

FAMILY FAITH EVENT FOR PARISHES

Leading Children to Meditation

The Ogilvie Centre
RC Diocese of Aberdeen

The Ogilvie Centre of the Diocese of Aberdeen

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Overview

The Family Faith Event, *Leading Children to Meditation*, is an opportunity for the parish and the family to partner in the formation of the children of the parish. The event consists of:

- Time of Formation: There are separate talks for children and adults. Children engage in meditation preparatory activities and parents receive a talk on meditation.
- Time of Prayer: Families are brought back together in church or hall to meditate together.
- Time of Community: All the participants share a meal together.

The Ogilvie Centre is providing this resource for parishes which includes an event planning sheet, catechist background material, a suggested parent talk, ideas and materials for the children's session, and a meditation to use during the time of prayer.

Family Faith Event Planning Sheet

A clear plan will help the family faith event to run smoothly. Think through the following with other catechists, the parish priest, and other helpful resource-persons before running the event.

Timing

As you plan for the date and time, take into consideration what other local, television, or national events might conflict and reduce the number of attendees. After Sunday Mass is usually a good time for parish events.

- What date and time will the event take place?

Attendees

Personal invitations are the most powerful. Posters and bulletin announcements help raise general awareness, but are not as effective in attracting attendees as the personal touch. You have a lovely event to share with families and they will be happy to be invited!

- How will you advertise the date and time so that the most number of families will know?
- Do you have specific families in the parish in mind whom you could personally invite?
- Do you have email addresses or mobile phone numbers to text families who you believe would be interested?
- Could the parish make this a “required” event for children in the sacramental preparation program?

Space and Logistical Considerations

- Where will adult talk take place?
- Who will give the talk to the adults?
- Where will children’s activity take place?
- Who will lead the children’s activity?
Is there at least one catechist and one other PVGed adult to conduct this session?
- Will materials be needed not currently on hand in children’s liturgy cabinet? If so, how much will they cost and is the parish happy to provide funds to purchase materials?
- Where will the family meditation take place? There should be enough room for the children to sit in a circle or semi-circle with parents sitting behind them. Children can be on the floor and parents should have a chair if possible.

- How will I decorate the centre of the prayer space? Do I have a small prayer table or cloth, flowers or simple statue, pillar candle and matches?
- Who will lead the meditation and/or simple song? Is there someone who plays an instrument who can help lead (not necessary), such as one of the older children?

Meal

This can be an opportunity for older members of the parish to contribute their time and skills to build up the younger families in the parish. They simply need to be asked.

- Where will the meal take place?
- Will each family bring a dish to share or will a parish team provide the meal? Alternatively, families can bring their own packed lunches with the parish providing teas, coffees, and homebakes.
- Who will set up and clean up afterwards?
- What cutlery, dishes, and cups will you use? (Paper and plastic products can make for faster clean-up, though will cost more to use.)

Schedule

It helps to have a simple schedule and someone who will help keep the times moving along so that the event runs smoothly. There will be some transition time needed between events. The meal may come first or last, depending on the time of day.

- Gathering, Welcome, and Split into Groups (about 10 minutes) __:____
- Formation Time (about 30 minutes) __:____ - __:____
- Prayer Time (about 20 minutes) __:____ - __:____
- Meal Time (about 45 minutes) __:____ - __:____

Prayer Team

Don't forget to pray that the event is a grace-filled time for all who will attend! Having a team of intercessors who will pray for the families before the event is always a beautiful way to involve other members of the parish, even if they cannot attend.

Catechist Preparation

As a catechist, your first preparation for the event is for yourself. It is good to familiarize yourself with the practice of Christian meditation and to practice it yourself before presenting it to others. The following resources will help you “contemplate and give to others the fruits of your contemplation.”

Amazon.co.uk has a Kindle edition of the book “In My Heart Room” by Sr. Mary Teresa Donze which is the inspiration for this family faith event. The introduction and meditations are helpful for orienting a catechist to meditation. The catechist should pray a few of the meditations in the manner suggested by the book and should practice reading a meditation aloud to practice presenting the meditation during a prayer time.

Christian prayer, the dialogue between a soul and God, takes many forms. At Mass and in the sacraments, when saying the Liturgy of the Hours, or while reciting the Rosary, Catholics pray in community, using pre-determined words and rites. But there is also a form of Christian prayer which is quiet and personal.

