



On your marks

The season of Pentecost is a good time to explore and celebrate how the Christian faith has spread to the ends of the earth in response to Jesus' command to 'make disciples of all nations' (Matthew 28:19). Today there are representatives of every tribe and every language in the great congregation of those who love Jesus.

Many of our set prayers in churches have been written down the ages by Christians from around the world and are therefore inspired by different cultural imagery and local concerns. However, even the way that those prayers are said in a service will vary greatly from country to country and also, of course, within the different Christian traditions.

The following idea some other ways of praying together that can be found in the worldwide family of the Church.

Get set

Take time to read through the different styles of prayer as outlined below. Then introduce one or two of them into your church all-age service or as part of a session together with your small group.

For more resources about the worldwide Christian family, see *Where in the World?* (published by BRF) in which there is a section of prayers from around the world.

Key verse: 'After this, I saw a large crowd with more people than could be counted. They were from every race, tribe, nation and language, and they stood before the throne and before the Lamb... Then they all worshipped God and said, "Amen! Praise, glory, wisdom, thanks, honour, power, and strength belong to our God for ever and ever! Amen!"' (Revelation 7:9, 12, CEV).

Go!

1. Altogether prayer

In many Asian countries, notably the very new Christian church in Nepal and the very large church of South Korea, it is the custom for everyone to speak out their prayers at the same time. After all, our prayers aren't meant to impress others with their fine words but are addressed to God, who can hear everyone in the world simultaneously. This is also a helpful way to encourage new Christians to start praying, as they don't feel that other members of the congregation are listening and maybe even judging them on how well they word their petitions.

In the Western tradition, we often say the same prayer all together, but this is different from speaking out individual, different prayers all at once. Why not try it? Start getting used to the idea by inviting everyone to say their name and address at the same time. Then ask them to name all the members of their family. Finally, ask everyone to name lots of things they are thankful for or worried

about at the same time. No one has to join in – and anyway, no one will notice if they do or don't.

2. The special prayer

The one prayer that is used by Christians all around the world is the prayer Jesus taught (Matthew 6:9-13), known as the Lord's Prayer. Often, at international gatherings of Christians, every delegate will say it in his or her own language, demonstrating the variety and unity of the Christian family worldwide.

Find The Lord's Prayer written out in many languages. Choose some countries and print off some of the prayers to use. You could then create a display.

3. Responses in prayer

In some Christian traditions, a priest or worship leader says some lines of a prayer and then everyone else responds with a short sentence, repeated several times.

One of the most famous prayers used in this way across the world is the 'Kyrie eleison', which is Greek for 'Lord, have mercy'. It is often sung or chanted many times in a service. Christians use it to remind themselves that all they have comes to them only because of God's love.

Bartimaeus, who was blind, made this same simple prayer to Jesus. You can read his story in Mark 10:46-52.

'Kyrie eleison', like 'Hallelujah', is one of the most international Christian prayers and is understood the world over. Here it is, however, in some other languages:

- Swahili: *Bwana na huruma*
- Spanish: *Señor, ten piedad*
- French: *Seigneur, prends pitié*
- Afrikaans: *Here, ontferm*
- Turkish: *Rab merhamet*
- Filipino: *Panginoon maawa*
- Indonesian: *Tuhan kasihanilah*

4. Silence

Perhaps the most universal way of praying, for Christians worldwide, is silent prayer. When the apostle Paul gave advice on prayer to the Christians in Rome, he suggested that the deepest prayer is the kind that is too deep for words (Romans 8:26). It is then that God's Holy Spirit helps Christians to pray most effectively. However, silence isn't easy, so different cultures use a variety of local symbols to help them focus their silent prayer.

In the catacombs of Rome, where the first Christians hid from persecution, simple pictures of things like fish or anchors were drawn on the walls as a focus for prayer. A piece of art or an icon can also

be a doorway into pray. Sometimes a special stone or a religious souvenir or relic can help. Many traditions use the smell of incense.

Search the internet for some special icons or pictures from other cultures that help Christians to pray. Show the pictures to the congregation or your small group. What do they think about these images? Explore with them what would help them to pray silently.

5. Physical prayer

Christians around the world vary greatly in the way they use their bodies to pray.

- Orthodox worshippers in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Egypt and Ethiopia stand when they pray. In fact, they stand for most of their long but colourful church services.
- Christian worshippers in India and Pakistan usually sit cross-legged on the floor in a position that Westerners would describe as yoga-like, suited to meditation.
- Some traditions lie face-down in prayer, making the sign of the cross over every part of their body - eyes, face, heart and their whole person, from their feet to their head and across themselves.
- Catholic Christians bend one knee before the altar (genuflect) and also cross themselves whenever the name of Jesus is mentioned in prayer. Catholics make the horizontal part of the sign of the cross from their left to right, whereas Orthodox Christians move their hands from right to left.
- Many Christians from all parts of the globe prefer to kneel when they pray

There is also a great variety of how hands are held in prayer. Christians of the Pentecostal tradition usually pray with one or both hands held aloft. Other Christians hold out cupped hands as if ready to receive, and there are those who either fold their hands or place their palms side by side, with fingers pointing upward.

Orthodox Christians use knotted prayer ropes to help them pray important repeated prayers. Similarly, Catholic Christians use rosary beads.

The monastic tradition of Europe established a pattern of regular prayers seven times a day.

You can read what Jesus said about prayer in Matthew 6:5-8; Luke 11:5-13 and Luke 18:1-8. What were his guidelines for Christian prayer?

Talk with the congregation or your group about what positions they would recommend for prayer and why. Introduce some of the ideas above as a way of praying with the world, particularly in the season of Pentecost.