



Leading a session in a Primary School Prayer Space

Lesson Plan Outline: Advent

The following is an example of how a session within the prayer space may look. *Throughout the session always use the language of 'Christians believe' or 'as a Christian I believe' when talking to students.*

Welcome

- Meet and welcome the students as they arrive with their class teacher/teaching assistant to the session.
- Guide the students to sit down with you somewhere suitable within the prayer space.

Introduction (Approx. 1 - 2 minutes)

- Introduce yourself, and perhaps what church you attend.
- Ask the other volunteers to introduce themselves and the church they attend.

Explanation (Approx. 5 - 6 minutes)

- Ask the students if they know what the room is called for this week and what they have been told by their teachers about it. If the school has had a Prayer Space before, find out what activities they took part in last time.
- Explain it is a Christian Prayer Space but they can use the space in a way they feel comfortable with. Explain this is a place where they can have the opportunity to learn about Christian Prayer and have the opportunity to pray **if** they would like to or they can just have time to reflect on the different activities instead. **It is important that no-one feels forced to pray against their will.**
- Explain that this time, there is a theme, to link the ideas together, which is a story. *"Actually, stories are all around us. **What's your favourite story? Where might we find a story?** Yes, that's right, in the news, on the radio, in a book or a magazine, on the internet...there are lots of places to find fictional and real stories. All stories tell us about events and how these affect the people within them. So, we are going to focus on a set of events that Christians believe actually happened."*

We would suggest that the introduction will touch on some, if not all, of the following points. As you can see, following each suggestion there is an example of something the Prayer Space Leader *might* say. These, however, are only suggestions. *(If this prayer space is happening in a community school, you may need to focus more on the key aspects of prayer, explained in the '1st Prayer Space' lesson plan, or at least recap these)*

What is Christmas/Advent?

Find out what the students know about the story or celebrations linked to Christmas. You might need to clarify that 'advent' is the name for the days leading up to Christmas day, and that the word means 'the arrival of an important person', which might spark some discussion. For younger students, you might like to use simpler questions about things people see or do during Christmas and Advent today. For older students, you could probe deeper, asking how the events of Christmas affected people then and today. *"**When I say the word 'Christmas', what words or pictures does this make you think of? Who celebrates Christmas? Can you name some of the people in the Christmas story? What happens to them? Can you think of a time when they prayed?**"*

Why did people pray at the first Christmas?

*"Christmas commemorates/remembers the birth of Jesus and the hope that this brings to Christians today because of the reason for Jesus' birth. During 'advent', Christians think about lots of different events happened before Jesus arrived; some were wonderful, like the shepherds, who everyone usually ignored, being visited by an angel and told of the arrival of this most special baby who would be the saviour of the world. Others were difficult, such as when Mary and Joseph had no place to stay, or that long trek to Bethlehem on a dusty road...it must have been a bumpy road on the back of a donkey! **What do you do when you feel worried or really happy? Is there something you can do or a place you can go to or a person you can speak to?** Many of the people chose to pray to God, during the happy times, like when Mary found out she was having a baby and she sang a prayer! And during the hard times, asking for God's help. God even chose to speak to the people, through angels and dreams. **Where/how do you think people prayed?** Yes, they prayed in lots of different places, at different times. Today's activities will help us think about our responses to these feelings through praying or thinking."*

Explanation for Nursery/Reception and extending Year 6

- Use a shorter explanation for younger children, just a minute or two. You might like to ask them if they have heard the word 'prayer' before and if they can tell you something about it, or show you how people pray.
- You may find it helpful to relate friendship to prayer. Ask them what they like to do with their friends, taking a suggestion or two, then explain that Christians believe that they can be friends with God and they like to spend time with Him, by talking with and listening to Him. You could then ask where they like to go with their friends, take a couple of suggestions, then explain that Christians can talk to God in church, at school, at home, in fact anywhere! Then mention that they will have a go at some fun activities to find out about what Christians talk to God about. There's no need to explain all the activities. It's better for each volunteer to briefly explain their activity in their area, rather than when all the children are sat together.
- Before the activities begin, check with their teacher whether the children are used to working in groups or whether using the prayer stations with a 'free-flow' approach would be more appropriate for their time in the prayer space. At the end, the children might find it helpful to sit in a circle and share what they liked best about the prayer space.
- For Year 6's, you could go deeper with your questioning, asking 'Why?' when they have answered a question, or what they think about that, as well as building on their responses and helping them to consider what difference prayer makes to peoples' lives. You also may be able to draw out some themes from their responses e.g. finding safe places to pray can help, rather than typically quiet places.

Explain the Activities (Approx. 2 - 3 minutes)

- Next explain each of the activities in the room, the type of prayer (e.g. When Christians Pray they say please, they ask God to help them with things etc.), and what the activity involves doing, (e.g. In this area you can think about anything you would like help with, if there is something, you can write or draw it as a prayer or reflective thought and stick it to the bubble tube).
- Explain if they forget anything there is an adult in each area to help them.
- **Remember to use language that states the students have the opportunity to respond as a reflective thought or as a prayer. It is up to the students how they respond to each activity.**

Setting behaviour Expectations (Approx. 1 - 2 minutes)

- Most of the time we have found that behaviour is not a problem at all. However, it is good to set expectations. One way this can be done is by explaining just before you send them off to the prayer activities is by asking them what sort of voices they think we should be using in the prayer space and why. Explain that Christians respond with prayer in different ways; some shout and sing (this can help Christians to express their feelings freely), others pray with friends or are really quiet or silent, praying in their heads (this can help Christians to concentrate and be respectful).
- Emphasise that we will use quiet, whispering voices, to allow everyone in the space to pray or reflect if they wish too, and to respect one another. This should also affect how we move around the space, so therefore we all need to walk between the prayer areas, not running, so that we are respecting one another in the space.
- You might also like to guide the students about which activity to go to first, so that there is the right number of children at each one and this also controls the movement from the big group to the smaller groups.

Groups (Approx. 25 minutes)

- The students will then need to be split into groups of three or four by yourself and sent to different activities where the Prayer Space zone volunteers will greet them and, if necessary, again explain the activity.
- Each group will spend about five minutes at each activity.
- As you approach the fourth minute of the activity, go around to each group and give a minute warning, this will help them get ready to move onto the next activity.
- Just before 5 minutes is up, go back to each group and ask them to quietly move onto the next activity.

Conclusion (Approx. 5 minutes)

Once each group has been to each station, and you have given the last minutes warning, the students should be brought back together quietly, perhaps a group at a time.

- The whole group should then be given a chance to consider what they did or didn't like or how they felt about the Prayer Space and why.
- Older children can write down their thoughts anonymously on post it notes, whilst younger children might prefer to discuss their thoughts. If possible it is good to type up the comments and a selection of post it notes from some of the zones to give to the school, as this will provide evidence of spiritual development for OFSTED and SIAMS (an inspection for Church Schools). We have a report template that you can use for this.

- Finish off by reminding the students that they can **pray or reflect** anyway and at any time and in lots of different ways, there is no right or wrong way, it is about finding the best way for them.
- You could challenge them to find some time each day to reflect on or pray about things in a way that works for them.
- Before the students leave, the Prayer Space Leader should, if applicable, invite everyone to the Prayer Space during lunch time and/or after school.
- Finally, as the group leave, the adults in the room should make sure that they say goodbye as the students go to ensure that even as they leave, they feel welcome in the space.