Christian meditation is one of many ways of personal prayer. It involves the body, firstly, as it requires the person to sit in a relaxed but attentive position and to close one’s eyes and to breathe calmly. It involves a quieting of the imagination in the beginning and a focusing on a simple word or phrase, such as, “Our Father,” or “Holy Spirit, come,” or “Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus,” to remind the person that he or she is in the presence of God. A guided meditation, such as is given in “In My Heart Room,” then leads the person into an ever-deeper awareness of God’s presence. As the person becomes aware of God’s presence, usually a feeling of peace and calm begins to spread throughout the soul and to further relax the body. A person has the opportunity to have a personal encounter with Christ during this time of meditation and may find him or herself forming a resolution to do something good after the meditation, or discovers the solution to a problem, or simply is encouraged to meditate again at another time. The time of meditation ends in the same relaxed and gradual way as it began.

The Scriptures tell us that the baptized person has the assistance of the Holy Spirit in prayer: “And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15). A person’s age does not matter when it comes to prayer, since all baptized souls rely on the grace of the Holy Spirit to pray. This is why we are so confident that learning the practice of Christian meditation is important to teach even to young children and can bear fruit even in young lives.

Further resources:

“Coming Home: A Guide to Teaching Christian Meditation to Children”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXuxfrnL1EQ> This youtube video gives testimonies and visuals as well as a few how-to tips to leading Christian meditation times with children.

“Catholic Spiritual Formation – Spiritual Direction” link on www.discerninghearts.com This excellent web site has podcasts and resources about the examen prayer and the prayer of discernment which are extensions of Christian meditation.

Points for the Parent Talk

- What is Christian meditation?

There is a difference between Christian meditation and yoga. Yoga is about centring yourself and calming yourself and becoming conscious of the world around you. Its goal is you. Yoga is about controlling your mind and not letting anything enter your mind.

Christian meditation is about calming oneself and one's thoughts so as to be able to enter into dialogue and relationship with God who is a personal Being other than oneself. Christian meditation is about letting God in. It's about letting God take control and surrendering ourselves in trust.

- Six aspects of meditating with children
 1. Recognize your child is a spiritual being.
 2. Be prepared to work alongside and with the child.
 3. Listen to what the child has to offer.
 4. Honour each child's relationship with God.
 5. Make the experience positive.
 6. Never judge the child's meditation.

We need to be aware that children's experience of meditation is going to be more simple and uncomplicated. We tend to clutter our prayer and bring a lot of complexity to it. Children are much more simple and straight-forward. We are to learn from them.

- It's a work that is done both by us and by God.
 1. Work that we do.

Routines help children to enter into a time of meditation. We should set aside a time of the week, for example at the end of a week or a Sunday and a time of day (usually night before bed). We can introduce simple rituals like setting up a prayer table with a cloth, flowers and an image of Our Lord, lighting a candle before the image of the Lord, putting on soft music, unplugging the phone or turning off the mobile phone, and getting into a prayer position (straight back, gentle breathing, hands relaxed with open palms or palms on the knees).
 2. Work that God does.

We should remember that He is the one praying in us. He is speaking to our hearts and calming them. He sends inspirations and helps us form resolutions so that we grow from strength to strength in our journey with Him.

- How to Meditate

Prepare the environment: It is helpful to have a focal point for the prayer, such as a statue or a picture of Jesus along with a candle to light. Get into a prayer position of sitting either on a chair or on the floor in a place that will be quiet. Soft music can be helpful, but silence is even better.

Breathe gently through your nose, taking in your breath softly. While doing so, a prayer phrase may be used. Examples: “Our Father,” “Holy Spirit, come,” “Come, Lord Jesus,” or Our Lady’s prayer, “Behold the servant of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word.” Become aware that God is looking at you with love. He is with you and you are with him.

Various things may then be done. For example, one may simply rest in the presence of the Lord, allowing the Lord to gaze with love upon him or her. A meditation may be used, such as those found in “In My Heart Room.” One may also take a story from the Gospel and picture it vividly in the imagination, placing oneself in the story and allowing the Lord to speak to him or her. One may lift up various difficulties to the Lord and surrender them one by one to His loving care. The important thing is not the meditation itself, but the awareness of God’s presence.

