



## Prayer Service Development Guide

*This guide has been designed by NCEA staff as a complete resource to be used by P-12 Catholic school educators to plan a school prayer service. Additional resources are referenced that educators may also use to create prayer service plans for a variety of red-letter days on the school calendar, civil calendar and Catholic Church calendar. Educators can use the guide by reading through and reflecting on each item beginning at the top of this page.*

### **Time of Year**

To begin planning a prayer service, consider the school calendar, civil calendar and Church calendar. For example, the start of the school year, Thanksgiving in November and the start of Advent can all be appropriate moments for the school to gather in prayer.

### **Theme**

Base the theme of your prayer service on the time of year. For example, the themes for a start of the year prayer service can be asking God to bless the group with energy and asking for the grace of unity of purpose for faculty, staff and leaders.

### **Prayer Service Leader**

Leadership team member or designated faculty or staff member

### **Participant Examples**

- School faculty, staff and leadership team members
- Students
- Parents and grandparents
- School board members

### **Inclusion of Non-Catholic Faculty and Staff**

Participation in prayer services and other forms of religious worship can be an expectation of all faculty and staff in a Catholic school. At the same time, creating understanding and a desire to participate is key for adults. Therefore, it can be helpful for a member of the school leadership team to meet with new faculty and staff members who are non-Catholics to assist them in understanding both the purpose and details of various forms of religious worship that occur during the school year. These new faculty and staff members can be invited to participate in prayer services by sharing a prayer of petition and by sharing at appropriate moments. Including several veteran non-Catholic faculty members in the meeting who have embraced the school's Catholic mission can be very helpful as they can answer questions and provide their points of view.

New faculty and Catholic staff members will very likely benefit from a similar meeting. This would be an excellent opportunity to make clear the expectations for faculty and staff participation in religious worship at the school.

### **Prayers**

Staff members at NCEA will share complete texts for prayer services in the NCEA Talk Blog, for example, a prayer service to start the school year.

*The Shorter Book of Blessings* is also a good resource for prayer services. This book is available online and in local religious goods stores. You can use a complete prayer service from this book, or you can use a single prayer from this book. Each prayer service in the book includes readings from scripture. Although many of the prayers in this book are presented as blessings, there are many complete prayer services and other types of prayers.

### **Examples of Prayers in the *Shorter Book of Blessings***

- Prayer service for students and teachers
- Prayer service for those gathered for a meeting
- Service for the blessing of animals (Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, October 4)
- Prayer service for those who teach and learn
- Blessings during the Thanksgiving season in late November
- Blessing ritual for an Advent Wreath
- Ritual for blessing and distribution of ashes on Ash Wednesday

### **Scripture**

Choose scripture texts based on the time of year (school, civil or Church calendar) and the theme of the prayer service. Many Bibles have an index of readings based on topics or the Church calendar. One such Bible is the *New American Bible for Catholics* published by the American Bible Society in 2002. Included at the back is an index of readings for Mass for every day of the year.

### **Songs**

Choose songs based on the time of year (school, civil or Church calendar) and the theme of the prayer service. Also, consider which songs your group is most familiar with and will be able to sing. Consider engaging a music minister to lead the singing. Playing recorded music is also an option, and the group may be able to sing along or may want to quietly listen to the music. Consider how to obtain songbooks if needed.

### **Examples of Leadership Roles**

- Prayer leader
- Music minister
- Lector to read scripture
- Small group leaders to facilitate small group sharing

## **Location**

Choose a space that is large enough, comfortable and quiet. Consider adding a crucifix and religious icons if these are not already present in the space.

## **Prep Location**

Consider factors such as the size of the group, seating accommodations, comfort and religious atmosphere when choosing a space for a prayer service. Ensure that necessary resources are in place before the start of the prayer service, for example, a Bible and a crucifix.

## **Vesting**

A priest or deacon may vest to lead a prayer service. A commissioned acolyte or similar commissioned minister could also vest in an alb and cincture to lead a prayer service, if this is appropriate in your school. If a priest, deacon or acolyte will not lead the prayer service, then the leader would not vest in liturgical garments but could wear clothing of a color that reflects the theme of the prayer service, for example, white for Easter or red for Pentecost.

## **Examples of Resources**

- Prayer book or order of worship handout
- Songbook
- Battery-operated candles
- Religious art
- Crucifix

## **Order of Worship**

- Opening Rite
  - Welcome
  - Sign of the Cross
  - Brief comment on the theme
  - Prayer based on the theme
- Liturgy of the Word
  - Scripture reading
  - Reflection on scripture
  - Petitionary prayers
  - Our Father
- Closing Rite
  - Prayer based on the theme
  - Sending forth, for example, May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen. (All make the sign of the cross as they say these words together.)
  - Moment of quiet reflection
  - Announcements to move group to next activity