trivialise sin into simply being naughty, or developmental shortcomings on the part of children.

'Dear Jesus, I'm sorry I'm not a good sharer because I'm only 2 and haven't developed my social-self awareness beyond parallel play yet...'

is not an authentic confession.

'Dear God, I haven't got the hang of conversion of volume and mass yet, so please forgive me for spilling the juice.'

The second danger is that we think children are too innocent to confess anything. If we consider theology only from an individual standpoint, we will struggle to offer our children the sacrament of confession and forgiveness. Our children are just as needful of confession and forgiveness, because they live in this world where evil is giving it a red hot go, contending for air-time against the reign of God.

Confession is not only an individual act but a corporate owning of realities that overwhelm us because they are bigger than any one thing.

Children are healthily included in our confession as participants in the whole ecology of the world – seen and unseen.

Pour out my Heart

Centre a time of prayer and worship around the song 'Pour out my heart' (by Craig Masseau, but Matt Redman also has a version)

Provide a stack of cups or bowls or jars, a tub of water and a central empty tub, perhaps with a cross behind it. As you sing, invite people to come and take a vessel, fill it with water from the tub then go and pour it out into the central tub. If you like, offer textas and scrap paper for people to write prayers on and add into the water.

Prayer Plaiting:

Pass three broad ribbons of White, Green and Yellow around the congregation. Provide several permanent markers so that more than one person can write on the ribbon at a time.

The Green ribbon is for prayers for the world, the White is for prayers for ourselves and the Yellow is for our recognition of God.

After allowing space for people to contribute their prayers (best done with musical background), join the three ribbons with a knot. Whilst one person prays aloud, ask three people to hold one ribbon end each and plait the ribbons together. Prayer is a joining of our concern for the world, our intention to serve and the heart and power of God to move us in response.

You can do this without writing, too.

Stand in Solidarity

In some communities there is resistance to standing up and identifying yourself as a candidate for prayer. Yet it is a wonderful gift to have someone pray for you.

This idea invites us to stand, not for ourselves, but for others - surely a great biblical theme.

Invite people to talk with a person near them about whatever they might want prayer for. It can be a personal or global concern. Make the breadth of this clear. No one is expected to share personal information in this context that they are uncomfortable about.

After several minutes of sharing, re-gather with a central focus. Say something like:

"We have heard each other's concerns and God has been gently present in our conversations. We are now going to pray together. As I speak out different areas for prayer, you are invited to stand in solidarity for someone else whose concern you have heard today, or for someone you know of beyond this community. "

Loving God, we stand in solidarity and pray for your kingdom to come

*With those who are afraid, despairing and vulnerable
and in need of security and hope...*

With those who are unwell and in need of healing...

With those alone and in need of community...

With those in conflict and in need of reconciliation...

With those in responsibility and in need of wisdom...

With those in trouble and in need of grace...

With those in joy and in need of celebration...

With those in poverty and in need of resources...

We stand in solidarity and pray for your kingdom to come.

(This line could be repeated as a response in between each bidding line.)