

*Bev McDonald*

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Family prayer: the first thing I want to say is that I have never found it easy. My husband is very supportive of Faith in our home but he's not Christian, my wider whanau are in every imaginable position regarding faith and religion and life is busy.

But when I was in Wellington recently I was given two great ideas that I'd like to share with you.

One was the idea of having children make and decorate a box into which the whole family place written prayers about anything that is concerning them. You can get quite creative with this idea.

Have a family meeting and brainstorm about:

- what size and kind of box it could be
- how to decorate it,
- how the prayers are to be posted,
- where to keep it in the house
- what is around the box? Perhaps a Bible, Rosary, a Holy Picture, a candle?
- Are there any Scripture verses that might be on the box or read out when you pray with it
- and when and how will you offer the prayers each week.

Then perhaps once a month, maybe on a Saturday which is Our Lady's day, you could all gather the prayers from the box and burn them confidentially as a kind of incense prayer to God. This kind of praying may well suit slightly older children. They need to know that whatever they place in the box as a prayer is going to be completely confidential. A family with younger children may choose to have the prayers shared out loud but whichever you choose, have it clearly understood and consistent. When the prayers are burnt, you could have the family's favourite food or drink and thank God about answers to prayers even in unexpected ways.

The other idea was to have a basket on the table which gets filled with all the people, issues and concerns you each care about in your family. The notes can be decorated on coloured card or papers which remain in the basket to be shared over a long time. At some point over a meal each person takes one card from the box and says a quick prayer for that person or area of concern. Picking a fun time to make the cards can be a good family exercise on a rainy day, or the basket can slowly be filled over a period of time. Don't make it a chore, keep it light and easy to achieve. Some suggestions to get the family started are:

- each person in the immediate and wider family including mum, dad, grandparents, aunts, cousins etc.
- thanksgiving and gratitude prayers for house, home, health, loved ones etc
- deceased members of the family
- neighbours and their needs, issues or in gratitude for them
- sick people, named or unnamed
- friends at school, bullies or difficult people at school
- teachers, bosses, priests, parish,
- exams, schoolwork, chores and family responsibilities or anything that is a struggle
- any accidents that happen, even minor things like grazed knees for the little ones.

- Pets, birds and creatures who live in our garden; thanksgiving and blessing
- Pollution, war, earthquakes and natural disasters etc.
- Thanks for sunsets, rain, food etc.

You hopefully get the idea. The concept is not to cover every issue; but to broaden the way you pray as a family, while making it simple and easy for even the most reluctant pray-er to read out a very simple offering prayer. It can be as simple as “Dear God I offer you ... (read the card)... in prayer “and everyone else joins in with an ‘amen’. I am going to try to find a creative personal way to try these ideas in my messy, ordinary, busy home. Ideally it can become so ‘normal’ that even visitors are comfortable to join in. These two ideas are just an offering to get you sharing. They could be used together but if you haven’t had family prayer before my suggestion would be to start simple and stick at it so it becomes a tradition before you add in the next thing. The other thing I’d suggest is keep it light, easy, fun and flexible. You are not trying to put on any kind of performance or get anything ‘right’. You are simply building a tradition of normal prayer into a busy family schedule and it may well be a tradition they pass on to their own children. Focused around a meal it also has natural links to Sunday Mass which don’t need to be spelt out but will quietly be a part of your family life.