The time to end the meditation is when it seems right to do so. With young children, five to ten minutes is a sufficient time. Do not insist that children sit longer than the actual meditation itself, if it is read. As an adult, you can “set aside time” for meditation, such as fifteen minutes or half an hour, but you do not need to be rigid with this.

It’s important to know that times of dryness or difficulties in meditation can occur. The practice of meditation is significant and beautiful and sometimes requires an effort to sustain, as does anything which is worth doing. The Lord may be strengthening your “prayer muscle” by allowing this dryness. The important thing is to keep at it, as you would with any relationship that is precious to you. If children show reticence to meditation, talk about it with them and discover where the difficulty may be. Remember that children are very real and don’t always “perform” perfectly. The time of meditation is something special and they will remember these times of gentleness and calm, even if they are not always “perfectly behaved” before or after the meditation, or even during it! By involving children in the preparation and deciding when and where the meditation will be done, the prayer phrases that will be used, and the meditation to focus on (if using “In My Heart Room”) they will have more ownership of the time and appreciate it more.

If there is time:

Practice on of the “In My Heart Room” meditations with parents, such as the one which will be used later with the children. A discussion of how the meditation went or questions/observations parents have can be led by the catechist with the parents after the meditation.

Group Activity for the Children

Materials:

- prayer table with cloth
- image of Christ and the children
- candle, matches
- CD player with soft Christian music or mp3 player and speaker with downloaded gentle Christian music
- photocopies of heart craft
- coloured pencils, pens, markers, or crayons

Gather children around the prayer table. Display picture of Christ and the children. Read the Scripture of Jesus and the children:

Mark 10:13-16

Jesus Blesses Little Children

13 People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. 14 But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. 15 Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." 16 And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

Ask, "What happened?" Read again if necessary. "What did the disciples think about the children?" "What did Jesus think about them?" "Does Jesus want to be with the children?"

Tell the children, "Jesus wants to be with us and we want to be with Jesus. Today we're going to learn about a special place where we can go to be alone with Jesus: our heart room. We'll learn ways to use our bodies and our minds to meet Him in this special place. Doing this is called meditation. Meditation is a type of prayer where we are quiet and alone with Jesus in our heart room."

Teach children to make the sign of the cross. Teach the Maranatha song or other simple, calming song or prayer word such as "Come, Lord Jesus," to begin the meditation time. Teach children how to sit up straight and relaxed, face relaxed and not furrowed, breathe softly, eyes gently closed. This is called making a silence. Practice for about 30 seconds, asking children to listen to what they hear.

Discuss importance of being silent so the Lord can speak in you and to you. We won't meet him like we meet other people who we can see and hear and touch. God is spirit and we will him with our own spirits.

Ask children to go quietly to a place where they can draw and colour. They will draw a picture of themselves with Jesus in their heart room. Play gentle music while they draw.

When they are finished say, “Now we will rejoin our parents and have a chance to practice meditating with Jesus in our heart room. We will take our pictures to give as an offering to Jesus before we begin our time of prayer.”

Time of Meditation with Families

The prayer space should be in a quiet place, such as the church or the church hall. A prayer table may be prepared beforehand, or you may have the children put a coloured prayer cloth on the table along with a candle, an image of Christ, and flowers.

Invite the children to place their heart decorations around the image of Christ or around the prayer table. Invite children to sit in a circle or semi-circle around the prayer table or prayer cloth, with their parents in chairs or pews behind them.

Light the prayer candle.

Invite the children and their parents to sit up with tall backs, but not stiffly.

Distribute various types of wooden pencils to each of the children and their parents. Read aloud the meditation, “My Pencil Prayer” from “In My Heart Room,” pausing to give participants space to pray.

To end the time of meditation, sing a simple song such as the “Alleluia” refrain from the song, “Peace is Flowing Like a River” or “Maranatha.”

Thank the families for attending the family faith event. Invite the children to each take their heart picture from the prayer table. Invite families to quietly genuflect to the tabernacle before leaving (if in the Church) and to proceed to where the meal will take place (if the meal ends the event).

My Heart Room

*Jesus, you wish to meet with me in the depths
of my heart. Come, Lord Jesus!*

